

Not Just Lezginka

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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One of several slickly produced web banners available on the rally's web site. It reads, "Stop feeding the Caucasus!"

A nationalist rally at Chistiye Prudy on April 23 has been making major waves in the North Caucasus' blogosphere. The event, which was co-organized by the Russian Civil Union and carried the slogan "[Stop Feeding the Caucasus!](#)" was aimed at pressing the federal government to reduce funding to the North Caucasus, which protesters claimed is getting more money than other Russian provinces.

The rally was notably sanctioned by City Hall and well-publicized by big names such as Vladimir Milov, a prominent opposition politician and one of the leaders of the Solidarity movement, and anti-corruption crusader Alexei Navalny, who [advertised](#) the rally on his blog.

The rally's organizers claimed that federal funding had increased 12-fold over the past 10 years and was several times higher than the national average. But North Caucasus bloggers (1, 2) argued that the money ends up in the pockets of local bureaucrats — as it does all over

Russia. They also [pointed out](#) that while the North Caucasus republics do receive more federal funding than the average Russian regions, they receive nowhere near as much as Magadan, Kamchatka and other Siberian regions.

Another claim made by protesters, that the North Caucasus lacks talented people — "all they can do is dance [lezginka](#) and ask for more money" — prompted Caucasus bloggers to compile [lists](#) of prominent countrymen from all walks of life, including the general director of the Mariinsky Theater, Valery Gergiev, and Chechen dancer Makhmud Esambayev.

Kanta Ibragimov, a well-known Chechen writer, [wrote](#) on his blog that "if the North Caucasus is the root of all Russia's problems then it has no problems at all." An Ossetian blogger, Zaur Farniyev, [wrote](#): "Maybe the average Russian *does* think that we're swimming in so much money here and going crazy from it and that we only come to central Russia to kill, rape or pillage."

But the rally was not really about either corruption or a supposed lack of talented people in the North Caucasus, but about pitting ethnic, religious and cultural groups against each other. Kommersant columnist Olga Allenova [called](#) it the continuation of last December's riots on Manezh Square, which were prompted by the murder of a football fan by a group of North Caucasus natives. Whether City Hall's sanctioning of the rally is just an isolated incident or a part of a larger government agenda to prepare public opinion for a change of policy toward the North Caucasus remains to be seen.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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