

TV Star Seeks Patriarch's OK to March With Nationalists

By [Jonathan Earle](#)

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The Russian Orthodox Church may authorize priest-turned-TV star Ivan Okhlobystin to participate in the Russian March, the event of the year for nationalists, Interfax reported Wednesday.

But it was unclear which of two rival rallies the church was thinking of backing. The original Russian March, prepared by a group of anti-Kremlin ultranationalists joined by whistleblower Alexei Navalny, has gotten unexpected competition from an unknown group that has invited Okhlobystin to oppose Navalny.

In a letter to Patriarch Kirill on Tuesday, Okhlobystin asked for permission to participate in the Russian March, saying he was ready to lead 500,000 people out to the streets across the nation, but needs guidance on whether to do so.

Although church officials are usually barred from politics, an exception might be made

in Okhlobystin's case, church spokesman Vladimir Vigilyansky said, Interfax reported. Kirill has kept silent on the issue.

The second Russian March was announced Tuesday. Co-organizer Yury Gorsky told reporters that it would avoid popular ultranationalist slogans such as "Stop feeding the Caucasus," and "Russia for Russians," which he said threaten the country's unity and territorial integrity.

He added that Okhlobystin, an avowed monarchist, was invited to "combat Navalny and his anti-Caucasus slogans," Lenta.ru [reported](#). Navalny, who calls himself a "national democrat," participated in a "Stop feeding the Caucasus" rally last week.

Okhlobystin said Tuesday that he was unaware of two Russian Marches in the works. Navalny did not comment on being pitched against the actor, who currently plays the irascible Dr. Bykov on TNT's hit medical sitcom "The Interns."

Ultrnationalist Dmitry Demushkin, a co-organizer of the original march, has accused those behind the alternative march of staging a "provocation" to spread confusion.

Okhlobystin, 45, was suspended from the priesthood last year because he was starring in movies while serving in the church.

He has dabbled in politics recently, running a short-lived campaign for president in September, the highlight of which was a massive rally in Moscow's Olimpiisky sports complex that saw him deliver a lengthy speech from atop a giant, white pyramid. He then dropped out of the race, citing the church's disapproval.

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