

Russian Singers Compete to Write Ukrainian Separatist Anthem

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A woman walks with a flag of Novorossiya during a rally on Lenin Square in the center of Donetsk, eastern Ukraine, Oct. 4.

Two prominent, pro-Kremlin, old-school pop artists said they are entering a contest to pen an anthem for the unrecognized Novorossia region in eastern Ukraine.

Vika Tsyganova was the first to go, rolling out her take on the anthem with much pomp in Moscow on Monday.

The 3 1/2-minute tune, available on state news agency RIA Novosti's website, is appropriately epic in tone and features lyrics such as "invincible, spiritually strong, God-protected Novorossia," as well as some less-than-successful rhyming and a Les Paul guitar solo.

The tune was penned by Serbian composer Ninoslav Ademovic, who worked with Goran Bregovic and the Gypsy Kings, and recorded in Adriano Celentano's studio in Italy, RIA Novosti reported.

Tsyganova, 50, made a name for herself in the 1990s in the "Russian chanson" genre, which offered sappy prison-themed lyrics over simplistic melodies. The Communist Party affiliate embraced patriotic pop in recent years and has made public appearances with Ukrainian separatist leaders.

She will have to compete with Iosif Kobzon, the patriarch of the Soviet pop scene and a State Duma deputy with the ruling United Russia party.

Kobzon, 77, who has repeatedly been refused entry into the U.S. over hotly denied allegations of mafia ties, will present his own version of the Novorossia anthem during a tour of the region this week, the TASS news agency reported Thursday.

More than 30 versions of the anthem have been submitted so far, RIA Novosti said. Most were not publicly available as of Tuesday evening.

The residents of the rebel-held territory will select the anthem by 2015.

The pro-Russian insurgency in eastern Ukraine that erupted in May has resulted in 3,600 deaths on all sides, according to United Nations estimates, as well as a shaky cease-fire.

Separatists currently control about a third of the territory of Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

They have declared these regions to be full-fledged independent states, though recent reports indicate they have been increasingly struggling to maintain public order and meet the humanitarian needs of the population.

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