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## Russian bikers begin run despite Polish entry ban

4/25/2015



**Riders from a Russian nationalist motorcycle group on Saturday began their run commemorating the Red Army's offensive against Nazi Germany, despite Poland's announcement that it would refuse to let them in the country.**

About 20 bikers including members of the Night Wolves group set off from Moscow with the aim of crossing into Poland before eventually reaching Berlin on May 9. Poland, alarmed by the aggressive nationalism of the Night Wolves, on Friday said it wouldn't allow them entry.

The Night Wolves were part of a larger group of several hundred bikers who rallied to mark the start of motorcycling season despite temperatures of 4 degrees (39 F) and intermittent rain mixed with snow.

Night Wolves leader Alexander Zaldostanov said Saturday they would still try to cross en masse as planned at the border near Brest, Belarus, despite the Polish decision.

But "if they don't let us in as a motorcycle column, we'll go individually, from various points. We'll go by a different crossing. But, for sure, we're not abandoning our attempt and we'll go on our complete route," he was quoted as saying by the state news agency RIA Novosti.

The group was expected to reach the border on Monday.

Despite tense relations with Russia that have been severely aggravated by the crisis in Ukraine, Poland has given permission to other Russian vehicle processions in commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the end of European fighting in WWII, including a motorcycle run from Kaliningrad that is to take place May 6.

But Polish Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz denounced the Night Wolves' planned run as a "provocation."

The Night Wolves have become notorious abroad for their vehement nationalism and their ties with President Vladimir Putin, who has ridden with the group several times. The Night Wolves put on an elaborate show in the Crimean city of Sevastopol last year lauding Russia's annexation of the peninsula from Ukraine and the group recently helped found a movement called Anti-Maidan, aiming to prevent any outbreaks of protests deemed similar to the Maidan protests in Ukraine that drove Russia-friendly president Viktor Yanukovich out of power.

The controversial run comes amid heightened emotions as the 70th anniversary of the Nazi defeat approaches. The Red Army's grinding offensive to push back the Nazis and the country's immense suffering during the war are key to Russians' national pride. Russian officials frequently complain that the Soviet Union's importance in the war is underrated and that the West is trying to "rewrite history" by portraying the Soviet Union as post-war occupiers of Eastern Europe rather than as liberators.