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PRO-PUTIN FORCES DRIVE CONVOY WITH 'BIG RUSSIA' SIGN THROUGH BELARUS CAPITAL

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Political supporters of Vladimir Putin have been spotted driving through the capital of Belarus, sparking fears of growing pro-USSR sentiment in the former Soviet State.

Footage of the nationalist Peoples Liberation Movement (NOD)s convoy included seven cars, plastered with St George flags, political symbols, pictures of the Russian President and the words Big Russia.

NOD peddles anti-liberal and anti-American rhetoric and supports the restoration of the USSR.

It reportedly has offices in almost every region of Russia, but is not officially registered in Belarus, despite claiming a growing following on social media.

Its founder Yevgeny Fyodorov is currently serving his fourth term as deputy of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of Russia. He supports the re-drafting of the Russian constitution, is in favour of sanctions from the West to bring about isolationist polices and famously claimed that the assassination of Russian opposition politician Boris Nemtsov was carried out by the CIA.

NOD helped Mr Putin to organise mass rallies a technique of the administration to respond to political challenges after a bomb attack on the St Petersburg metro killed 14 people earlier this year. The event, called Together Against Terror, was organised just 10 days after tens-of-thousands of people took to the streets in 90 cities across the country to protest government corruption, led by opposition politician Alexei Navalny.

In March, the NOD also reportedly organised a so-called All-Russian humanitarian rally, to raise funds in order to send inhabitants of occupied Russian territories in eastern Ukraine, such as Donetsk and Lugansk, to visit places the NOD describes as significant in the Russian and Soviet struggle to defend the sovereignty of the Motherland.

The month before, the party activists also held an unauthorised rally in Independence Square in Minsk.

The news of the latest convoy in Minsk on 18 September comes as Russia and Belarus carry out vast military exercises which European observers say could involve as many as 100,000 troops. It has been codenamed Zapad or West.

Zapad is expected to contain a dry-run for nuclear military engagement, and is similar to previous

exercises which signalled Russias invasion of Crimea in 2008 and of Ukraine six years later.

Zapad is a routine exercise, so there is no cause for alarm in the sense that Russia will stick to the scenario, Mathieu Boulegue, a research fellow at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, recently told The Independent.

Everything they want to rehearse is ready and its been planned for the past few years. But there is a kind of game of hypocrisy with Russia on one side and the West on the other.

We want to acknowledge Zapad as being potentially threatening, but we dont want to give Russia the chance to brag about its military prowess."

Despite mass anti-corruption demonstrations in Russia 2011 and 2012, led by Mr Navalny, as well as growing unrest over declining standards of living, Mr Putin is expected to win the 2018 Presidential election.

Mr Putin has spent years, according to critics, arresting and quashing his opponents to lay the path for the next election.

Kaynak/Source: