

Russian governor deploys Cossack militia against immigrants

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Alexander Tkachov, the governor of the southern Russian Krasnodar region, announced in early August that he intends to deploy a Cossack militia of 1,000 men against illegal migrants from the Caucasus, beginning next year.

Tkachov, a close political ally of President Vladimir Putin, declared in a repugnant racist speech before police officers that the Cossacks would be deployed to help the police in order to “stamp it [illegal migration] out, install order ... check documents and enforce migration policies”.

He compared the neighbouring region Stavropol with a “filter” for intercepting immigrants that was no longer fulfilling its function. Stating that ethnic Russians in Stavropol were “already feeling uncomfortable”, he warned that “Russian culture” was also threatened in Krasnodar because Caucasian immigrants would soon surpass the “Russian population” in numbers.

Krasnodar is located in the south of Russia and has therefore become a main destination for immigrants seeking work from the nearby Caucasus. As a result of capitalist restoration and also the wars waged by the Kremlin against Chechnya, which have devastated the whole region and claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, the North Caucasus is now one of the poorest and most politically unstable regions in Russia.

Even according to official estimates, unemployment in Chechnya stands at over 30 percent; in Ingushetia it is more than 50 percent. Russian army troops are still stationed in the region, and terror attacks and bloody clashes between the army and insurgents continue to dominate everyday life. Under these conditions migration to other regions in Russia is the only way for thousands of workers to feed their families.

The blatant chauvinism of Tkachov, who has been

incriminated in countless corruption scandals, has long been notorious. In 2002, he publicly declared: “In Kuban [nickname for Krasnodar] there is no place for gypsies, Meskhetians, Kurds and dissidents”.

It is not the first time that Cossacks have been deployed against ethnic minorities in Krasnodar. In 2005, a settlement of over 15,000 Meskhetian Turks, a Muslim people, was violently dissolved by Cossack hordes. They attacked the settlement with governmental consent in order to expel the Meskhetians, plundering and abusing the population at will. Thousands of people were forced out of the country as a result.

Cossack troops were formerly deployed under the Tsar to suppress the population, gaining notoriety for their participation in numerous anti-Semitic pogroms. Many Cossacks also supported the Whites during the Civil War following the October Revolution, and some Cossack regiments fought on the side of the fascists in World War II against the Red Army.

Since the period of Perestroika, these reactionary forces have once again received financial and political support from the government. Under Putin in particular, they have been fostered in a systematic fashion. Today, they provide support for the frontier guard and the police, form separate units in the military and protect state property.

Tkachov’s foray is an obvious attempt to divert attention from social tensions in the impoverished region and the discontent of the population with his government. In early June, Krasnodar was hit by floods, which left at least 150 dead, with tens of thousands losing their homes and property. The government had failed to warn the population in any way and continues to cover up the real causes for the catastrophe, as well as the number of fatalities—estimated by eyewitnesses to be as high as

1,000. The disaster led to widespread anger in the general population, indicating the extent of the hatred and contempt of working people for the government and ruling elite. (See “Flooding in Krymsk: Kremlin covers up causes and consequences”)

Tkachov’s announcement is not an exception but rather is completely in line with the ultra-nationalist line of the Kremlin. Like their European and international counterparts, the Russian ruling elites increasingly rely on racist campaigns against foreigners to distract from rising social tensions, while strengthening reactionary forces in the state apparatus. Given the close relations between Tkachov and Putin, there are good grounds to assume that the governor’s foray was in fact backed by the Kremlin and that Cossack militias could also be deployed soon against immigrant workers in other parts of the country.

The Kremlin’s reactionary policy has not met with any opposition from the established political parties in Russia. The parliamentary opposition fully supports Putin’s line on this question, and the leaders of the protest movement, which developed in the aftermath of the rigged Duma elections in December 2011, are equally nationalist and right-wing. (See “Protests in Russia: Liberals, pseudo-left march alongside far right”)

Alexey Navalny, who is among the most prominent figures in the movement and counts as a liberal, recently said in an interview with the German magazine *Der Spiegel* that “immigrants from Central Asia bring in drugs” and then demand “a visa for all those wonderful people from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan”. In an attempt to sell his views as non-nationalist he pointed to US president Obama’s construction of a fence on the Mexican border to keep out immigrants. With reference to the extreme-right party “National Front” of Marine Le Pen in France, he declared that he “wouldn’t have any objection to a Le Pen-style party in Russia”.



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