

Thousands protest in Russia against plans to hike pension age

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Vladimir Putin has called the reform a financial necessity as Communist party leader brands move ‘cannibalistic’

Thousands of people across Russia joined protests on Sunday against government plans to raise the pension age, despite [recent promises by President Vladimir Putin](#) to soften the unpopular measure.

The protests show that the proposed policy remains a politically sensitive issue for the government despite concessions offered by Putin in a televised address on Wednesday. During the speech, Putin took personal responsibility for the reform for the first time and described it as a financial necessity.

About 9,000 people gathered about a mile and a half from the Kremlin, according to White Counter, an NGO that counts participants at rallies. Moscow police put the numbers at 6,000.

Many carried the red flags and banners of the principal organiser of the protest, the KPRF Communist party.

A large banner reading “We do not trust United Russia”, Putin’s ruling party, was held up by the crowd and featured a drawing of a red fist punching the white polar bear logo of Putin’s party.

“Today we are holding an all-Russia protest against this cannibalistic reform,” veteran Communist party leader Gennady Zyuganov said, addressing the crowd.

A separate gathering in the city, organised by the Just [Russia](#) party, attracted a further 1,500 people protesting against the pension reforms, Moscow police said.

In his address on Wednesday, Putin watered down the original draft pension reform legislation, introduced by the government on 14 June, which opinion polls showed was opposed by 90% of Russians and which has provoked a string of protests in recent weeks.

Polls by the Levada Centre show Putin’s personal approval rating has fallen around 10 percentage points since the pension reforms were proposed, although it still stands at around 70%.

Putin offered to cut the proposed retirement age for women to 60, from a retirement age of 63 first proposed by the government. Russian women currently retire at 55. Putin said that the proposal to raise the pension age for men from 60 to 65 would remain unchanged.

In St Petersburg, the Fontanka newspaper said that around 1,500 people gathered to protest, while the Interfax news agency said 1,200 joined a protest in Novosibirsk and 250 in Vladivostok.

In Yekaterinburg in the Ural mountains, around 450 people took part in a demonstration entitled the ‘Regiment of Shame’, during which protesters held portraits of politicians who have voiced their

support for pension reform, local newspaper Nasha Gazeta said.

In Russia's south, there were protests in the Black Sea port of Novorossiisk, Astrakhan, Rostov-on-Don and in the capitals of the Caucasus republics of Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria, according to Interfax.

People also took to the streets in the town of Simferopol in Crimea, the Black Sea peninsula annexed by Russia from Ukraine in 2014, Interfax added.

Reuters

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