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Kremlin Tells Kids Opposition Is Important

By Alexander Bratersky

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The Kremlin opened a new section on its web site Tuesday that offers children an interactive lesson on the positive role of political opposition.

But analysts and even the author of the interactive lesson said the information did not correspond with real life, where the authorities show little tolerance for political dissent.

"In a healthy democratic society, those who disagree with state policies help the authorities, not hinder them," reads the text in the "What's the Opposition and Why Do We Need It?" section of Kids.kremlin.ru.

Further clicks will inform you, among other things, that "dissenters look for mistakes by the authorities — which is a good thing. Let them look. This is what makes the state authorities feel their responsibility to citizens."

Educational information is broken down into short parts and illustrated with cartoonish characters ranging from a pirate with an eye-patch to a mischievously grinning TV news anchor. The site is aimed at children aged 10 to 12.

The "opposition" story, like the rest of the content on Kids.kremlin.ru, is penned by prominent children's writer Grigory Oster, who conceded that it does not exactly correspond with Russian everyday realities, where opposition rallies are dispersed by police and political parties denied registration or banned from elections.

"We are telling children about how our life is organized according to the Constitution. If adults feel this is not the way it works in real life, it's a reason for them to think about it," Oster said Tuesday in an interview with Business FM radio.

Oster said he first pitched the idea to President Dmitry Medvedev, who heartily approved.

Kids.kremlin.ru was launched in 2004. No recent traffic data is available, but site administrators said in 2008 that some 2.2 million people had visited the site since its inception.

The Kremlin is trying to "win the opposition's sympathies" with the new project, opposition leader Eduard Limonov said by telephone.

Anton Nosik, the father of the Russian Internet, said the site follows an ideological path set by the president, "who has said that 'freedom is better than the absence of it' and who enjoys giving interviews to the liberal media."

But children and adults alike "will not learn about freedom from the government but from real life, when police stop harassing people at opposition rallies," Nosik said.

Separately, the official web site of the prime minister opened on Monday a section for Vladimir Putin's new public group, the All-Russia People's Front, even though the group has nothing to do with Putin's job as prime minister.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov saw nothing wrong with the new section. "There are no contradictions because it is not the government's site but Putin's own web site," he said by telephone.

Peskov did not comment on the fact that the site, Premier.gov.ru, is registered at a domain reserved for government entities exclusively.

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