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# Putin Gets a Surprise Birthday Gift on Twitter

By Nikolaus von Twickel

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A banner reading “Happy birthday, president!” hanging on a building near the White House on Prime Minister Vladimir Putin’s 59th birthday Friday. **Sergei Karpukhin**

Vladimir Putin's friends and fans tried to outdo one another for the prime minister's 59th birthday — but the biggest surprise came from Twitter when a hashtag went viral.

#СПАСИБОПУТИНУЗАЭТО, or "Thanks to Putin for that," sparked a storm after United Russia activist Vladimir Burmatov tweeted on Friday morning: "It's warm and sunny in Moscow — summer! #SPASIBOPUTINUZAETO."

Burmatov, who heads the political science department of Moscow's Plekhanov Russian Economic University, subsequently fired more lines like "Our rockets are stronger than their missile defense" or "There's long been no war in Chechnya" and "The liberals have no chance" — all followed by #THANKSTOPUTINFORTHAT.

But the hashtag was quickly mocked by tens of thousands of not-so-flattering Twitter users, who put it after lines like "No money and no flat #THANKSTOPUTINFORTHAT."

The exchange shot the hashtag up in the ranking of Twitter's "global trends," making it the first Russian-language hashtag to gain global preponderance.

The speed of success was not just because Burmatov is a Twitter enthusiast with more than 33,000 followers, but because his original line is a pun on a classic Soviet rhyme that ridiculed the abundant praise for the Communist Party by using traditional folk poetry. "Proshla zima, nastalo leto — spasibo partii za eto," is still known by heart by most Russians and can be translated as "Winter's passed, summer's here. For this we thank the party dear."

"I wanted to create some action on the prime minister's birthday," Burmatov told the BBC Russian Service. "I was counting on my 30-something thousand readers and wanted to play this game with them. But it wound up drawing in the broad popular masses."

Among the most popular adaptions was one made by blogger and art curator Marat Guelman, who wrote "And Brezhnev rises from the dead #THANKSTOPUTINFORTHAT" — reflecting the widespread disappointment with Putin's decision to return to the presidency next year.

Many others dwelled on Chechnya, where local strongman Ramzan Kadyrov told reporters on Grozny City Day last Wednesday that the money for the lavish celebrations had "come from Allah," prompting tweets like "Allah sent Chechnya a chunk of the budget #THANKSTOPUTINFORTHAT."

Other versions, collected on the quickly inaugurated site Spasiboputinuzaeto.com read "There's no point for us to live in Russia ... ." and "We had Medvedev, soon we won't ... ."

Many Twitter users noted that President Dmitry Medvedev, who set up his Twitter account during a visit to the company's San Francisco headquarters in 2010, failed to weigh in with his own tweet ending with #THANKSTOPUTINFORTHAT.

Unlike Medvedev, Putin has not shown much public enthusiasm for social networking, and his spokesman Dmitry Peskov said last week that he had decided against setting up accounts on Twitter or Facebook because his prime minister site, Premier.gov.ru, offered enough interaction with the public.

Meanwhile, other Putin fans also sought ways to surprise him on his birthday.

Nashi, the pro-Kremlin youth group, distributed a video of activists holding lit candles to form the shape of the numeral 59 and singing the classic Soviet tune "A Birthday Sadly Is Only Once a Year." (Police detained anti-Putin activists who tried to disrupt the filming Thursday night near Bolshoi Theater.)

Young women with the "Putin's Army" online fan club fed birthday cake to passers-by on Chistoprudny Bulvar and asked them to specify which part of Putin's body was the most sexy.

The Facultet printing house, which published a calendar of Moscow State University female journalism students in lingerie for Putin's 58th birthday, released 25,000 copies of a

children's coloring book titled "Vova and Dima" and depicting Putin and President Dmitry Medvedev as best boyhood friends.

Russian Football Union boss Sergei Fursenko raised eyebrows when he claimed after the 1-0 win over Slovakia late Friday that this was the national team's present to the prime minister.

Putin himself divided his birthday between work — he chaired a meeting on propping up the military-industrial complex — and a private celebration in the evening.

Reached by telephone Friday, Peskov would not reveal the location of the birthday party, saying merely that it would be held at one of the prime minister's "out-of-town residences." (He denied, however, that it was in Sochi.)

But Peskov confirmed that two of Putin's closest friends from abroad would attend, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder.

Peskov later confirmed that the party had taken place but gave no further details, telling Vesti television that the Berlusconi and Schröder had attended in a purely private capacity.

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