

Putin Supporters Promote 'Love Instead of Demonstrations'

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Supporters of presidential candidate Vladimir Putin held their latest campaign Thursday, marking the first day of March by wearing heart-shaped signs promoting "Love instead of politics" and handing out tulips to Moscow metro riders.

Federal Youth Agency spokeswoman Kristina Potupchik posted photographs on her Twitter account of young women wearing red heart-shaped signs around their necks with messages that included "Love instead of animosity!" and "Love instead of demonstrations!"

Pro-Kremlin youth groups have held a series of public events in the lead-up to Sunday's presidential vote to promote Putin's candidacy and as a response to recent opposition rallies that have drawn tens of thousands of demonstrators. At an event earlier this month in front of the White House, participants wrote Valentine's Day notes to Putin.

Members of the Network of Putin Supporters planned to hand out 100,000 tulips to metro passengers Thursday to mark the end of the "seasonal and political winter," the group said in a statement on its website. March 1 is considered the first day of spring in Russia.

In a post on her LiveJournal blog Thursday, Potupchik made the surprising claim that the event was "funded by Novaya Gazeta," the prominent opposition newspaper. She claimed that the flowers were bought with money from youth agency head Vasily Yakemenko received as a result of a lawsuit Yakemenko had won against liberal newspaper Novaya Gazeta.

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