

Mixing Messages

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Слова, слова, слова: Words, words, words

I'm a pretty upbeat person, someone who can usually find the sunny side of any situation — or at least the funny side. But I have to admit that the past few days have gotten even me down.

And they've gotten me worried about my Russian-language ability. I listen to speeches and read transcripts, and I seem to understand all the words just fine. But they don't make sense to me.

Take Dmitry Peskov, press secretary for Prime Minister President Vladimir Putin. First he said publicly that полиции надо было действовать жёстче 6 мая (the police should have been tougher on May 6). I found that odd. What about following the law and using appropriate force?

But then, according to Just Russia Duma Deputy Ilya Ponomaryov, Peskov clarified his first

statement: Ещё слишком мягко сказано было. За раненного омовца надо размазать печень митингующих по асфальту. (That was said too delicately. The demonstrators' lives ought to be smeared on the asphalt for every wounded OMON riot policeman.)

When did it become OK for public figures to use that kind of violent language? Was he misquoted? If he was, why hasn't he complained?

And then I just don't get this statement from Putin's press service: Отметив, что у него есть обязательства завершить процесс назначений в состав нового правительства России, президент Путин выразил сожаление в связи с тем, что не сможет присутствовать на саммите "восьмёрки" в Кэмп-Дэвиде (Noting his responsibilities to finalize Cabinet appointments to the new Russian government, President Putin expressed regret that he wouldn't be able to attend the Group of Eight summit at Camp David.)

I get the words, but I don't get it. If there's one person on the planet who knows what duties await a new Russian president, it's Vladimir Putin. So why did he go along with the original idea of holding the meeting at Camp David to accommodate him if he wasn't sure he could attend?

And besides, just a few days before at his inauguration, he said, "Мы хотим и будем жить в успешной России, которую уважают в мире как надёжного, открытого, честного и предсказуемого партнёра" (We want — and will live in — a flourishing Russia, which is respected in the world as a reliable, open, honest and predictable partner).

Maybe I'm nuts, but doesn't "predictable" apply to attending major international meetings as promised? But maybe a "predictable and reliable partner" means something different to Vladimir Putin.

But Putin is sending President Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev in his stead, and as presidential aide Arkady Dvorkovich said: Он работал президентом России четыре года и всеми этими темами занимался (He worked as Russia's president for four years, and he knows all those topics). So I guess the benefit of the job swap at the top is that the current prime minister is в теме (up to speed) with the issues.

I don't understand Medvedev's words either. He recommended that his Open Government прививает правовую культуру гражданам России (cultivates a legal culture in the citizens of Russia) and then added: Всем. В том числе нашему передовому классу, нашим горожанам, которые гуляют где хотят (In everyone — including our progressive class and our citizens who walk around wherever they want).

And walking around wherever you want is ... a problem? Annoying? Against the law?

I just don't get what they are trying to say.

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