

Lawmakers Fixated on Loud Sex and Cats

By [Boris Kagarlitsky](#)

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For a full week, the country watched in amazement as deputies in the St. Petersburg municipal legislature spoke out against sex and noise in their city. Their pronouncements were so bizarre and so extreme that observers soon realized that political satire has no future in Russia. No comic could ever dream up statements more absurd than those already voiced by the elected representatives of the people. One deputy spoke of noise coming from the neighboring apartment. He said sounds came from all directions, the result of people moving refrigerators, having loud sex and snoring. But worst of all was the sound of "cats stomping around" that somehow pierced the din.

In fact, of all household pets, cats are the quietest. Their paws are soft and designed to tread lightly. If there is a loud cat on record anywhere, it must be the Puss in Boots of storybook fame. But in literature and various superstitions, cats are often associated with evil spirits and depicted as sinister. In listening to the deputy's fantastic account, one can almost imagine a huge mass of cats stomping in formation down the corridor and up the creaky steps of a

100-year-old St. Petersburg apartment building.

But is St. Petersburg the only place where legislators have gone off their rockers? Take, for example, the recent initiatives of the State Duma: the fight against nongovernmental organizations, the attempt to censor the Internet, or the bill that makes insulting someone's religious feelings a serious crime. All of these initiatives are insulting to the intelligence of ordinary citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs.

President Vladimir Putin has been unable to carry out his campaign promises because he is blocked from incorporating those projects into the budget. The national leader can fly hang gliders with cranes all he wants, but when it comes to the budget process, his authority is not as great as it seems. The ultraconservative political initiatives by Duma deputies are counterbalanced perfectly by ultraliberal economic initiatives from the government, and any attempt to introduce a note of sanity or social responsibility into that discordant symphony is doomed to failure from the start.

The public had barely recovered from price hikes to public transportation and utilities when officials announced plans to raise the retirement age, simplify the process by which employers can fire their workers, and force owners of privatized apartments to bear the cost of capital repairs to their building. Taken together, this lowers the standard of living of people who were already deeply hit by the economic recession. Prior to elections, politicians offered concessions to placate and win support from voters, but now it seems that their main task is to cancel those projects as quickly as possible.

Meanwhile, as winter draws nearer, many cities remain unprepared to provide centralized heating for their residents. The government blames the problem on utilities debts totaling millions of dollars and fraudulent practices by the newly privatized services sector. But what did leaders expect would happen when they gratefully handed that burden, with virtually no oversight, over to unscrupulous entrepreneurs across the country?

Time is passing, but our legislatures are too busy complaining about noisy cats to deal with the very real problems that Russians are facing.

Maybe stomping cats is a fatal omen after all.

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