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Russia's Miss Earth Contestant Speaks Her Mind

By Roland Oliphant

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Pereverzeva believes Russia is being torn to pieces by greedy people.

Russia's delegate to the Miss Earth beauty pageant this week made international waves with an essay eviscerating her home country as a "beggar" and a "sinking ship" being bled dry by the greed of a "chosen few."

Kursk native Natalya Perverzeva began her essay on "what makes you proud of your country and what can you promote about it?" routinely enough, saying Russia is "all that I have, all the people I love, all that is dear to me."

But the 24-year-old civil service financier soon turned her attention to ills she said too many people want to close their eyes to and "reject as spoiling a look."

"My Russia is a poor long-suffering country, mercilessly torn to pieces by greedy, dishonest, unbelieving people. My Russia is a great artery from which the 'chosen' few people [are]

draining away its wealth," she wrote. "My Russia is a beggar. My Russia cannot help her elderly and orphans."

"From [Russia], bleeding, like from a sinking ship, engineers, doctors and teachers are fleeing because they have nothing the live on. My Russia is an endless Caucasian war. These are embittered brother nations that formerly spoke in the same language but now prohibit the teaching of it in their schools. My Russia is a winner that overthrew fascism but bought the victory at the expense of the lives of millions of people. How, tell me, how and why does nationalism prosper in this country?" she wrote.

The comments, posted in inexpertly translated English on the Miss Earth website, have won her instant fame among the liberal opposition, with quotations from the speech being reposted by the Campaign for Fair Elections and other groups.

It is not all doom and gloom, however. She said she would be proud of the country "no matter who rules it," and she urged her countrymen to identify themselves with the "mercy, heroism, courage, diligence" that are the nation's saving grace. "Only we can improve the situation," she wrote.

Perverzeva, a WWF volunteer, is also a fierce advocate of renewable energy, which she believes has great potential in Russia.

The winner of the Miss Earth pageant, in which contestants are judged partially on their environmentalist credentials, will be crowned in Manila on Saturday.

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