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Eurovision Turns Political as Russia and Ukraine Prepare for Finals

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The Tolmachevy Twins during a Meet & Greet at the Eurovision Song Contest 2014.

Russia and Ukraine will go up against each other during the final of the Eurovision song contest Saturday, in a face off that has prompted a flurry of comments about the supposed political undercurrent of the competition.

Ukraine's TSN.ua said the announcement that Russia had made the finals on Tuesday, was met by "Boo!" from the audience, followed by cheers when Ukraine's candidacy was revealed.

Across the border, a commentator on Russia's Ekho Moskvy website praised the performance by the Russian contestants, the Tolmachevy Twins, while another denounced the music as "aggressive and militant, like the anthem of the State Duma." He used a derogatory colloquial term for the lower house of Russia's parliament.

In the run-up to the contest, both Russian and Ukrainian media cited an apparently humorous

piece by London-based journalist William Lee Adams who said close analysis of the Russian contestants' song "Shine," allowed listeners to see it "for what it is: a veiled love letter from Russia to Crimea."

The apparent irony seemed to have been lost — or perhaps disguised even further — in translation, when Russia's tabloid-style website Super.ru cited the review and added that the "opinion of Adams has also received support from other countries that regard Russia negatively for political reasons."

It also quoted the singers as saying they were unfazed by the supposed reproof.

Ukrainian contestant Maria Yaremchuk's song "Tick-Tock" appeared to have received less politically charged attention, though some would happily submit her lyrics to similar scrutiny: Aren't the opening lines of her song — "I believe that I've loved you since the first time that I saw you" — a thinly veiled reference to the day six decades ago when Ukraine received Crimea as a "gift" from Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev?

Then again, politics and the Eurovision contest are not as unlikely a pair as one would expect.

Britain's The Independent, which described the contest as "the cheesiest, campest and arguably most ridiculous of all music competitions" in a recent article, added that Eurovision "has been plagued with cries of 'It's just political!' for as long as most of us can remember."

A Eurovision spokesman said last week that votes from Crimea would still be regarded as Ukrainian, as long as fans there use Ukrainian cell phone networks, The Wall Street Journal reported.

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