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Russian Army Supplier Patents Catchphrase Celebrating Crimean Annexation

By The Moscow Times

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Russian warships fire during a naval parade rehearsal in the Crimean port of Sevastopol on Jul. 25, 2014.

A popular catchphrase that Russians use to celebrate the annexation of the Crimea peninsula has been patented by Voentorg, the Russian Defense Ministry's official clothing and food supplier, company head Vladimir Pavlov told news agency TASS in an interview published Thursday.

The phrase "polite people" emerged as a way for Crimeans to describe the heavily armed, unidentified men who appeared on the peninsula in February, shortly after former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych was ousted following months of street protests.

While the soldiers refused to identify themselves, their weapons, accents and uniforms outed them as Russian commandos. The Russian government denied any connection at the time, but

in April, a month after Russia had annexed the peninsula from Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin admitted the "polite people" had been Russian soldiers all along.

The phrase took off on the Russian Internet, and entrepreneurs immediately saw business potential. Voentorg's application, filed in April, vied with at least two other private businesspeople for the branding rights.

Voentorg also announced Thursday that it had won the rights to the phrase "Tank Biathlon." Russia launched the first ever international tank biathlon competition last year, an event in which tanks shoot targets while navigating an obstacle course to win points.

Apparel with a military or Kremlin-related theme has been rising in popularity since tensions sprang up between the West and Russia over the Ukraine crisis. T-shirts featuring Putin's image, some overlaid with the phrase "The Politest of People," saw a two-hour queue when they first went on sale in Moscow's chic GUM shopping mall in August, the BBC reported.

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