

Referendum, parmesan, truce - Russia's words of 2014

By [Michele A. Berdy](#)

December 11, 2014



Обратный отсчёт: countdown

Hallelujah! The year 2014 is drawing to a close. Of course, that doesn't mean that all the difficulties, trials and tribulations of the year will end magically on Dec. 31 when the clock strikes midnight. But maybe something — anything! please! — will change for the better.

Part of the ritual of seeing out the old year is reviewing the top words, expressions and neologisms of the 12 months just gone by. As various formal and informal organizations vote for their слова года (words of the year), one group, Словарь года (the year's dictionary) has already posted the top hits for each month. This is a kind of linguistic walk down memory lane. Here are a few high points:

January: Дары волхвов (Gifts of the Magi), what more than half a million people stood in line

for hours in the cold to venerate when the relics were brought from Mt. Athos in Greece to Russia. This began the year on a high, if somewhat unexpected, religious note.

February: Трусые кружевные (lace undies). While the eyes of the world were on the Winter Olympics in Sochi and Maidan in Kiev, Russian lawmakers had their eyes on something closer to home. After what one presumes was thorough research, they concluded that lace underpants harmed the reproductive health of Russian women, and banned their import. No research was conducted on the subsequent reproductive health of Russian men.

March: Референдум (referendum), a poll with only one possible answer conducted among part of the population of Crimea after two months of intense propaganda, no long-term analysis, and the ubiquitous presence of so-called вежливые люди (polite men) in full military gear.

April: Крым наш (Crimea is ours). What a surprise. I'm shocked, shocked. Also this month: зелёные человечки (little green men), the Ukrainian term for what the Russians call вежливые люди.

May: Уконтрапупить (to destroy thoroughly as one would destroy counter-revolutionaries — circa 1921, used by President Vladimir Putin in 2014). This is my personal word fave of the year. Any word with пуп (belly button) in it is a small ray of sunshine in an otherwise dark year. Also in May: Новороссия, a resurrected historical term denoting some land that we are to believe was "всегда русская" (always Russian) even before there were Russians.

June: Псакнуть (derogative term derived from the name of U.S. State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki, which means to say something stupid). A play on пискнуть (to squeal). The hysterical propaganda campaign against this person is the greatest mystery of the year.

July: Бук (Buk missile system), about which we tragically know more than we ever wanted to know.

August: Пармезан (Parmesan cheese), what we must give up to counter the Western sanctions against us. I am still trying to figure out how our suffering more personally is a good way of getting back at those who do us wrong.

September: Перемирие (truce), apparently a term used to describe a period of quiet used to bring in more weapons and armed forces from abroad.

October: Спайс (spice), synthetic marijuana outlawed by parliament. I wish they'd banned this before they considered the panty ban.

November: Свободное плавание (free-floating), what the ruble is doing. Unfortunately, it wants to float downstream.

December's word and the winning word of the year have not yet been announced. But one group member suggests a motto for the year: Война, враньё и воровство (war, whoppers and thievery).

I'm telling you: not Russia's finest year.

Michele A. Berdy, a Moscow-based translator and interpreter, is author of "The Russian Word's Worth" (Glas), a collection of her columns.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/12/11/referendum-parmesan-truce-russias-words-of-2014-a42200>