

Despite Sanctions, Russia's Elite Is Living It Up

By [Maxim Goryunov](#)

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Despite the current confrontation with the West, the wholesale return to pre-revolutionary levels of nationalist rhetoric and to a special status now given to Russian Orthodox priests and Cossacks, a number of regional officials could not deny themselves the pleasure of celebrating their New Year's holiday in Europe.

Those whose patriotic fervor was particularly strong went so far as to post photos on social networks showing themselves at holiday banquet tables piled with foods that Russia has barred from import as part of its own sanctions against Europe.

As long as corrupt officials spend their ill-gotten gains in Monte Carlo, Russia cannot turn the clock back to those days of communism.

Special mention in this regard goes to Oryol region Deputy Governor Alexander Ryavkin, who posted a caption to one such photo saying the foie gras he ordered at the restaurant in Karlovy Vary in the Czech Republic was simply "divine."

Such foie gras — along with Spanish jamon and French wines — are among the most important points in Russia's anti-Western propaganda. Die-hard patriots daily accuse fellow citizens of opposing the conflict in Ukraine and advocating the return of Crimea whenever they fail to sacrifice their earthly, gourmet appetites for the sake of a higher goal such as Russia's right to the sacred territory of Crimea — where, by the way, it recently came to light that Russian statehood is emerging.

After Internet users noticed the questionable photos on social networks, Ryavkin hurriedly deleted them, but continued vacationing at Karlovy Vary and posting new photos. However, this time he added properly patriotic captions to the effect that the area around the resort was unquestionably beautiful and could even compare — however distantly, of course — to the area around his home city of Oryol.

The public reacted strongly. The state's propaganda machine has been working for one year and people are tired of the relentless attack on their love of Western food products. When they have the choice, Russians generally prefer foodstuffs imported from that "Godless" Europe to domestically produced fare.

In fact, that preference pertains to the whole gamut of consumer products. The further a province is from Moscow and St. Petersburg, the more likely goods will carry the prefix "Euro-" to indicate superior quality. It would prove extremely difficult to halt that practice now, not only because it has been in place for so many years, but because Russians accept it as natural and logical.

However, as long as corrupt officials spend their ill-gotten gains in San Remo and Monte Carlo, Russia cannot turn back the clock to the days of communism or, as those on the far right dream, to the rigid regime of the 19th century.

But once these officials — whose lifestyles recall that of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un — stop stealing, and as soon as they consent to don simple clothing and eat nothing but raw beets for breakfast, lunch and dinner and sing Soviet-era anthems mixed with Orthodox hymns, only then will Moscow leaders manage to raise the dead past and miraculously step back in time.

All the money these officials have stolen from Russian taxpayers and sent to offshore accounts will prevent them from posturing very convincingly in Russia's current carnival of medieval values, and their penchant for fine wining and dining in a clumsy attempt to pose as Europeans only further works against officialdom's ostensible embrace of "traditional values."

For this reason, it behooves every Russian who stumbles across photos of this or that deputy governor posing near the Eiffel Tower to save his own skin by posting such comments as the following:

"Oh, Mr. Deputy Governor, what a fine Roman profile you have. Are you of Italian descent

by any chance? Such sculpted noses are generally only found in Borgia family portraits. You ought to visit Rome more often. Those haute couture suits do become you. And you clearly know a thing or two about fine wines, silk ties and the Porsche Cayenne luxury edition SUV. I am impressed. It will be an irreparable loss to the world of high fashion and truffle season at the Pavillon LeDoyen restaurant if you are unexpectedly prohibited from leaving that terribly drab and gray Russia. You have a natural talent for splendor and beauty — don't let it fade away."

Only by buttering up these criminal Russian hedonists can ordinary citizens save themselves. Such is the inscrutable Russian world of today.

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