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Abkhazia Tries Flower-Power on Russia

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Three and a half tons of mimosas allegedly now are crossing each day from separatist Abkhazia into Russia, Russian news outlets allege. The tiny, subtropical region is hoping to make a roaring trade out of its resplendent yellow blossoms ahead of the March 8 International Women's Day, a combination of Valentine's Day and Mother's Day in the post-Soviet world.

As it blossoms early, mimosa, or acacia dealbata, makes a prime gift for the big day. Mother Nature has helped out as well. A moderate winter led to early blossoms this year on Abkhazia's Black Sea coast, Russian media claim.

Yet contraband is also on the increase. Some smugglers are trying to hide Abkhazia's mimosas in their car trunks, Russian customs officials complained, Vesti.ru reported, citing TASS.

A standard mimosa bouquet sells for 100 rubles, or $1.60, in Sochi, the largest Russian city near Abkhazia, according to one outlet.

But, soon, those mimosas may not rank as contraband. Russian President Vladimir Putin, ever land-hungry, would like to eliminate Russia's de facto border with flowering Abkhazia, which Moscow recognizes as an independent country from Georgia.

"Eventually this border needs to go. There should be no border between us," said Putin aide Vladislav Surkov earlier this month.

Putin may have observed last year that love makes the world go round, but a desire for flirty flowers is not thought to motivate his desire to clasp Abkhazia ever closer to his chest.

Over protests from Tbilisi, Moscow is trying to pull Abkhazia and its breakaway twin, South Ossetia, into the Russian economic space through agreements on integration. Georgia views these steps as attempts to annex its territory, but no solution to the impasse is in sight.

Yet the Kremlin is paying an increasingly high price for keeping the Abkhaz happy. Despite its ailing economy, Moscow earlier this month announced plans to provide 9 billion rubles (about $146 million) in aid to Abkhazia.

Some observers argue that sanctions and falling oil-prices mean that bundle of cash eventually will have to be reduced, but, as yet, those financial forget-me-nots just keep on coming.

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