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Russians Love Cracking a Good Joke, Unless It's About Putin

By Jennifer Monaghan

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One-quarter of Russians believe that jokes about President Vladimir Putin should be considered off-limits, state-run pollster VTsIOM revealed Wednesday.

But Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov seemed to disagree, urging that all jokes are appropriate, so long as they're good.

Addressing an apparent April Fools' joke by news site EUobserver — which said that France was selling a pair of Mistral warships to the European Union's foreign service instead of to Russia as previously agreed — Peskov quipped: "All good jokes are appropriate, as is the fulfillment of a contract," in comments carried by the TASS news agency.

Seventy-nine percent of respondents to the poll said that they personally had a good sense of humor. But while a substantial majority of Russians feel confident in their capacity to crack jokes, it appears that many believe a plethora of topics are no laughing matter.

The poll also found that most Russians (57 percent) consider it inappropriate to poke fun at religious values. In general, religion is taken very seriously in Russia. A law passed nearly two years ago by the Russian parliament criminalized insulting the feelings of religious believers.

Among the other topics considered out of line for Russians to kid about were war, with 63 percent saying such jokes were unacceptable, as well as genocide and terrorist attacks (58 percent) and family tragedies (61 percent).

Most Russians do enjoy watching comedy films and television series, with 79 percent of those polled saying they get a laugh out of watching humorous shows. Forty-one percent said they listen to comedy radio programs, while 39 percent read rib-tickling literature and 37 percent browsed amusing websites online.

The survey was carried out between March 21 and 22, among 1,600 people across 46 regions, and had a margin of error no greater than 3.5 percent, the pollster said in a statement.

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