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Russia's May Holidays: Bikers, Fascists and BBQ

By Unfair Observer

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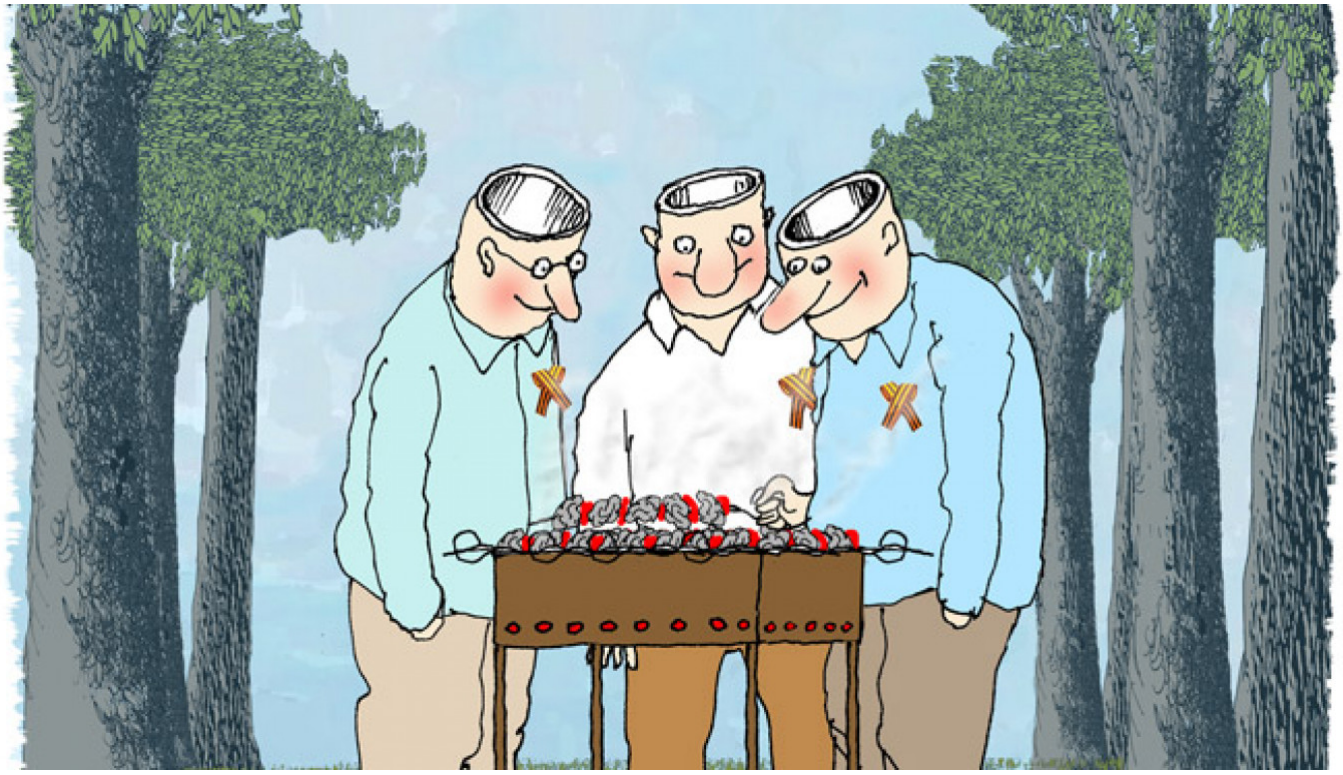

Russia rolled into the Labor Day holiday last week, an event celebrated nationwide by skipping work and gorging on grilled meat. This once-mighty holiday, however, is now just a warm-up for the upcoming Victory Day, to be celebrated by consumption of more grilled meat, military parades and ultrapatriotic speeches in honor of the more than 27 million Soviet soldiers and civilians shot dead, starved and tortured during World War II.

But it turns out that the war still rages on (with mixed results) — as the following recap of last week's most exciting events indicates.

Biker Invasion

President Vladimir Putin's favorite biker gang, the Night Wolves, spent an exciting week trying to enter Europe on a ride to commemorate the World War II victory — essentially, to rub a reminder of Russia's power in Germany's face. A few managed to clear the border by late last week — but not before being turned away repeatedly. In the words of one of the

intrepid bikers, Polish border guards searched "every cosmetic bag" the bikers carried.

Russian bikers are the Kremlin's new Cossacks — they ride with the president, they praise the Lord, they threaten the opposition (and the "fascists" in the West), and they reportedly sent a few fighters to the pro-Russian uprising in eastern Ukraine. So you would expect that all the Eastern European countries that Russia kept under its thumb in the past decades (i.e. most of them) would be less than impressed.

But you would also expect more from tough-talking machos than an invasion force armed with cosmetic bags, looking for a nice border guard to let it through.

Perhaps the Night Wolves should have traded leather jackets for suits and ties — their much-touted grandfathers, who used to cross borders on tanks, would probably have appreciated the effort. (Though in all fairness, being soldiers, the grandfathers would probably rather prefer a good bit of twerking, or an anti-fascist comic book — but both things are now banned in Russia. Girls who recorded a twerk by a war memorial were jailed, and Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer-winning graphic novel "Maus" was pulled off the shelves over a swastika on the cover — "Nazi propaganda," these days).

Victory in Space

An unmanned Progress spacecraft sent to the International Space Station spun out of control last week and was marked as a loss. In addition to the boring stuff like food, air and water, it was carrying a true necessity in the orbit — a copy of the Red Army's Victory Flag. Thankfully, as the Russian space agency Roscosmos informed the world, the astronauts already have another copy.

Russia has lost at least 10 spacecraft over the last five years, including several Progresses. But it does not deter Russian space bosses from dreaming big. Firebrand nationalist Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, in charge of the space industry, said he wants a Russian on the Moon by 2030.

One can only infer that Rogozin has seen "Iron Sky" and expects to find — and defeat — Nazis on the Moon. One must also hope that Roscosmos does not plan to fly to the Moon by shooting astronauts out of a Big Bertha cannon — because their technical skills seem to be decreasing.

Fascists at Polls

One decisive victory was, at least, clutched over the enemies at home, and this was at the polls.

Elections in the city of Balashikha outside Moscow ended with independent observers crying massive fraud to the benefit of the ruling United Russia party — and beaten into hospitalization for their trouble. Moscow region election tsar Irek Vildanov was accused of calling the vote monitors "homegrown fascists," though he later claimed to have been misquoted.

Perhaps Vildanov really did not call those pesky observers "fascists" — in this case, he is due

an apology. The pesky observers and the people of Russia, in the meantime, are due an apology for explicit and condoned vote rigging and electoral manipulations, back in full force after a temporary setback during the last elections.

In any case, it is clear from this "war on fascism" that we already know how the 2016-2018 election cycle will play out — which, at least, saves time for all parties involved.

Elsewhere, the Justice Ministry withdrew registration of opposition supremo Alexei Navalny's party. Such a laughable pretext was used that the ministry must be saving a ton of money on electricity — because their faces must be shining such a deep red you can read by its light (not that anyone does — everyone's out of town gorging on grilled meat).

Navalny's party was said to have failed to timely register branches the Russian provinces, while at the same time the Justice Ministry's branches in the regions have been throwing out registration requests from the party's regional branches.

Grilled meat, anyone?

Unfair Observer is the pen-name of a Russian journalist that The Moscow Times has invited to observe the most brain-dead weekly developments in Russia.

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