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Weekly Wrap: Aliens Head to the French Riviera

By Unfair Observer

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The election season in Russia picked up steam this week with opposition candidates kicked out of regional elections in two regions. To determine its popular support, a party in Russia first has to prove it has popular support (makes sense) and has to collect signatures to confirm this. The election authorities checked the signatures collected by the Parnas party against an obsolete database and declared them invalid. Checkmate.

President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov explicitly denied the Kremlin's involvement. One election official protested his innocence and said that he has a Ph.D. and thus cannot lie, though that's a shaky argument in a country with hundreds of plagiarized dissertations.

But citizens need not worry that they won't be represented because there are 78 political parties in Russia. That's more than in North Korea, which has a multiparty system (yes, it does). There is a party of Cossacks, of disabled people, of women, monarchists, farmers, veterans and honest people. Chances are balalaika players and fans of Marvel Comics will get

their own parties soon.

So no reason to worry: Pick your hobby, and find the appropriate political party. It sucks if your hobby is democracy or transparency, but you can't have everything.

The Russian Riviera

In addition to a multiparty system, Russia also has Crimea, and the place received some foreign visitors who weren't journalists recently. A bunch of French lawmakers went down to check out the place and liked it. They said they didn't see any soldiers, the populace seemed well-fed and happy, and it looked like the French Riviera. Italian lawmakers are already lining up for their own glimpse of the place.

The French spent less than two days in Crimea, but we can assume they had the time to check everything out — they must have compared the local prices to those in Ukraine, watched national television with the Tatars who have gone missing since Crimea's annexation, spoke to entrepreneurs trying to run businesses in the place. It's all OK, apparently.

But that's precisely the problem with Crimea: Everybody likes it. Seriously, it's a good place. The thing is that not everyone has the right to it and some pickier countries take issue with the referendum last year, held in a region controlled by foreign military forces. There's just no pleasing some people.

The French lawmakers may think there is no risk for La Belle France. But they should be more careful given how many Russians currently live, or have apartments on the French Riviera. They've been going there since tsarist times (with a little lull in the 20th century), and it's essentially Russian territory, really.

So perhaps one day the polite green men will appear there, a referendum will be held, and Russia will be one resort richer. I'm sure the French lawmakers will then go to the Russian Riviera and find it all right.

Fighting Gaybook

Russian lawmakers were as proactive as their French counterparts this week, and discovered another nest of gay propaganda — on that pesky Facebook. The site has rainbow-themed emoticons, which violates Russia's anti-LGBT legislation, so the youth wing of the ruling party was asked to investigate and hopefully spare Russian children the horror of gay propaganda.

Nobody told the lawmakers that the Internet has other websites, many of which are LGBT-themed or just mention gays (or rainbows), and they are perfectly accessible even to people not old enough to buy alcohol. So perhaps a cap on that Internet thing should be considered, otherwise Russia will turn completely gay just like the rest of the world that uses Facebook completely oblivious of its threat to the human race.

But before they pass a law that'll have you show your passport before you go online, some import substitution could be implemented: i.e., let's develop Russian smileys! Most should be based on Putin's stern visage, of course, but you can have one winky face looking like Putin's

spokesman Dmitry Peskov. Bear- and Crimea-shaped emoticons should also do wonders for self-expression. That'll teach the hipster Silicon Valley vultures a thing or two! *Peskov wink*

Rafting to the Stars

And in the Urals, a family built a raft from old truck tires to sail down to the site of a local UFOlogist conference, apparently frequented by aliens. Huckleberry Finn would not be seen dead in this raft, judging from the pictures, but it got the job done and delivered the happy UFO seekers to their middle-of-nowhere destination. No extraterrestrial contact ensued.

Stephen Hawking and millionaire philanthropist Yury Milner just launched a $100-million program to search for extraterrestrial life. A shame nobody told them all they needed was to raft across the Urals.

But I really only have one question. After these people paddled their dystopian contraption to sentient beings that crossed light-years to hang out in the middle of nowhere, what would they tell the aliens? Let's trade knowledge? We can build a raft out of tires and we want a spaceship now? Want to party?

Or maybe it would be, take us out of here, please. You don't need to fly us all the way to Betelgeuse, just drop us off at the French Riviera. We hear it's nice there, almost as nice as Crimea.

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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