

Conservative Lawmaker Mizulina Takes On Cheeky Children's Notebooks

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Yelena Mizulina

The creative efforts of designers crafting notebook covers for Russian school children have resulted in several works of decisively bad taste, according to ultraconservative lawmaker Yelena Mizulina, a fierce defender of Russia's children from allegedly offensive content.

Mizulina is particularly incensed by notebook covers featuring flippant Soviet-era jokes that parodied the official ideology of the time, but were most likely intended for adult audiences, the lawmaker said on her Website and Twitter account on Wednesday.

“The specifics of a child's psyche are such that children interpret everything literally, they are unable to divine the hidden meaning of a joke placed on a notebook,” said Mizulina, the head of the State Duma's Committee on Family, Women and Children Affairs.

Mizulina posted photos of the offending notebooks. Another examples featured on her

website offered children tongue-in-cheek spins on the realities of life in modern Russia, such as one calling for a teacher to “not use [their] service weapon.”

The Russian formulation of this phrase used the word “tabelnoye” — which can refer to both a service firearm and a student's report card. Another example singled out by Mizulina was a cover that read “Stop smoking and start skiing. Instead of cancer, you'll get a hernia.”

The notebooks have prompted a flurry of protests from Russian parents, she said.

Mizulina is currently campaigning in Omsk — the region she represents in the Duma, located in southwestern Siberia, about 2,200 kilometers away from Moscow — ahead of Russia's upcoming gubernatorial elections.

Mizulina met with Education and Science Minister Dmitry Livanov in Omsk to discuss the problem of the notebook covers. Livanov “smirked” at the covers but denounced them, the Komsomolskaya Pravda newspaper reported Wednesday.

The controversial Duma deputy, who has been an outspoken supporter of other conservative measures such as Russia's foreign adoption ban, has joined with her allies to draft an appeal to the Prosecutor General's office to enforce a law protecting children from harmful material, the newspaper reported.

Though Mizulina's proposal appears to be supported by some Russian parents, several of her previous proposals have been met with greater skepticism.

Mizulina has in the past proposed fining people who divorce, and called for adding a reference to the Orthodox Christian religion in the Russian constitution, which in its current form proclaims Russia as a secular state giving no preferential legal status to any one religion.

Atryom Belan, the artistic director of the Alt publishing house, which publishes notebooks for schoolchildren fired back at Mizulina's latest crusade, explaining that the offending material has not been a great hit, “but children are not idiots either,” Komsomolskaya Pravda reported.

“Those are jokes, and they cannot do any harm,” Belan was quoted as saying.

Belan pointed out that Alt publishing house several years ago published notebooks with portraits of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin a few years ago. No protests from Mizulina were reported at that time.

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