

International Women's Day in Russia: the Good, the Bad, and the Sexist

March 08, 2017



Vladimir Putin visits a newly opened maternity center in Bryansk on March 8, 2017. **Alexei Druzhinin / Pool Photo via AP**

Wednesday is International Women's Day. If you're from what was always a capitalist country, there's a good chance you don't even know what this holiday is, but rest assured that it's a big deal in the former Communist world, particularly in Russia, where it's been celebrated for more than a century.

In the Soviet Union, the holiday was meant to commemorate and inspire women in the workforce. Today, it's become something closer to Mother's Day and Valentine's Day, all rolled into one. Men are supposed to show their appreciation for the women in their lives, at work and among friends and family, by gifting flowers.

Embed:



Love that Aeroflot gave all the lasses on the flight a rose. #internationalwomensday #aeroflot #аэрофлот

A post shared by Rhiannon Evans (@rhsnan) on Mar 8, 2017 at 4:38am PST

Of course, International Women's Day is also supposed to highlight women's fight for equal rights across the globe. In this spirit, Russia's Defense Ministry shared a few photos showing

women in the armed forces, with the caption, “Keep it up!”

Embed:

С праздником Весны, дорогие девушки! Так держать!
pic.twitter.com/vuhhxyzeXE

— Минобороны России (@mod_russia) [March 8, 2017](#)

Not everyone in the Russian government pulled off a progressive message, however. In fact, some officials seemed strangely confused about the very concept of equality.

Russia's mission to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe declared awkwardly, “Gender equality? Not today!” implying that March 8 is a day to honor women above men.

Embed:

Gender equality? Not today. Happy 8th March, dear women! we wish you joy and truly spring feelings [#ВамЛюбимые pic.twitter.com/iUF1xg5wke](#)

— Russian Mission OSCE (@RF_OSCE) [March 8, 2017](#)

For others, like a company in St. Petersburg that manufactures plastic-ties, International Women's Day was an invitation to publish violently sexist jokes at women's expense.

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This advertisement from a Russian cable-ties company (on International Women's Day) is not exactly Don-Draper material. pic.twitter.com/peV3myEYfP

— Kevin Rothrock (@KevinRothrock) [March 7, 2017](#)

The company later removed the advertisement, graciously apologizing to all women — even women “without a sense of humor.” The apology was so lame that it, too, soon disappeared from the company's website.

Aside from these unfortunate “jokes,” International Women's Day was also a chance for Russian officials everywhere to show off their wit, charm, and creative flair. In fact, the Kremlin reportedly demanded it.

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In a holiday ritual that's both creepy and sweet, Russian traffic police stopped random women motorists and presented them with flowers.

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The Russian riot police were also keen to show off their softer side.

The crowning achievement of course came from Putin himself, who took the opportunity to quote Russian Silver Age poet Konstantin Balmont.

"A woman – with us when we are born,

A woman – with us in our last hour,

A woman – our standard during battle,

A woman – the joy of open eyes," Putin quoted.

And what about the monumental challenges and dangers women face in a world that values physical attractiveness above intelligence and personality?

Worry not, says Putin. "We will help you smile more."

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