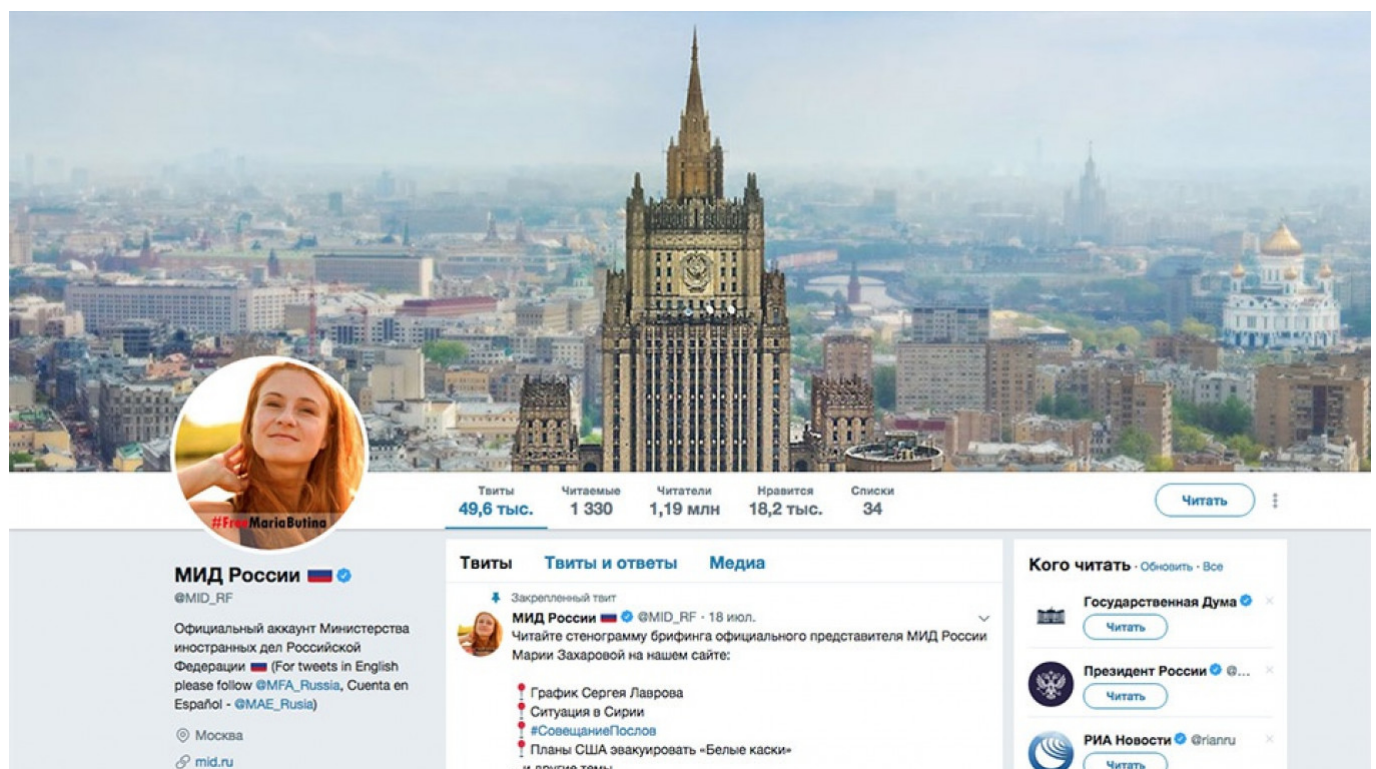# Russia's Foreign Ministry Launches #FreeMariaButina Campaign

July 20, 2018

Russia's Foreign Ministry has launched an online campaign in support of accused Russian agent Maria Butina, drawing a mixed bag of public support and snark.

Butina, 29, was arrested last Sunday in the United States and charged with conspiracy to act as an agent of the Russian government. A judge ordered Butina, a recent graduate of American University in Washington D.C. and founder of a pro-gun Russian advocacy group, to be detained until her trial after U.S. prosecutors argued she was a flight risk.

The Russian Foreign Ministry launched a Twitter flashmob on Thursday calling for followers to change their profile pictures to an image of Butina with the hashtag #FreeMariaButina.

The ministry's English-language accounts shared Butina's photograph with another hashtag saying #NewProfilePic.

Embed:

В связи с арестом в [#США](#) гражданки России Марии Бутиной мы начинаем флешмоб в ее поддержку. [#FreeMariaButina](#). Ставьте себе на аватарки фото Марии. [pic.twitter.com/ekhh9ayvGA](#)

— МИД России ⊠⊠ (@MID_RF) [19 июля 2018 г.](#)

Online responses to the flashmob ranged from [supportive](#) to [incredulous](#), with a heavy dose of [trolling](#).

On the snarky side, Twitter users [reinterpreted](#) the wording of the hashtag to [read](#) as an ad campaign offering a free Maria Butina.

The Twitter curation website Twitchy [compiled an extensive list](#) of #FreeMariaButina hashtags with photos of redhead pop culture figures, including singer Ed Sheeran, actress Scarlett Johansson and standup comic Carrot Top. The inspiration, it wrote, came after a U.S. National Security Council staffer [photographed](#) at a White House meeting with Russian officials was confused for Butina because of her red hair.

The #FreeMariaButina hashtag's popularity surged in the United States, but had little traction in Moscow, where it originated, as of Friday afternoon.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/07/20/russia-launches-free-maria-butina-social-media-campaign-a62307