

# The Moscow Times

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18+





"They caused troubles for Muscovites who use the metro every day, and see ... bazaars built without permission."  
**Sergei Sobyanin, Moscow Mayor.**

**The Moscow Times**  
No. 5741

**700**

bulldozers were sent on Feb. 9 to demolish pavilions

**2,000-15,000**

people to lose their jobs due to pavilion demolition, according to estimates.



Most of the demolished pavilions were providing non-food retail services, according to the Moscow City Hall.



SERGEI KARPURKHIN / REUTERS

Some of the demolished pavilions used to be part of the post-90s Moscow cityscape. They sprang up during Yury Luzhkov's 18 years as Moscow mayor. His successor Sergei Sobyanin is eager to remove the "unsightly" structures.



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## 'There Are People Still In There!'

By **Daria Litvinova** d.litvinova@imedia.ru and **Vasily Kolotilov** v.kolotilov@imedia.ru

Moscow City Hall demolished 97 street shopping pavilions overnight — sparking debates over property rights and, in some cases, ignoring the owners inside.

**Y**ou could hear a young woman yelling, but her voice was diluted in the sound of bulldozers, smashed glass and metal.

"What are you doing?! There are people still in there! Stop it!" she said.

Several police officers stood outside, watching the bulldozer do its work without any intention to intervene. The woman continued yelling: "The are still inside! Can't you drag them out?" she said.

Eventually, reluctantly, a police officer responded. "We told them to vacate the premises," he said, monotone.

The bulldozer kept thrashing the retail pavilion, and the people kept screaming.

Moscow streets are full of scruffy, temporary retail structures. They grew and flourished during the '90s and 2000s, as convenience stores of every hue filled the empty scopes left by Soviet city planners. They clung like old trees to buildings, metro sta-

tions and public spaces. Some of them grew into shopping malls and café chains.

On the night of Feb. 9, Moscow city authorities signaled its intention to remove them from the cityscape. It began the process by demolishing 97 structures overnight in an operation described by Russian media as a "night of long shovels."

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin and his team have long vowed to bring order to city

*Continued on Page 3 →*

### AUDITING STATE ASSETS

## Fighting Under the Rug: Russian Railways Cleans House

By **Vladimir Milov**  
President of the institute of energy policy, former deputy energy minister



YEVGENY PARYONOV

In Russia, simultaneous investigations are rarely a coincidence. Recent developments at the behemoth Russian Railways Company are unlikely to mark an exception to that rule.

Concurrent audits by the Interior Ministry, carried out at the request of opposition politician Alexei Navalny, searches in connection with PR-contracts, revocation of the Central Bank's operating license for Russian Railways-linked Millennium Bank — such developments point to a coordinated campaign against former Russian Railways head Vladimir Yakunin and his legacy.

Russian Railways, the country's railway monopoly and operator of the biggest wagon fleet, is one of the largest transport companies worldwide and a key pillar of President Vladimir Putin's state-dominated economic model. It has reported annual revenues of almost 2 trillion rubles, or 2.5 percent of Russian GDP. From 2005 to 2015, Vladimir Yakunin was its uncontested CEO. Considered one of Putin's closest business allies from his St. Petersburg team, he was sacked in August 2015.

Pressure on Russian Railways has coincided with the company's new head, Oleg Belozеров, attempting to clean the company of Yakunin loyalists, accusing some of excessive spending harmful to the company. The allegations include costly PR, limousines and dubious contracts taken out with companies controlled by relatives of top management.

This is not the first time Russia has seen such coordinated action. In February 2008, the Russian Accounting Chamber began a high profile audit of major state-owned infrastructure monop-

ly, Transneft — the country's trunk oil pipeline operator — in connection with alleged mishandling of funds intended for the construction of the Eastern Siberia-Far East oil pipeline (ESPO). The audit came a few months after the appointment of a new chief of Transneft, Nikolai Tokarev, in October 2007. In 2010, Navalny leaked the audit report to the media, exposing billions of dollars in murky transactions by Transneft subsidiaries.

The Russian Accounting Chamber's 2008 report on the Transneft audit provoked an uproar and led to major changes in the management of Transneft and its subsidiaries. Essentially, it brought an abrupt end to the unbridled authority of the company's former chief, Semyon Vainshtock.

Belozеров finds himself in a similar situation today at Russian Railways, following a decade of unchecked domination by his predecessor Yakunin and his far-reaching loyalists. We do not know whether current efforts to investigate Russian Railways are truly seeking to expose controversial business practices and potential corruption, and change those things for the better, or only to assist Belozеров in getting rid of his predecessor's team.

With Transneft, the state was eager to close the case and hide indiscretions from the public — once new management had cleaned up its act. The 2008 Transneft audit report has never been officially published and authorities have distanced themselves from Navalny's media leak — claiming that "things were not really that bad." We do know that Russian Railways has been incautious when it comes to hiding excessive spending, kick-

backs, and expenditure double-count.

It was caught redhanded by the tax revenue service for counting the same expenses twice for suburban commuter train services — a service segment long claimed as "loss-generating." For these alleged losses, the company receives tens of billions of rubles in annual compensation from the state budget. The artificial nature of these paper "losses" was demonstrated in early February 2015 by the Russian Accounting Chamber. In a routine audit, it noted that Russian Railways had "failed to undertake measures" to reduce losses generated by commuter train services, and that a large portion of expenditures originated from a maze of cross-payments between subsidiaries of Russian Railways.

Murky spending and accounting practices at Russian Railways are nothing new. Lack of competition and non-transparency are common diseases within state-dominated economic sectors led by high-level Putin cronies.

But why now, why Russian Railways, and what does the recent pressure say about changes within the Russian system? If one considers the state's passivity during previous years on exposed cases of fraud and inefficiency at Russian Railways, the buzz surrounding the company points to one thing: New management, backed by the authorities, is cleaning house using corruption allegations — the same way it did following Transneft's management changeover in 2008.

Once that has been accomplished, the dust will settle, and corruption will cease to be newsworthy — yet again. **TMT**



*"This decision to demolish pavilions at night was made because the authorities feared people's reaction."*  
**Yury Luzhkov, ex-mayor of Moscow**



**2,000**

of 30,000 kiosks remained in Moscow in April 2015

A Communist party parliament member **Valery Rashkin** filed a request to the Prosecutor General's office to investigate the demolition of retail pavilions.



**300**

retail pavilions of up to 150 square meters to be auctioned off in 2016.



SERGEI KARPUKHIN / REUTERS

Kropotkinskaya metro station was home to six pavilions with shops and cafes. Three have been demolished while three were not on the list of targeted buildings. All six pavilions have the same owner.



SERGEI KARPUKHIN / REUTERS

700 bulldozers were deployed to demolish 97 buildings throughout Moscow. Although the demolition was allegedly scheduled during the night to avoid inconveniencing commuters, traffic around the sites was disrupted.

← Continued from Page 2

planning, and have criticized temporary retail structures as being unsightly, unhygienic and unregulated. They argue that they were perfectly entitled to demolish the structures that, they say, were built illegally.

But the demolition, conducted under the dark of night and with police back-up, looked more like a military operation than a legal procedure. With paperwork in hand, the store owners had every reason to question the legality of the process.

## 'Night of Long Shovels'

It was two months ago that City Hall first announced its decision to demolish a total of 104 kiosks and pavilions. A demolition list was published by City Hall and, its officials claim, all owners were informed by mail that their "illegal" property was earmarked for demolition.

The owners were "allowed" to take the pavilions down themselves. "We informed them about the deadline and even postponed it for one month," said Alexei Ionkin, a senior official of the Moscow state real estate inspectorate. "The deadline for 97 buildings ran out at midnight on Feb. 9," he said. As night fell, the bulldozers rolled.

Yet many store owners say that the sight of the bulldozers came as a complete surprise. Some establishments, like a three-story restaurant in downtown Moscow never thought authorities would follow through on their threats, an employee told *The Moscow Times*.

When the workers showed up and began dismantling the building and property inside, the owner managed to "negotiate" a 30-minute stay of execution. This allowed him to remove money stored in the restaurant's vault. That "negotiation" cost him 20,000 rubles (\$256).

Others say they realized they had a target on their backs, and had been fighting a rear-guard campaign for several years. Konstantin Mikheyev, aide to entrepreneur Anna Azidi — who owned six pavilions near Kropotkinskaya metro station — said his team had been in a legal battle with City Hall since 2013. City authorities had consistently argued that the pavilions were illegal. But 18 months ago, the court ruled in favor of the businessman.

Moscow officials have repeatedly appealed the ruling. Another court hearing has been scheduled for later in February. Until then, an injunction supposed to prevent demolition was in force, said Mikheyev.

The bulldozers apparently ignored the court injunction, and by midday of Feb. 9, three out of the six pavilions had been destroyed.

## Legal Limbo

Activists say City Hall has ignored dozens of court rulings in its demolition program.

City Hall disagrees. "The demolished pavilions were built in violation of city regulations, they were built on different utility lines and there could be many negative consequences," says Alexei Nemeryuk, head of the city's department of trade.

Another bureaucrat, Alexei Ionkin, representing the city's real estate inspectorate, argued that shop keepers had only been allocated land slots for temporary structures. "They erected capital buildings while they weren't allowed to, and that's why we've deemed them squatter settlements," Ionkin said.

But how long is temporary? Some of the buildings were

built 25 years ago. According to Alexei Navalny's anti-corruption foundation colleague Georgy Albuorov, most of them were registered in cadaster as capital buildings, which suggests the authorities were aware of the issue and considered it perfectly legal for decades. This, after all, was the way that business was done in Russia during the '90s: With connections and corruption, it was easy to obtain genuine property rights for anything.

Navalny argues that the store owners, many of whom are bona fide title holders, are the only ones who have suffered. Corrupt officials, who let the construction happen and turned a blind eye over all the years, have been left alone, he says.

The official position of Moscow authorities is that temporary constructions are inherently dangerous. Since July 2015 they have also had amendments in the Civic Code to back up their arguments. These amendments give municipal authorities the right to demolish structures "built alongside utility lines" without any additional legal moves.

But many of the entrepreneurs have documents that demonstrate full legal ownership of the properties, proper leasing of the land, and registration in the official public registry. In other words, they are the exact opposite of squatter settlements. "Most of the owners of demolished pavilions had all the necessary paperwork," says Alexei Petropolsky, a lawyer.

Petropolsky describes the authorities' position as "absolute legal arbitrariness." "City Hall is simply not permitted to demolish anything without a proper investigation and a court ruling," the lawyer said. Moreover, if a construction is in place for more than three years, and during these three years the city government has made no legal claim, it has no right to sue, he says.

## What Does It Mean for Business?

According to City Hall's own figures, Sobyanin's "night of long shovels" may have left 2,000 people out of work. It also sent an obvious message to all small businesses in Moscow: There are no documents or court rulings that can protect your assets from being destroyed by those in power.

Entrepreneurs polled by *The Moscow Times* indicated a reluctance to do business on such shaky conditions. Head of City Hall's department of trade, Alexei Nemeryuk denied the authorities should be concerned about a possible business exodus.

"We're sending the opposite signal," he argued. "If you oblige the law, you can work here."

But the figures do not lie: Small businesses are shrinking

in Moscow. In the first nine months of 2015, the number employed in small and medium enterprises dropped by 45,000 when compared to similar figures from 2013 (down from 1.54 million). And that, according to economist Natalya Zubarevich, means that operating conditions for such enterprises are deteriorating.

Moscow's bureaucrats could be forgiven for not noticing. Taxes collected from those working under the simplified tax system made up just 3.13 percent of total city revenues in 2015 — 1.7 trillion rubles overall. This means that small business revenues brought in just over half of what the city spent on urban amenities, like benches and flowerbeds.

The revenue contribution of small street retailers to the Moscow's budget is insignificant, says Zubarevich. Even so, the message is not a good one at a time of recession.

"Economic crisis is an inappropriate moment for such operations," she said.

For Sergei Rak, chairman of the consumer market committee at the Moscow branch of the small business association *Opora Rossii*, the decision not to consult properly was "typical" of City Hall. "They make a decision, and they carry it out, no matter what reasons there are against it," he told *The Moscow Times*.

## What Is to Come?

Officials have said that no new retail outlets will be built in place of the demolished structures. They refute speculation that the demolition was a cover to clear out lucrative spots for friendly businessmen.

But neither, it seems, are authorities planning to offer new retail spaces to the owners of demolished pavilions. "They can rent something themselves — the rental market is thriving now," Nemeryuk said. City Hall have also said no preference will be given to the former owners in future kiosk auctions either.

In theory, the store owners were due compensation, but City Hall is playing hardball. The owners were entitled to cash only if they voluntarily canceled their property rights, authorities say. "No one from the list did it, as far as I know, so their pavilions were demolished forcibly," said Ionkin.

Both City Hall's department of trade and the real estate inspectorate told *The Moscow Times* that the operation to remove "illegal" structures was not yet over. They were, however, unable to provide an exact number of structures that had been earmarked for construction, nor give a date that bulldozers would next take to the streets.

In the meantime, some of the owners of demolished pavilions say they are ready to go to court to contest the legality of the demolition.

They are likely to get some support from ordinary Muscovites. "The situation in Moscow is very tense as it is, with authorities pushing unpopular measures like paid parking zones and the endless replacing of sidewalks," said Natalya Zorkaya, expert at the independent pollster Levada Center.

But this is unlikely to turn into revolutionary fervor. It will, one suspects, take a great deal more to shake Russians out of a default position of falling into line. **TMT**



SERGEI KARPUKHIN / REUTERS



## 4 Looking Forward



"Medvedev ... will face questions about Russia's tactics in Syria, particularly its bombing of the opposition and not ISIS." **Vladimir Frolov**

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2010

the last time Medvedev went to Munich.

150+

Russian, Ukrainian and Crimean officials under sanctions.



"Russia's official point of view ... is quite critical of the West. But I believe that Medvedev's stance is going to be milder." **Yury Barmin**

### Weekly Forecast\*

## Watching the Ruble



**Irina Rogova**  
Analyst at Forex Club investment firm

**Russian indexes** have been rather sensitive to the oil price dynamics and the turbulence of the global markets.

The situation is unlikely to dramatically change next month.

The bonds of some companies included in the index, especially those who have been listed among candidates for privatization, may demonstrate growth. But this won't be enough to ensure a steady growth of the index.

However, if the U.S. economy or U.S. Federal Reserve signal that the key interest rate won't be raised in the near future and that the global prices will continue to rise to \$39 per dollar, the MICEX can rise to 1,870 points.

At the same time we shouldn't forget about the difficult geopolitical situation. Syria and Ukraine are still major risks. The escalation of conflict in any of these regions can easily make the MICEX drop to 1,607 points.



**Oleg Repchenko**  
Head of real estate analytical center IRN

Since autumn, the **prices for Moscow real estate** range between 170,000 and 180,000 rubles per square meter.

The dollar prices continue to fall — over the past five months they reduced from \$2,700 to \$2,300 per square meter.

The prices are tending to reach \$2,000 per square meter, a level that was observed in the years 2004-2005, when the financial situation was, in general, similar to the current one: weak oil prices and a low amount of foreign funds in economy.

However, it's difficult to forecast when exactly it will happen as a lot depends on macro-economic and geopolitical events, which are hard to predict. As for the ruble prices, they will stay at the level between in the upcoming month.



**Maria Pomelnikova**  
Economist at Raiffeisenbank

The price of **oil** remains the main factor affecting the ruble exchange rate in the first quarter of 2016.

In the beginning of the year, the ruble value was sliding more slowly than the price of oil, but by the end of the first quarter ruble will become more sensitive to the oil price changes. In the upcoming months, the foreign debt payments will increase which even in case of stabilizing prices of oil leads to the weakening of the Russian currency.

If oil prices stabilize at around \$30 per barrel, we do not exclude the possibility of the ruble weakening to 90 against the U.S. dollar. If oil prices recover to around \$40 per barrel, the value of the ruble exchange rate against the U.S. dollar, according to our estimates, will stand at 75.

# Mr. Medvedev Goes to Munich

By **Matthew Bodner** m.bodner@imedia.ru Twitter: @mattb0401

### Prime minister sent to smooth the way for sanctions relief.

**A**t last year's Munich Security Conference, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov took to the stage to defend Russia's actions in Ukraine. Scheduled between German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the U.S. vice president, Lavrov faced a tough sell.

He did his best to toe the government line, declaring Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 more legitimate than the reunification of Germany in 1990. It was all too much for the audience of heads of state, foreign and defense ministers, and experts. He was laughed at.

"Lavrov accuses the EU of 'supporting coup d'etat' in Kiev. I hope he feels somewhat ashamed of having to market such rubbish," former Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, a staunch critic of Russia's actions in Ukraine, wrote at the time.

Lavrov was, of course, pandering to a domestic audience. His points were not meant to sway international opinion of Moscow's foreign policy, but to reinforce Russian state media narratives of the crisis in Ukraine, regardless of how it looked abroad.

This year, it appears Russia is changing tack. While Lavrov will attend the Munich conference, Russia's official delegation will be led by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev — the message seems to be that Russia is ready to talk about sanctions relief.

stimulus, as companies could begin refinancing their debts in foreign currencies — which would provide the ruble with a measurable boost. However, some economists doubted that the relief would be significant enough to entice the Russian government into capitulating to Western demands in Ukraine.

There is, however, something to be said for the government's fear of economically-motivated public unrest. Negotiating an end to sanctions, even if the relief is more symbolic than substantive, would send a positive message to concerned Russians.

The Kremlin faces a daunting balancing act: It cannot be seen to abandon the separatist forces it supported in eastern Ukraine — especially if Kiev pulls back from implementing the political side of the Minsk agreements. Equally, it cannot afford to continue its fight with the West.

"Russia wants a repeat of the 2008 Georgian War scenario — getting back to business as usual with the West without having to cede any ground," said Vladimir Frolov, a Russian expert on international relations.

As such, Medvedev will look to explore Russia's maneuvering room. Meanwhile, the Europeans will themselves look to discuss sanctions, according to U.S. Senator John McCain, who is scheduled to participate in the conference.

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev in Sept. 2014. He is heading the Russian delegation set to attend the upcoming Munich Security Conference.

### Twin Track

Medvedev's peacemaking effort is part of a broader attempt to reopen diplomatic tracks with the United States. The extent of this apparent detente was underlined last month by a mysterious and surprising meeting in Kaliningrad between Kremlin advisor Vladislav Surkov and Washington's Victoria Nuland.

Following the meeting, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry mentioned for the first time that sanctions could be lifted. But agreeing on an acceptable schedule of sanctions relief won't be easy, as the crisis in Ukraine is not over.

The key to sanctions relief is implementing the Minsk-2 ceasefire agreement. But Kiev, under considerable domestic pressure, may decide it's in their best interests to spoil Minsk.

Likewise, separatists in eastern Ukraine may find reasons of their own to reject Minsk, under plausibly deniable instruction from Moscow, or otherwise.

Russia is trying to paint Ukraine as the problem. Moscow has argued that Kiev is dragging its feet on implementing its side of the Minsk bargain, namely enacting constitutional reform allowing for greater autonomy for the rebel regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. But the Russian-backed rebels have also been sluggish in implementing Minsk. OSCE monitors have noted serious ceasefire and weaponry infringements on both sides.

### The Syrian Connection

Looking beyond Ukraine, Russia's efforts to break sanctions will be further complicated by its actions in Syria. Though the West has "compartmentalized" the two, checking Moscow's attempt to trade its favor with Assad for a compromise in Ukraine, there is an unspoken link between them.

Russia's actions in Syria have been resoundingly derided in the West, and peace talks collapsed last week as Russian warplanes flew cover for a Syrian army advance on rebel positions in the northern region of Aleppo.

This infuriated German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who was reported to be "horrified" by the suffering caused under Russian bombing. Merkel's reaction may foreshadow a broad challenge to Medvedev's efforts in Munich. But, as Galeotti noted, "were the Russians expecting a diplomatic triumph, Putin likely would have gone." **TMT**



DENIS ABRAMOV / IVEDOMOSTI

"Medvedev is a positive sign that means Moscow is taking the event more seriously now," said Yury Barmin, a political analyst. "All in all, I think the Russian delegation will try to smooth out the disagreements with the West, and Medvedev's presence might help."

Medvedev provides a soft face with which to wrap Russia's intransigence on issues like Crimea, the conflict in eastern Ukraine, and Moscow's support for Syrian President Bashar Assad. Whether true or not, Medvedev is viewed in Moscow as the West's Russian sweetheart.

According to Dr. Mark Galeotti, an expert on Russian security affairs, Medvedev will be looking for clarity on sanctions relief, "or, at least, some hope of widening divisions over the issue." Medvedev will relay the usual Russian talking points, but "sanctions are the absolute central issue."

### Under Pressure

Official Russian foreign policy positions in Ukraine and Syria have not changed since Lavrov was laughed off stage last year. But Moscow has been forced to show flexibility in finding a solution to its standoff with the West.

The reason for the softening of Russia's position is simple: the nation is experiencing its worst economic crisis since 1998, and Western sanctions are part of the problem. Consumers and companies are in desperate need of relief from the recession.

Economists from Russian banks said that were sanctions lifted tomorrow, Russia's economy would receive considerable





The Russian Orthodox Church is the biggest NGO beneficiary in the country, receiving \$3.2 million in presidential grants from 2013 to 2015.

**945**

churches currently in the city of Moscow.



In 1990, Soviet President **Mikhail Gorbachev** restored diplomatic ties between Moscow and the Vatican, broken by the Communist government.

**53%**

of Russians trust the Orthodox church and religious organizations.

## Holy Meeting in Havana

The churchmen will meet for the first time over coffee in a Cuban airport.



TONY GENTILE / REUTERS



MARKO DJURICA / REUTERS

Pope Francis (left) in Saint Peter's Square at the Vatican on Feb. 6, 2016. Patriarch Kirill (right) holds a liturgy in the souther Serbian city of Nis on Oct. 6, 2013.



Op-Ed by **Andrei Desnitsky**  
Theologian, translator  
and essayist

**H**ead of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis will meet in Cuba on Feb. 12. This historical meeting has been carefully orchestrated to appear casually improvised — both church leaders will be touring Latin America, and shall convene for a cup of coffee in Havana's José Martí International Airport during their flight layovers.

This convention over coffee will be the first ever papal meeting with a Russian church leader. Rome has been open to meeting but Moscow has constantly refused, pointing to disagreements over Catholic "proselytism," primarily in western Ukraine.

Moscow wanted Rome to stay out of what Moscow considered its canonical territory while Rome objected to such a definition. So the two denominations acted as neighbors happy to exchange greetings but loathe to partake in further interaction.

For the first time in almost 1,500 years, a Pan-Orthodox Council is to be held June 16-27 at the Orthodox Academy of Crete. The Orthodox churches have no pope — they interact as friendly but independent states. Therefore, the council will be functioning more or less as the EU: They need to reach a consensus on all decisions. This does not exclude struggles for an informal primacy.

There are two obvious contenders for Orthodox leadership: Constantinople and Moscow. Traditionally considered the most important bishop's seat in the Orthodox world and once the capital of the glorious Byzantine empire, Constantinople is now a tiny quarter in the Turkish city of Istanbul. Regardless of size,

Patriarch Bartholomew has ambitions to informally lead the global Orthodox community — after all, the Vatican occupies a geographically small area of great importance.

The Moscow Patriarchate considers itself the greatest local Orthodox church in the world, and expects to be recognized as the most influential one. It benefits from Russia's quasi-empire behind it, dedicated to the promotion of traditional Christian values in opposition to the secularized West — or so it thinks.

This council is not only about theological discussions. Once again, Ukraine is of great importance. While the majority of Ukrainian Orthodox believers belongs to the Moscow Patriarchate, some refuse to worship under a bishop based in an unfriendly state such as Russia. At the dawn of Ukrainian independence, they formed the Kievan Patriarchate, which is still unrecognized by the rest of the Orthodox world. The current political and military conflict has heightened this estrangement, as well as the desire of Orthodox Ukrainians to form a united national church.

Moscow has made it clear that compromise is impossible, so hopes for an independent Ukrainian jurisdiction recognized by the global Orthodox community rest with Constantinople. It used to be the "Mother Church" for the metropolitans of Kiev, and could claim the same privilege again, however, this remains an improbable scenario. This only adds to the tension between the two episcopal seats. At the pre-council meeting in Chambésy, Switzerland this January, it became clear that the Ukrainian question will be the most contentious point of disagreement between the Constantinople and Moscow Patriarchates.

What does Pope Francis have to do with these maneuvers within Orthodoxy? Like in the former Soviet days, foreign relations are intricately linked with domestic policy. Constantinople is already engaged in a dialogue with the Vatican; Bartholomew met Francis on a Holy Land pilgrimage and in Constantinople

itself. A refusal by Kirill to meet with Francis would not add to his popularity among other church leaders and would make Bartholomew look like the only legitimate representative of the Orthodox church. Such a situation is best avoided by Patriarch Kirill prior to the Pan-Orthodox Council.

But a meeting between Kirill and Francis would probably not have occurred without the Kremlin's blessing. Russia presents itself as the last defender of Christendom against brutal savages from the East and decadent heathens from the West. The nationalistic image of the "Russian World" which prevailed 18 months ago, has silently left the stage. So the old Soviet slogan "Proletarians of all countries, unite" has brought back with a modification — workers have been replaced with "conservatives."

According to the Russian Constitution, the Orthodox Church, like all religious institutions, is independent from the state. In reality, it has become increasingly engaged in both internal and external politics, sometimes as the Kremlin's helper and sometimes as its competitor: Who has a say in shaping the reemerging "Great Traditional Russia?" The Havana meeting is another step in this direction.

These aspirations are well represented with a meeting with the leader of the West's oldest and largest Christian church. President Vladimir Putin met Francis in June 2015, in the Vatican, and Kirill is keen to follow his example.

The location for the rendezvous was chosen to be as neutral as possible. While sitting in the transit zone of a tropical airport (in striking contrast with Rome-Constantinople talks), the churchmen will discuss severely persecuted Christians in the Middle East, an uncontroversial topic for such a long-awaited dialogue.

One cannot expect them to make substantial progress on the issues dividing the Catholic and Orthodox churches — but it sets a promising precedent. **TMT**

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"Collectors' agencies don't have a brand — they don't need loyalty. So they are harsher." **Danila Mikhailishchev**, ex-collector.

**292%**

increase in overdue debt  
over 2012-2015

**42.5M**

people — or half the  
working population —  
currently have loans.



"People are looking for easy work ... they couldn't give a damn about anyone else." **Alexander Naryshkin**, Stop Collector.

# The Debt Industry's Dark Side

By **Peter Hobson** p.hobson@imedia.ru | Illustration by **Ilya Kutoboy**

With incomes shrinking, more Russians are falling victim to high-interest lenders and a debt collection market rife with criminality.



In the dead of a cold January night in Ulyanovsk, a Molotov cocktail smashed through a ground floor window of a wooden house. Within seconds, the room was ablaze: curtains, blankets, and a bed containing a two-year-old baby. The child would survive — miraculously — thanks to doctors and quick actions by his grandfather, Ismail Guseinov, but was badly burned.

It had been thrown by a debt collector seeking repayment of a loan. A few months earlier, Guseinov had needed cash for medicine to help a bad back. To get it quickly, he turned to a pay-day lender, and agreed to a high interest loan of 4,000 rubles (\$50).

By January, however, he had fallen behind on payments and a local collectors agency became involved. They demanded immediate repayment of a sum ten times larger than the original loan — 40,000 rubles.

The collectors did not immediately reach for their Molotov cocktails. The first warning, a few weeks prior, was a brick through the window. The message on the brick left no doubt as to their further intentions: "We'll burn your house down," it said. The collectors began calling Guseinov's children.

Guseinov was alarmed and reported the matter to the police several times, but they failed to react adequately.

The violence was shocking, and left the Russian public looking for answers. But the family's predicament was unexceptional. Incomes have been falling during Russia's economic slump,

and more people than ever are struggling to repay loans. During 2015 the value of overdue loans increased by almost 50 percent to 1.15 trillion rubles (\$15 billion).

According to Alexander Akhlov, an executive at the United Credit Bureau, which monitors credit history, by the end of December, 11.5 million Russians held overdue debts. Seven million people were more than 90 days in arrears. And an under-regulated, sometimes predatory collection industry is capitalizing on their predicament.

## Debt Bubble

At the start of the decade, consumption was wild. "Time to have it all," said the credit companies in advertising campaigns. "Take it, you can return it later," the slogans crooned. And, as borrowing peaked and the economy stalled, a parallel collection industry grew up for those who couldn't pay.

Some banks began in-house debt recovery, but many began selling overdue loans to specialized agencies. These firms often operate on the edge of the law. "In most cases the activity of collectors is directly connected to criminality," the Prosecutor General's office said in a statement earlier this year. These agencies process more than 40 percent of bad debts, says Akhlov — meaning that at least 3 million Russians are targeted.

Professional bodies representing debt collectors are keen to

point out that many of these people are fraudsters who took the money without intending to repay. They also say their members don't use Molotov cocktails. Banks and respectable collectors stopped using rough methods "long ago," said the president of the Association of Corporate Collectors, Dmitry Zhdanukhin. But even if open violence is relatively uncommon, intimidation appears to be widespread.

Danila Mikhailishchev might be described as a veteran of the industry, having worked in debt collection during the early 2010s, first at a major Russian bank and then at a collector's agency called Sequoia Credit Consolidation. He described the three stages of collection: "Light" collection, which means polite phone calls reminding people to pay, lasts for a couple months. Then it switches to "medium," when calls become more insistent. At three months, "hard" collection begins, and collectors start visiting.

Even large, respectable lenders use intimidation tactics. Mikhailishchev said the bank had trained him to use psychological pressure: "People pay up because they don't know their rights and because they are afraid." Threats work in a country where memories of lawlessness and gang violence in the chaotic 1990s are still fresh, former collectors said.

Officially, bank employees weren't allowed to threaten

Continued on Page 11 →



# Out & About



Weekly round-up of all that's new, delicious and fun in Moscow.



SKOLKOVO GOLF CLUB / FACEBOOK



SKOLKOVO GOLF CLUB

Even if you don't play golf, or don't care about golf, or don't particularly like golf — come to the club for the chic design, lush setting and great food.

## A Restaurant Worth the Drive

By **Ruth Moore** [artsreporter@imedia.ru](mailto:artsreporter@imedia.ru)

### *Upscale eatery overlooking the Skolkovo Golf Club*

Moscow's reputation as a fountain of new wealth is perhaps no better epitomized than in the Skolkovo region to the west of the city. Nestled among luxury residential villages and a 400-hectare self-styled Russian Silicon Valley lies Skolkovo Golf Club, a playground for the rich and the beautiful.

Built in 2014 by one of Russia's best-known billionaires, Roman Abramovich, it's hardly surprising that the club houses an upscale eatery. As members sip crisp white wine in the dining room, cooking up a storm in the kitchen is Ilya Shalev — veteran of the Moscow food revolution.

Shalev, a Le Cordon Bleu alumnus, spent 18 years working abroad at the best restaurants in Paris and London before returning to work at Ragout, an innovative restaurant that brought Muscovites the best of fine-dining at reasonable prices. Here he has an opportunity to create without worrying about cost.

Start with classic salmon tartar or the velvety assortment of pates and terrines served with tart plum and onion chutney. Then move on to scallops cooked so perfectly they melt in your mouth. Colorful dashes of asparagus puree and pea foam frame them like a work of art. Immacu-

late presentation gives away the kitchen's obsessive attention to detail. A perfectly proportioned pan-fried duck breast sits abed a vibrant heap of stewed apple and cabbage. The dessert menu features classics like creme brulee and the indulgent warm sticky toffee pudding. The extensive bar offers cocktails and wine by the glass from 600 rubles to, well, eye-watering amounts.

The clubhouse itself is breathtaking. Designed by Tokyo-based Shigeru Ban, winner of the 2014 Pritzker prize for architecture, the timber structure building sits atop an incline overlooking the golf course. To enter you descend a staircase

revealing both the restaurant and a beautiful panoramic view of the grounds. Expansive glass windows allow light to stream in, creating a bright and clean aesthetic that is mirrored in the crisp lines and furnishings of the dining room.

The tremendous view, high beamed ceilings, and refined dishes make this a luxury restaurant, and an elegant one, too. They say money can't buy taste, but here it has certainly helped.

**+7 (495) 777 9899**

[skolkovogolf.com](http://skolkovogolf.com)

Skolkovskoye Shosse. Bus 523 from Kievskaya or Slavyansky Bulvar

#### NEWS & OPENINGS



45TH PARALLEL

#### 45th Parallel

##### **Global cuisine, rich decor**

45th Parallel offers a round-the-world selection of cuisines—think New York salad, Basque country tuna and Chinese dim sum. The restaurant has a chestnut-colored interior, dimmed lighting, comfy chairs and smartly dressed waiters. With dinner for two coming in at 5,000 rubles it's toward the pricey end of the scale but still definitely worth it for a special occasion.

**+7 (495) 734 9797**

[facebook.com/45parallel](https://www.facebook.com/45parallel)

45 Tsvetnoi Bulvar.

Metro Tsvetnoi Bulvar, Trubnaya



ZELYONAYA SOBAKA

#### Zelyonaya Sobaka

##### **Something for everyone**

Wooden furnishings, high ceilings and a green and white paint job give Zelyonaya Sobaka (Green Dog) a modern yet agrarian feel. Adventurous diners will be drawn to the veggie dishes with a Russian twist, for instance tofu in coconut milk accompanied by dill and cranberries. Or just grab a Guinness with your steak and chips or choose from the staple menu of salads, soups and pasta.

**+7 (495) 917 1881**

[facebook.com/Зеленая-Собака-504128706434863](https://www.facebook.com/Зеленая-Собака-504128706434863)

24 Ulitsa Zemlyanoi Val. Metro Kurskaya



RED CAFE

#### Red Cafe

##### **Relaxed venue with great coffee**

Although the signs still say Red Espresso Bar, a completely unrelated Red Cafe is now open on the site. Red Cafe is a mix of a coffee shop, restaurant and bar. It's strong on espresso-based drinks and cakes, but there's also plenty of food and cocktails on offer. Portions are small but food is tasty and inventive, like the new take on the traditional Russian Olivier with chicken and tobiko.

**+7 (967) 023 3174**

[redcafemoscow.com/ru](http://redcafemoscow.com/ru)

1A Sadovaya-Kudrinskaya Ulitsa

Metro Barrikadnaya, Krasnopresnenskaya



BURO VKUSA

#### Buro Vkusa

##### **Poolside dinner**

Buro Vkusa is a new cafe located at the ground floor of the immensely popular Chaika outdoor swimming pool. Since it's at a sports facility, the food leans toward healthy, although you can still get a burger (380 rubles). Beer and cider, including a hot homemade variety, are available, but no hard liquor. Beef Stroganoff has that feel of home cooking (650 rubles), while the seared tuna salad (490 rubles) tastes positively Californian.

**+7 (495) 799 3870**

[burovkusa.com](http://burovkusa.com)

3/1 Turchaninov Pereulok. Metro Park Kultury

## Take it and go!

Four pages packed with the best places in Moscow to eat, drink, walk, shop, listen, watch, dance and sightsee. A new walking route and listings every week! **Take it, use it, save it!**



**Alexander Frolov, historian**

At 17 **Bolshaya Ordynka** you see a strangely shaped building, which looks like a constructivist building with classic architecture details. Poet Anna Akhmatova's friends, the Ardovs, lived here and she stayed with them every time she came to Moscow. Akhmatova would sometimes stay for a long time — it was like her home in the city. Vladimir Surovtsev's sculpture of Akhmatova in the courtyard was based on Amedeo Modigliani's drawing of her.

**Polina Dzagourova, editor-in-chief, Expat.ru:**

The **Convent of Martha and Mary** is located at 34 Ulitsa Bolshaya Ordynka. I come here all the time to enjoy some peace and quiet. I come here to do charity work and also help out with the garden. On the premises of the convent you can find the restored apartment of its founder, Princess Elizaveta, granddaughter of the British Queen Victoria.

**Dmitry Zaretsky, CEO Pop Farm concert agency:**

Our office has recently moved to Ordynka — before it was near Patriarch's Ponds with lots of trendy places. Now we have a couple of hip cafes nearby. I like **Burger Heroes**, a hip burger bar located in an old Moscow hideaway. Nice choice of beautifully cooked burgers, small but good choice of craft beer. My favorite is the black mamba burger with cherry and smoked bacon.

# Art Beyond the River

## Walking the Road to The Golden Horde

By **Michele A. Berdy** m.berdy@imedia.ru | Illustration by **Ilya Kutoboy**

### Magnificent churches and Russian art in an old merchant quarter



Lavrushinsky Pereulok

Maly Tolmachyovsky Pereulok

**6. Tretyakov Gallery**

In 1856 a great event occurred in the life of Pavel Tretyakov, one of two art-loving sons in a wealthy merchant and manufacturing family: he bought two paintings. These were the first works in what would become the most magnificent and extensive collection of Russian art in the world. To house them, he and his family added gallery space to their home on Lavrushinsky Pereulok several times and opened their doors to the public. In 1892 he gave his collection to the city, and in 1904 the main building was finished, designed by Viktor Vasnetsov in a kind of faux Russian fairy-tale style. Walk in and lose yourself in art; come for lectures and special excursions; spend an evening listening to concerts surrounded by paintings and sculptures.  
10 Lavrushinsky Pereulok

**7. St. Nicholas Church in Tolmachi**

Behind the main building and accessed through a basement corridor is the St. Nicholas Church, a 17th century church where the Tretyakov family worshipped when they lived here. In 1929 it was closed; in 1932 it became a storage facility for the museum. Returned to the church in 1993, now it is something unique: a museum church — a consecrated space where icons can be venerated but with all the security, climate control and safety precautions of a state-of-the-art modern museum. To the left of the altar is the Vladimir Mother of God icon, made in the 12th century in Constantinople, brought first to Kiev and then to Moscow. In 1395, when Tamerlane and his army were poised to attack Moscow, the icon was carried through the city. Tamerlane retreated and Moscow was saved.  
9 Maly Tolmachyovsky Pereulok

**5. Tretyakov Gallery Engineering Building**

The first building on the left at the corner of Lavrushinsky Pereulok is a relatively new part of the Tretyakov Gallery with the prosaic name of the Engineering Building. Much of its function is also prosaic: it houses the climate control and other equipment that keeps the museum running. But the second and third floors are exhibition spaces, and the building also has conference rooms for lectures and meetings. To enter the museum, walk on to the main entrance next door.  
12 Lavrushinsky Pereulok

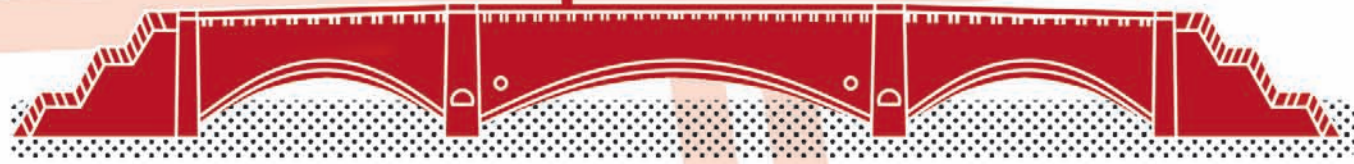
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7

5



1  
**HEMЦOB MOCT**



### 1. Bolshoi Moskvoretsky Bridge

We start our walk at the Bolshoi Moskvoretsky Bridge that spans the Moscow River just south of Red Square. For many centuries there were pontoon bridges here that could be opened to allow ships through. In the 17th century the first standing bridge was built, and in 1829 a more permanent bridge was constructed. The present bridge was built in 1937, and little changed since then. The next change might be the name; on Feb. 27, 2015 Boris Nemtsov was killed while walking across it, and there are calls to rename it Nemtsov Bridge.

### 2. The Resurrection Church in Kadashi Sloboda

Once you cross the bridge you find yourself on Ulitsa Bolshaya Ordynka, so named because it was the road taken by the Russian princes to bring tributes to the Tatar khans, the *Orda* (Golden Horde). Many nationalities and artisans settled here over the centuries, leaving their presence in place names and churches, for which Zamoskvorechye (the area beyond the Moscow River) is renowned. To see one of the finest, turn right on 2nd Kadashyovsky Pereulok to the Church of the Resurrection in Kadashi (Kadashi was a settlement of barrel-makers). Built in the late 17th century, it is a brilliant example of the Moscow baroque style, seen in the delicate drums holding up the cupolas, the white stone ornamentation on the brickwork, and the light and lacy bell tower. The parish, which only resumed services in the church in 2004, had fought for over a decade to take possession, and is continuing to fight against developers. Step inside the church or see their small museum that gives a sense of life, both religious and secular, in past centuries.

7 2nd Kadashyovsky Pereulok



2nd Kadashyovsky Pereulok

2

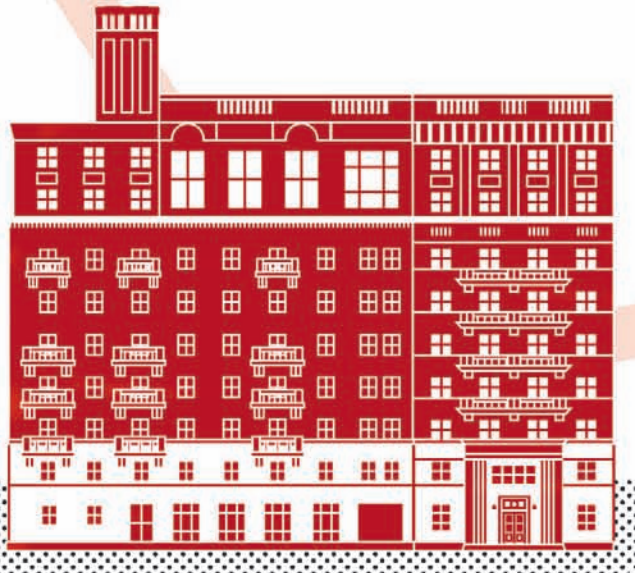
Ulitsa Bolshaya Ordynka



### 4. House of Writers

Continue on Ordynka until Bolshoi Tolmachyovsky Pereulok; turn right and then right again on Lavrushinsky Pereulok. Before you enter in the Tretyakov Gallery on the left, note the large Soviet-era building on the right next to a small square. This is the House of Writers, built in "early empire style" with a bit of late constructivism in 1937 to provide housing for the literary community. Imagine when writers Boris Pasternak, Ilya Ilf and Yevgeny Petrov, Konstantin Paustovsky, Mikhail Prishvin, Yury Olesha, Ilya Ehrenburg, and hundreds of other literary stars all lived under one roof.

17 Lavrushinsky Pereulok



4

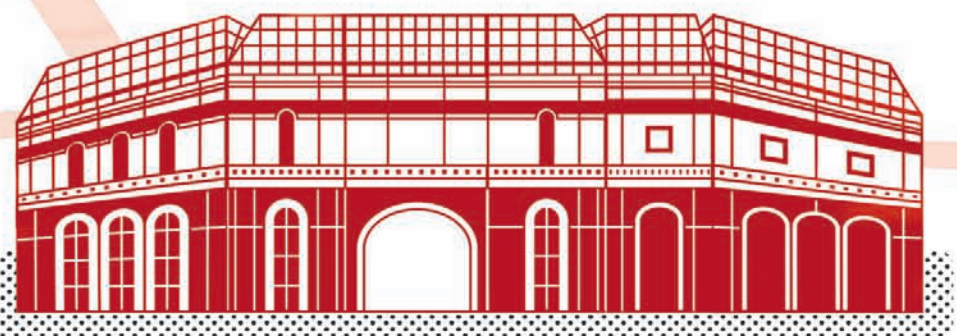


3

### 3. Church of the Consolation of All Sorrows

Walk back to Ordynka and turn right. As you walk along the street, you pass one- and two-story pastel urban manor houses and apartment buildings dating from the 17th through the 20th century. On the right is a striking yellow classical church built in the 18th century. It has a massive rotunda and a cylindrical bell-tower. In the 20th century, fate was relatively kind to this church: when it was a warehouse for the Tretyakov Gallery, the museum workers preserved the priceless interior, and it was given back to the church for services in 1948. It is a place of pilgrimage for people wishing to venerate its miracle-working icon, the Mother of God Consolation of All Sorrows.

20 Bolshaya Ordynka







**John Le Jeune**, marketing assistant, Bord Bia

One of my favorite bars is **Beer Happens**, near Sukharevskaya metro station, while **Kitaiskiye Novosti** (China News) near the Konkovo metro station is a high quality authentic Taiwanese restaurant. Both are well worth a visit!



PAVILION

## 5 Most Romantic Date Spots

Move aside Paris, Moscow is the city for lovers. Whether entwined on metro escalators, walking hand-in-hand through the city's parks or gazing deeply into each other's eyes over candlelit dinners, it's hard to escape them. If you can't beat them, then join them. In honor of St. Valentine's Day, we've pulled together a list of the top romantic spots for you to enjoy with your special someone.



TURANDOT

### Turandot

#### Disneyland meets baroque palace

What could be more romantic than the opera? An opera-themed restaurant of course. Turandot recreates all the ostentation of Puccini's masterpiece with unbelievably extravagant gold finishings and a frescoed cupola ceiling to boot. The menu is pan-Asian, which may seem surprising until you remember that Turandot is set in China. While the food doesn't quite live up to the setting, you can't fail to be impressed by the overall ambience of the place. Deep pockets needed.

+7 (495) 739 0011

turandot-palace.ru

26 Tverskoi Bulvar, Bldg. 3

Metro Tverskaya, Pushkinskaya, Chekhovskaya



MANDARIN COMBUSTIBLE

### Mandarin Combustible

#### Beautiful venue and killer cocktails

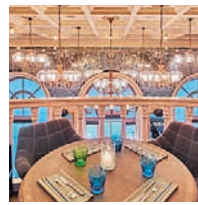
Mandarin Combustible is one of those places that seamlessly transitions from relaxing tea-room to achingly beautiful bar to restaurant. While it has a cocktail list to die for and some truly innovative pan-Asian bites, the most charming aspect of this place is the interior. Dark wooden lounge chairs, sumptuous draped curtains and mandarin-colored table lamps all create a natural intimacy, however busy the bar is. Settle into a corner with your loved one and let the world melt away.

+7 (495) 745 0700

facebook.com/MandarinCombustible

2 Maly Cherkassky Pereulok

Metro Lubyanka, Kuznetsky Most, Kitai-Gorod



PAVILION

### Pavilion

#### Waterside romance

Pavilion is a restaurant in one of the most romantic spots in Moscow. Situated overlooking Patriarch's Ponds, literary types will find themselves entering a reverie as they relive scenes from Bulgakov's "The Master and Margarita." In the winter you can watch skaters and in summer admire the elegant swans gliding past. The restaurant serves refined Russian cuisine and features white-tuxedo clad waiters. Start the evening with a glass of Prosecco as you watch the sun set over the lake. Once the weather warms up, a terraced seating area right next to the water's edge opens.

+7 (495) 697 5110

facebook.com/pavilionpatriki

7 Bolshoi Patriarshy Pereulok

Metro Tverskaya, Krasnopresnenskaya



45 BAR AND CAFE

### 45 Bar and Cafe

#### Wine-lovers paradise

Any place where the wine list is in the head of the sommelier is a place you know takes wine seriously. Here you don't get a wine menu to peruse, but hear the sommelier rattle off your options. This intimate bar has space for around 25, with plush bar stools organized in twos

along the counter and back wall. The kitchen serves charcuterie, olives and tasty bites to compliment your tittle of choice. Ambient lighting, soft music and exquisite wine make this the perfect spot for the oenophiles out there. A word of advice—if this is your first date make sure you brush up on your knowledge of grape types and wine regions beforehand. You wouldn't want to be shown up by the sommelier when he takes your order.

+7 (495) 953 1564

facebook.com/winebar45

17 Gogolevsky Bulvar

Metro Kropotkinskaya, Arbatskaya



BRIX BAR

### Brix Bar

#### Understated yet elegant bistro

Brix has two locations, and while both are lovely, there is a particular romance to the branch tucked at the end of an attractive side street near Patriarch's Ponds. Discreet signage — blink and you'd miss it — beckons you in to an intimate dining room with space for just 20. Candles on every table cast flickering shadows on the exposed brick walls and draw your eye to the bistro's focal point — an alcove piled high with wines from around the world. The wine list is balanced, varied in origin and price. A simple menu with light meals and salads complements the pared back simplicity of this place, allowing you to fully appreciate the good food, good wine and hopefully, good company.

+7 (495) 925 9594

brix-bar.ru

10/1 Maly Kozikhinsky Pereulok

Metro Tverskaya, Chekhovskaya, Pushkinskaya

The Moscow Times  
CONFERENCES

FEBRUARY 18

# HR LEGAL 2016

Partners



Институт профессионального кадровика

大成 DENTONS

## KEY TOPICS

- The abolition of the advisory procedure for the use of professional standards. How will the adoption of the law affect professionals and employers?
- Adjustments of quotas for foreign nationals' work permits and for invitation letters to enter the Russian Federation to work. Will the practice of litigation involving foreign workers change?
- Contentious cases of termination of employment contracts. Typical cases of violations of the law by the employer.
- Legal practice of the social structure of Moscow regional court 2015.

## SPEAKERS



**Alexander Leonov**  
Deputy head of the administration, Committee of the State Duma on Work, Social Policy and Veterans' Affairs, PhD



**Michael Mertekhin**  
Federal judge of Moscow regional court



**Valentina Mitrofanova**  
Director General, Institute of Professional Personnel Officers



**Evgeny Reizman**  
Of Counsel, Baker & McKenzie



**Marina Ryzhkova**  
partner, legacy head of the Russian Employment Practice, Dentons

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*"In training they tell people to be decent. But then their colleagues teach them to terrorize people."*  
**Yevgeny Romanov, ex-collector.**

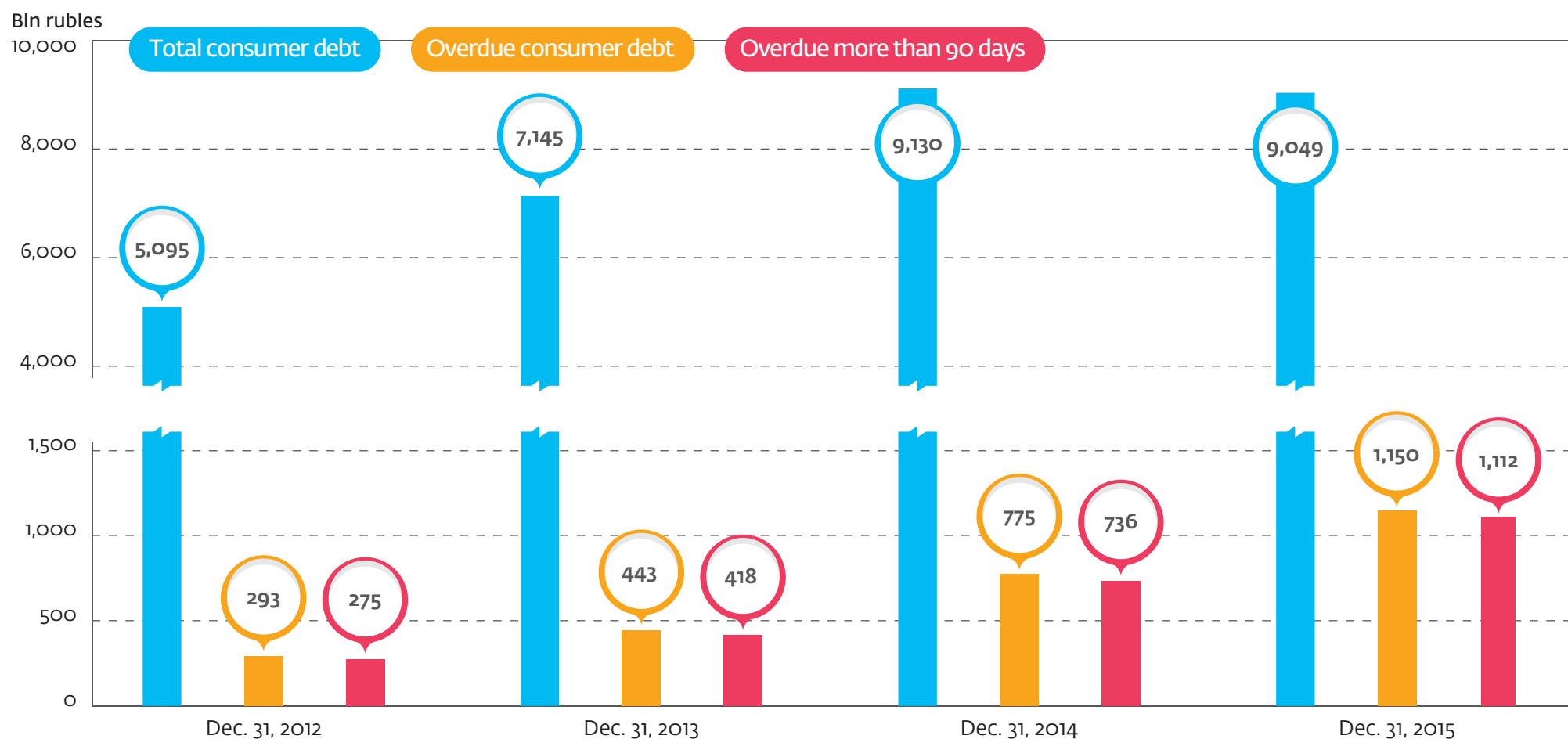
**40%**  
of overdue loans are passed to collectors agencies.



*"We could certainly reach 1.5 trillion rubles [of overdue loans] this year."*  
**Alexander Akhlomov, executive at the United Credit Bureau.**

**12.3%**  
of all consumer loans were overdue by more than 90 days at the end of 2015.

## Bad loans rising: Annual consumer debt in Russia from December 2012



Source: United Credit Bureau

← Continued from Page 6

people. Instead, they would harangue borrowers with a call every two minutes and say: "If you don't pay, your credit history will be ruined."

But employees found that the more menacing they were, the better their results, says Mikhailishchev. The bank had a bonus-driven culture, and "supervisors turned a blind eye" to rule-bending. Call center staff came up with various ways to turn up the heat: "They bought SIM cards on the black market registered to other people and rang from them, because landlines were recorded and monitored."

From untraced lines, they could plug into the darkest side of the business — mobile collector squads. Their methods include setting fire to doors, injecting glue into locks, scrawling insults on entrances to apartment blocks, threatening family and friends, trashing property and scratching cars. According to former collectors, they rarely supply documents to back their claims.

The Moscow Times obtained a recording of a call from a collectors agency. It was taped by a borrower in the Siberian city of Novokuznetsk who collected evidence against the people threatening him.

In the recording, two people from a collectors call center play bad cop and even-badder cop. A woman, who does not introduce herself, ridicules the borrower for the small, "unmanly" size of his 10,000-ruble (\$130) debt and asks if his parents have had heart trouble. "You believe you won't be punished. Collectors will beat that out of you," she says, adding: "Get your handkerchiefs ready."

Suddenly, she passes the line to a male colleague. "You didn't forget me did you?" he asks, and threatens to hand his debt over to thugs. "Tomorrow or the next day you'll be seeing people like Solnyshko Vladimir," he says, referring to a local gang leader. "I think that'll be jolly ... We're washing our hands of any responsibility."

The debtor objects: "You said you were an organization that works with borrowers before cases go to trial. If so, let's go straight to court."

"Before trial' means 'without a trial,'" he is told.

### Police

Making things worse is a distrust of the police. "Of course there is no point hoping in law enforcement," said Mikhailishchev. There's rarely any reaction, he adds — they're just

as likely to ask: "They didn't kill you, what are you bothering us for?"

Collectors usually commit petty crimes that are difficult to prove, and high staff turnover makes it even harder to find suspects, said Mikhailishchev: "Collectors agencies and banks work with hundreds of people. Staff changes every three months, so try finding someone."

The man who threw the Molotov cocktail in Ulyanovsk was a 44-year-old former policeman named Dmitry Yermilov. According to media reports, he had a rich history of threatening residents and vandalizing properties. Following that incident, the heads of the country's two most powerful law enforcement bodies, the Prosecutor General's office and the Investigative Committee, announced they would personally look into the collecting business.

### Predatory Lenders

Meanwhile, the problem grows. Russians' incomes declined last year for the first time since the 1990s, and an economic slowdown is likely to continue through 2016. The value of overdue loans "could certainly reach 1.5 trillion rubles this year," said the United Credit Bureau's Akhlomov. That would be a rise of one-third from the end of December.

As more people fall into arrears and spoil their credit history, more will be turned away by banks. This could force them to turn to more predatory lenders — so-called micro-lenders who deal in pay-day loans at interest rates that reach several percent per day.

These are already popular. 25 years after communism, many people in remote regions remain wary of banks. Credit card infrastructure is patchy, and major lenders don't deal in the small loans needed by poorer people. In larger cities, many migrants don't have access to legal banking services.

"The micro-finance industry is developing rapidly and replacing some of the banking industry in some localities," says Alexander Morozov, deputy head of the National Association of Professional Collection Agencies. They are aggressively marketing themselves and their collectors are the ones who hit the headlines, he said.

Officially, these micro-lenders have handed out loans worth about 150 billion rubles (\$1.9 billion), and two-thirds of borrowers are overdue, according to Akhlomov. But many operate outside the system. These lenders aren't interested in things like regulation and a client's credit history, said Mikh-

alishchev. "They want your passport data. Then they find you. Then they apply interest rates that turn the 10,000 rubles you took into 110,000."

"They make money on fear. They throttle you. That's all."

### Retaliation

On the back of the Ulyanovsk scandal, legislators have demanded new regulation that could restrict or outlaw collectors agencies. Officials are keen to be seen doing something ahead of parliamentary elections in the fall. A law to control debt collection is likely to be drafted in the near future. Morozov says this will help "the professional guys" by removing "grey parts of the market."

But the danger is that the new measures will have the opposite effect. Collectors will either redouble their savagery to collect as much cash as possible while there is still time or move further underground to escape new rules, former collectors said.

In the absence of effective policing, victims are organizing their own defense. Lawyers and former collectors have formed advice groups and consultancies. They usually tell people to either simply ignore demands for debt repayment or seek a court settlement. If you pay a collector, "You'll just bring down an even greater cabal [of collectors] on your head," said Mikhailishchev, who now works with OFIR, an anti-collectors agency that offers legal advice.

Alexander Naryshkin is the administrator of Stop Collector, an online forum for victims of collectors that offers support and advice and receives 90-120 pleas for help every day. He plans to meet force with force.

"This year we're going to launch mobile anti-collector squads," he said. For a small fee, muscular men will arrive on the scene and make their presence known to collectors. "If they don't get it the first time, the second time we apply physical force. After the second time, I think they'll understand."

Vigilante justice is not new for Russia, having been a feature of the dog-eat-dog 1990s. Collectors like Yermilov in Ulyanovsk are still living in those times, says Yevgeny Romanov, a former collector: "They are men who never made it but still think they are the heroes of some Tarantino film."

Another version is that they, like everyone else, are trying to feed themselves and their families during the downturn. Only they have no scruples, says Naryshkin: "These people couldn't give a damn about anyone else." **TMT**





"It's not just a foot in the door. It helps the entire process." Sean, 26, from Liverpool, on seducing Russian girls as a foreigner.

16%

of Moscow marriages were mixed marriages in 2016.

1990

The year Kombinatsiya's "American Boy" hit the pop charts



Marriages registered in Moscow in 2015 included people from Germany, Afghanistan, Israel and Britain.

## THE WORD'S WORTH

## A Primer in Propaganda

Самострой: illegal construction



By Michele A. Berdy  
Moscow-based translator and interpreter, author of "The Russian Word's Worth" (Glas), a collection of her columns.

If you've been on a 36-hour flight or locked in a cabin in the woods, you might have missed the news that almost 100 buildings were destroyed in Moscow overnight. But it wasn't a war or terrorist attack. It was the Moscow government putting your tax rubles to work.

Because this was a special operation, the city government and media are using special terminology to describe it. To help you understand it, I've put together a little primer.

**Снос:** demolition, the orderly dismantling of a structure. The party line: В ночь на 9 февраля под снос пошло около сотни торговых точек (On the night of Feb. 9 about 100 shops were taken down). The real story: Hundreds of bulldozers appeared in the middle of the night and smashed to smithereens several million dollars' worth of real estate.

**Киоски, палатки и павильоны:** kiosks, stalls, and pavilions, i.e. small, flimsy trading booths. The party line: Минувший ночью начался демонтаж павильонов, без разрешения возведенных рядом со станциями метро (Last night work began to demolish stalls that had been put up next to metro stations without permission.) The real story: Solid, stone one-, two- and three-story buildings, hooked up to utilities, with licenses, deeds, and court orders certifying their legal status were destroyed.

**Самовольная постройка:** unauthorized structure, also called самострой (shanty), незаконная постройка (illegal built structure). The party line: Москва избавляется от опасного самостроя (Moscow is getting rid of its dangerous shanties). The real story: Perfectly safe, authorized, inspected buildings were destroyed for no clear reason.

**Признанный:** adjudicated, declared, determined, i.e., status granted as the result of a legal process. Party line: В разных районах начался снос торговых киосков, палаток и павильонов, признанных столичным правительством потенциально опасным самостроем (In various districts, demolition began of trading kiosks, stalls and pavilions that were determined by the city government to be potentially dangerous illegal construction.) The real story: After every court ruled in favor of the store owners, the city decreed they could tear down buildings without a court order.

**Стихийный:** primitive, cobbled together, i.e., something that appeared spontaneously. Party line: По словам специалистов, стихийные конструкции могут представлять угрозу для важных городских коммуникаций (Specialists say that these structures, which were quickly thrown up, might be a threat to key city utility lines.) The real story: Although all these solid buildings that have stood for up to 20 years are fully licensed and inspected, my brother-in-law and his buddy said that in a hurricane phone lines might be affected.

So if you read the official news reports, it sounds like a bunch of ugly, illegally constructed market stalls and shanties were torn down to protect citizens' health and safety.

But here's what the free press — well, Facebook — says about it:

It was called: Ночь длинных ковшей (Night of the long diggers); Ночь хрустальных ларьков (Night of the crystal stalls); or just: сегодняшний погром (today's pogrom). Someone wrote that it looked like "Москва подверглась варварской бомбардировке" (barbaric bombing raids hit Moscow).

What I say is: Свято место пусто не бывает (Nature abhors a vacuum).

Let's see how empty those lots are in six months. **TMT**



## Russian Women, They're Just Not That Into You

By Eva Hartog e.hartog@imedia.ru | Illustration by Evgeny Tonkonogy

The post-Soviet generation of Russian women is looking for love and common values. not escape to the West.

**T**atyana, a good-looking blonde, leans across the table. "You fancy sticking around for a drink?" she asks with a naughty smile. The subject of her advances, a British Moscow Times business reporter, blushes with embarrassment.

It is Saturday evening and we are nearing the end of a foreign-friendly speed dating session in a central Moscow restaurant. Roughly twenty men and women have paid 1,500 rubles (\$19) to meet a potential new love interest.

Even though only two expats are in attendance, organizers clearly think the "foreign" tag is a crowd puller. Russia is entering its second year of crisis, widening the lifestyle gap between Westerners and Russians.

The economic slump has had an impact on the supply side too, as foreigners leave the capital in droves.

All of this should be good news for expats' love lives. But the fascination with foreignness is, it appears, skin deep. Moscow today, with its hip cafes, shiny business centers and fashionable retail stores, is no longer the Moscow of the '90s, when girls fantasized about being whisked away by a foreign prince in Levi's.

## American Joy

When Russia plunged into chaos following the collapse of the Soviet Union, many of its citizens looked for a reliable way out. Naturally, foreigners were viewed as a bridge to the more developed and "civilized" West.

The popular rock group Kombinatsiya summed up in endearing, if flawed, English what was most on Russian girls' minds:

"American boy, American joy.  
American boy for always time.  
I will go home with you.  
Moscow bye-bye!"

Russian women gained a name for going weak in the knees for anyone from the West. That reputation persists today, and it is not wholly without cause. Most male expats say that their nationality can still have a positive impact on girls.

"You can just speak English and heads will turn," said

Sean, 26, an English language teacher, Russian women are also more forward, he says: "You can just be talking to someone and some beautiful girl will come up to you with a chat-up line. Back at home, the guy would have to have to make the first move."

Not every Russian woman has access to expat hangout spots, though, giving rise to a booming business of dating agencies that specialize in foreign men.

Type the Russian words for "get married" or "meet" and "foreigner" into Yandex — the Russian equivalent for Google — and a door opens. This is a world of dating agencies, psychologists, therapists, etiquette training and self-help courses, all geared towards the question of where to meet and how to keep foreign lovers.

Many of the agencies also offer English-language courses and translators to facilitate online communication. In many cases, the linguistic efforts are rewarded. Forums are full of the accounts of Russian women thanking their coaches for a "happy end" — engagement or marriage to a foreigner.

"Thanks to you and your website I got married yesterday!" says an excited girl called Oksana. She describes her friendship with an American man: "I was once too afraid to believe in fairy tales."

Sixteen percent of all marriages registered in Moscow in the first ten months of 2015, were mixed, according to data from the state registry office. The most popular source countries were Ukraine, Turkey, Moldova and CIS countries, followed by Germany, Afghanistan and Israel. Britain and the United States also featured on the list.

Galina Ponomaryova, 63, has been a dating coach for 15 years. Her self-help book promises to hand women the key to "joint travel, candlelight dinners, a home in Europe" and a "comfortable life" in 90 days. Ponomaryova says that the industry has gone through trends. Initially, women were hoping to find a partner from the United States, then Britain. Today, European countries and Turkey are more in vogue.

"Who the most desirable foreigners are depends on fashion. Its all between the ears," she said.



"It takes time to get rid of the rose-colored glasses." **Svetlana Tolstykh**, on Russian women's impression of foreign men.



## 1 year

until you will find a husband, Galina Ponomaryova thinks.



*Muzhchina alfons* is a term used to describe men who sponge off women.

## 1000 rubles

the average price for a speed dating evening in Moscow

### Generation Gap

Decades after the Soviet collapse, the "American Boy" fantasy is starting to fade. Following an economic boom during Putin's first term, living standards have improved and many of the perks of living in the West are now on offer in Moscow too.

In a poll conducted in 2009 by Superjob.ru, one in four women aged 55 or older said she wanted a foreign husband. In the age group ten years below that, only 9 percent wanted a foreigner. And the number continued to drop to 6 percent among those aged 25 or younger.

As the economic motivation to search for a partner abroad has weakened, most of the reasons for looking beyond Russia's borders are cultural, says dating coach and English teacher Svetlana Tolstykh, 40.

Tolstykh, whose agency "Here I Am" helps Russian women establish relationships with European men, said most of her clients were "mature" women who had already gone through a divorce or had been disappointed by their relationships with their fellow countrymen.

"There's an idea that foreign men will be different [from Russian men]," she said. European men have a reputation for being more independent and better planners. She said they are also more emancipated — willing to take on household chores and take up an active role in raising children — and that they were softer in their communication.

But among younger Russian women, who did not experience life under the Soviet Union and are too young to be scarred by past experiences, foreign men have less cache.

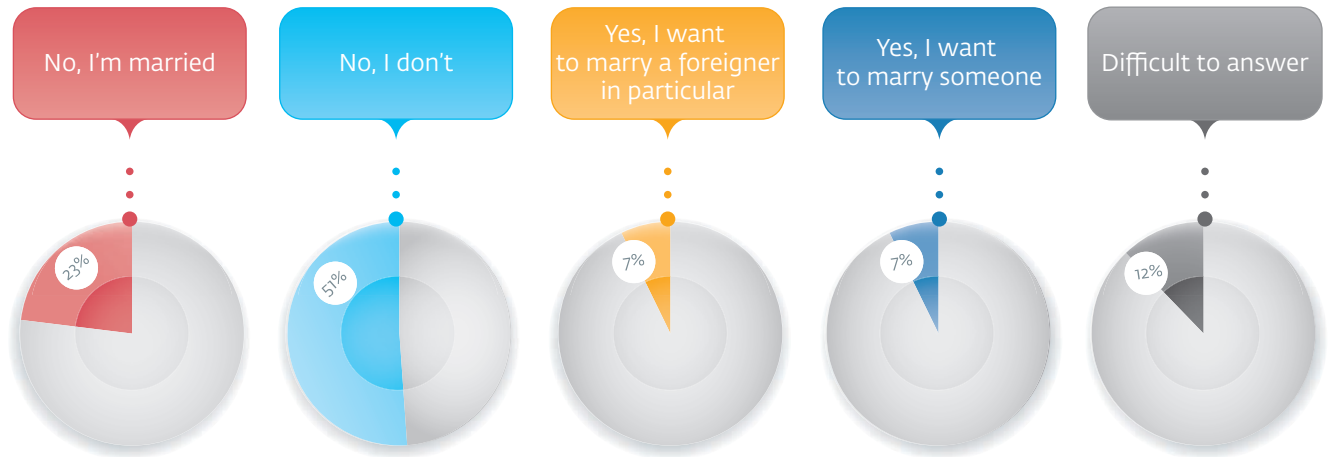
During the speed dating session, most women told the Moscow Times reporter that dating a Russian man would be easier and cause less friction. Tolstykh said that more travel experience meant the younger generation of Russian women no longer viewed foreigners through "rose-colored glasses."

Terror stories about women who have moved abroad have helped to paint a less rosy picture of mixed marriages. The popular state television program "Let Them Talk" recently covered in detail a story of a Russian woman who moved to Norway and was then beaten to death by her Norwegian husband.

As relations between Russia and the West have soured over the Ukraine crisis, the image of Europe as a beacon of stability has also suffered, with the Greek economic troubles and Syrian migrant crisis receiving broad coverage.

"Who wants to go to Europe anyway, with all the chaos

### Do you want to marry a foreign man?



Source: Superjob.ru

that's going on there?" said Tatyana at the speed dating session.

A floundering ruble is not likely to be enough to change that trend, suggested dating coach Ponomaryova. Indeed, in her view, the economic crisis has made Moscow women want to stick with the familiar.

"It's better to wed one of your own, than an overseas prince. Life is not as scary," said one respondent in a poll conducted by the Superjob.ru website.

Dating coach Tolstykh expects that the niche of women expressly looking for foreigners will become smaller as a new generation of Russian men adopt more emancipated views on relationships.

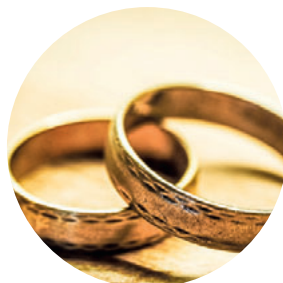
Her own daughter returned to Moscow at age 20 after several years in Ireland, only to get married to a local Muscovite.

Tolstykh predicted that in several decades the services offered by dating business like hers would have to be re-named from "find a foreign husband" to "find love" — in the footsteps of their Western counterparts.

"In the end it's all about love," said Tolstykh. "Of course Russian women want their lives to be set up comfortably but to be in a loveless relationship ... You don't need to leave Russia for that," she said. **TMT**

Peter Hobson contributed to this report.

Follow the reporters on Twitter @ EvaHartog and peterhobson15



SUPERJOB.RU POLL (2009)

### #SoNotIntoYou

- "They have a different mentality."
- "I don't want to get married at all, whether he be Chinese, German, or Russian!"
- "Russian guys might be coarse, but they're our own."
- "I want to live abroad with my Russian husband"

The Moscow Times  
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## FOOD

### How do I learn to eat ice cream when it's -15°C?

**TMT:** You mean how do you enjoy ice cream that has — ironically — become too cold to eat and risks freezing your tongue to it for all eternity?

Aside from the abundance of 24-hour florists, one of the most baffling sights for foreigners in Moscow is the long line in front of ice cream stands, even in the deepest winter. If you're reading this because your last hot date ended on a frosty note after you declined a scoop of morozhenoye (ice cream), let us explain a little bit about Russia's love affair with this sweet treat.

It all goes back to the Soviet era when a honcho from the Russian Ministry of Food Supply visited the United States and decided to open the first ice cream factory

in Russia. The idea was to create a mass-produced product at a reasonable price for everyone to enjoy. Ice cream was taken so seriously that a state-wide standard for manufacturing was introduced in 1941 to ensure the quality of the final product.

Russian ice cream has a higher fat content and a creamier taste than other ice creams. If you grab a cone from a traditional ice cream stand, like the ones around GUM department store, you're tapping into a nostalgia shared by babushkas and their children and then passed onto their children's children. And once you take a bite, you'll see why they love it.

Despite frosty temperatures, take it from us that the creamy nature of Russian ice cream means it's not like you're directly ingesting ice. Embrace your inner child and bend the rules like the Russians. Besides, there are several advantages to a winter cone. It won't melt all over you, it will soothe your sore throat, and last but not least — you burn more calories when you're cold. That means ice cream is basically good for you. Right?



## HOME

### Where can I recycle my pile of old TMT editions?

**TMT:** Does your child fancy a papier-mache craft session? Is the pet rabbit in need of new bedding? If not, there are several places across the city that will be only too happy to take all those unwanted newspapers, magazines and cardboard boxes off your hands.

Unfortunately, it will probably mean going to a private recycling company. As it stands, there is no uniform recycling collection service provided by the government. While private companies are very efficient, many are only interested in industrial amounts of paper, which, unless you're on the fifth draft of that family memoir, probably isn't helpful to you.

But don't despair! Greenpeace.ru has put together a handy interactive map which shows you all of the existing recycling points in Mos-

cow. Simply enter your address to find the nearest point. Color-coding shows which materials you can drop off, be it glass, paper or clothing. Alternatively, head to Sfera Ecology, part of the ArtPlay Design Center, where you can drop off your unwanted paper between 9 a.m. and 7 p.m. Live in the north of Moscow? The MEGA shopping mall at Khimki has a stationary collection point for recyclables including paper. It's situated in the parking lot behind IKEA, which gives you a good excuse to go and treat yourself after you've saved the planet.

Two things to bear in mind. Firstly, private companies often ask for a minimum weight of 1 kilogram of recyclable material. Secondly, ensure that you've separated cardboard, papers and anything with a glossy or plastic cover. We didn't say it would be easy, but just think of the warm, fuzzy feeling you'll get after doing the planet a good deed.

Greenpeace map: [greenpeace.org/russia/ru/campaigns/ecodom/trash/recyclemap](http://greenpeace.org/russia/ru/campaigns/ecodom/trash/recyclemap)  
Sfera Ecology: se8.su, 10 Nizhnaya Syromyatnicheskaya Ulitsa, Metro Kurskaya  
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## Will U B My Valentine?

It's February, which means the arrival of that annual holiday which we all love to hate, or hate to love. If you're struggling to think of ways to delight your other half other than a tired-looking bouquet from the local 24-hour florist, look no further. We've compiled a list of the top love-themed happenings in Moscow this weekend.



VKONTAKTE

### ACTIVITY Sokolniki Park

#### Hearts, Danko and the great outdoors

For couples with a hankering to be outside — or with kids who want to be outside — Sokolniki Park's traditional Valentine's Day celebration might be just the ticket. There will be heart balloons by the thousands, lots of sweets, plenty of contests and a special "photozone" to preserve the memories forever. In the evening relax with a ballet show and performance by the singer Danko. If you get tired of heart-warming activities, just head off to ski, skate or partake of the park's other everyday activities.

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[park.sokolniki.com](http://park.sokolniki.com)  
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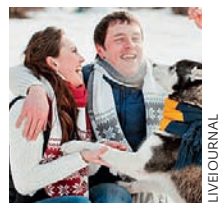
VAKHTANGOV.RU

### THEATER Anna Karenina

#### My funny Valentine

Let's say your romance isn't going the way you want it to. Or maybe that little dalliance on the side has gotten a bit obsessive. Or perhaps you're just in a really, really bad mood. Take your significant other to a brilliant, strange, riveting choreographed version of "Anna Karenina" at the Vakhtangov Theater. Choreography by Angelica Cholina, music by Alfred Schnittke. Because nothing says "I love you" like a train speeding into the station.

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LIVEJOURNAL

### ACTIVITY Meet With the Huskies

#### Puppy love

If you're an outdoorsy, dog-loving kind of couple, here's the perfect date for you. Kuzminki park has its very own Husky Club. Visit the huskies in their kennels, take them for a walk or — if you're adventurous types — try a spot of dog sledding. You can even pay for a husky photo shoot and use the snaps on your next dating profile if things turn sour. Huskies are, after all, a total babe-magnet.

Kuzminki Park  
[nahusky.ru](http://nahusky.ru)  
Zarechye Ulitsa.  
Metro Lyublino, Volzhskaya, Kuzminki



BARCERVETTI

### RESTAURANT Bar Cervetti

#### Romantic dinner for two

On Valentine's Day, Italian restaurant Bar Cervetti is hosting a romance-laden evening

with a specially themed menu for all the lovers out there. If you dine as a couple you'll be treated to free glasses of Prosecco, a three-course meal from the set menu and a decadent fruit desert, all for 3900 rubles. Romantic decorations and a love-song soundtrack add to the ambience. Booking essential.

Bar Cervetti  
+7 (495) 649 2311  
[barcervetti.ru](http://barcervetti.ru)  
8a Nikitsky Bulvar, Bldg 1.  
Metro Arbatskaya



BROOKLYN-THEMOVIE

### FILM Brooklyn

#### Fairytale of New York

Written by Nick Hornby and directed by John Crowley, "Brooklyn" is a sweeping historical romance about a young Irish immigrant who finds love in New York. Allow yourself to be wooed by the beautiful cinematography and pulse-quickening tale of displacement and identity in the mid-20th century. In English with Russian subtitles.

Pioner  
[pioner-cinema.ru](http://pioner-cinema.ru)  
21 Kutuzovskiy Prospekt.  
Metro Kutuzovskaya.  
Feb.14 at 8:40 p.m and 1:10 a.m.

## Realism Redux: 4 New Exhibitions

### Rezo Gabriadze

#### Georgian legend in Moscow

Painter, sculptor, writer, actor and film director Rezo Gabriadze is perhaps best known for his Tbilisi-based Marionette theatre. Frustrated at the constraints on individual creativity during the 1980s, he decided to use puppet theater to communicate his stories. The multimedia and puppet exhibition will involve more than 600 of the artist's works and paintings displayed through projections and animations, live performances and film. Until March. 20.

Museum of Moscow  
[mosmuseum.ru](http://mosmuseum.ru)  
2 Zubovskiy Bulvar. Metro Park Kultury



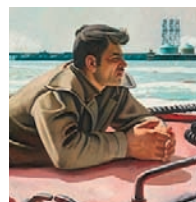
RAH.FU

### Russia on the Road. 1920 — 1990

#### The wheels of progress

Coming to Russia after a run at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome, this exhibition displays more than 60 paintings which demonstrate how transportation entered the everyday lives of people during Soviet times. Cars, planes and trains take on a higher significance in many of the pictures, symbolizing man's ability to traverse nature. Until May 22.

Institute of Russian Realist Art  
[rusrealart.ru](http://rusrealart.ru)  
7 Derbenevskaya Naberezhnaya.  
Metro Paveletskaya, Proletarskaya



TRETYAKOVGALLERY

### Tahir Salakhov

#### Exhibition of a true master

Starting out as a painter in the 1950s, Salakhov largely adhered to a Soviet Realist aesthetic in his artwork. Yet his paintings subtly subverted the notion that life was perfect in the Soviet Union. His grittier style was later termed Severe Socialist Realism. Born in Baku, he often drew creative inspiration from his native Azerbaijan. The Tretyakov will showcase his works from the Soviet era to the present. Until March 20.

Tretyakov Gallery  
[tretyakovgallery.ru](http://tretyakovgallery.ru)  
10 Lavrushinsky Pereulok. Metro Tretyakovskaya

### Alexander Gerasimov

#### Darling of socialist realism

Alexander Gerasimov is known as creator of the Socialist Realist canon. His heroic portraits of revolutionary leaders such as Lenin are instantly recognizable. While Gerasimov has been harshly criticized for his overly fawning depictions of life in the Soviet Union and the country's leaders, he never lost touch with his genuine creative talent and his skillful ability to capture light and movement. This is the first monographic exhibition of the artist's work in over 50 years. Look out for the enormous Gimn Oktyabryu (Hymn to October) canvas which won Gerasimov the second of his four Stalin prizes. Exhibition runs until April 11.

Historical Museum  
[shm.ru](http://shm.ru)  
1 Red Square. Metro Plushchad Revolyutsii,  
Teatralnaya, Okhotny Ryad

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