

Popular Front Flubs While Chaika Babbles

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Prosecutor General Yury Chaika last week announced that the opposition rallies have been financed "from sources located outside Russia."

The prosecutor general has no right to say publicly and so flippantly whatever crosses his mind. If the authorities have facts, then the Prosecutor General's Office should open up a criminal case. Otherwise, it is all reckless babble. A similar thing happened recently when the Federal Space Agency chief claimed that Russian satellites are falling down to Earth because of intervention from dark forces, implying the West.

Of course, it sometimes happens that whatever the prosecutor says later becomes fact. This was the case with Josef Stalin's infamous chief prosecutor, Andrei Vyshinsky. The funny thing is that the siloviki all try to emulate Vyshinsky when, in fact, they are nothing but windbags.

What were the motives behind Chaika's allegations that foreigners are financing the opposition? Why would he do something that will only provoke more people to attend the next rally on Feb. 4?

Chaika never stopped to consider what effect his comments might have on the general population because he made them for the benefit of one person only – Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

In another example, in Yekaterinburg in early January, Putin's All-Russia People's Front printed 80,000 copies of a doctored photograph of opposition leader Alexei Navalny and exiled billionaire Boris Berezovsky, with Navalny's image obtained by hacking his e-mail.

The Kremlin spin doctors' technology is well-known. They order a loyal television station or newspaper to run an "expose" that has as much validity as alleging that Navalny eats children. Then, six months later, a retraction is run in small print on the 10th page of some obscure publication. Nobody ever sees the retraction, but everyone remembers and cites the initial fake and libelous report.

In the case of the fake Navalny-Berezovsky photo, however, the Kremlin didn't have to order anything. The front did it on its own to achieve one goal: to impress the national leader, just like Chaika was trying to do with his remarks about foreign financing.

But the Putin supporters who produced the bogus photo made two fundamental mistakes. First, they failed to understand that nobody in the regions could care less about a picture of Navalny with Berezovsky, while millions are interested to know who among Putin supporters hacked Navalny's e-mail, stole a photo and altered it to include Berezovsky.

Second, they did not anticipate that the photo would immediately make the rounds on the Internet and spawn a dozen parodies of Navalny standing beside everyone from aliens to Adolf Hitler and Putin.

In effect, this confirms the principle described by political analyst Stanislav Belkovsky — namely, that the bureaucratic machine collapses when it makes decisions that are clearly harmful to the ruling authorities themselves. The latest round of propaganda "attacks" are not aimed so much at harming the protest movement as they are at winning approval from the national leader.

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