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Chaika's Younger Son Linked to Traffic Flap

By Alexander Bratersky

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Gvozdeva standing by her car with a blue bucket, in a nod to flashing lights.

A female motorist has complained about being harassed by police and someone resembling the son of Prosecutor General Yury Chaika after she refused to give way to two Mercedes sedans following a police motorcade.

"I don't feel safe," the motorist, Polina Gvozdeva, told The Moscow Times.

The incident, which has taken the blogosphere by storm, raises new questions about the perks afforded the ruling elite and is angering drivers already upset over officials' use of flashing blue lights to ignore traffic rules.

Gvozdeva said she was driving on Rublyovo-Uspenskoye Shosse west of Moscow on Oct. 2 when a fast-moving motorcade led by police cars with flashing blue lights appeared behind her. The police cars were followed by the two unmarked Mercedes.

She said she gave way to the police cars but not to the Mercedes cars.

Gvozdeva said one of the Mercedes that she cut off followed her home to the elite neighborhood of Zhukovka, where a young man emerged from the car and threatened to have her driver's license revoked.

She could not confirm the identity of the visitor but said photos on social networking sites and an anonymous tip pointed toward Igor Chaika, 21, son of the prosecutor general — who, not being a senior official, had no right to any traffic privileges, much less a police cortege.

She said the visitor refused to show an ID but claimed to be an officer with the Federal Guard Service, which provides security to the country's top officials.

He left, but the same day police officers went to an adjacent house, evidently mistaking it for hers, and told the neighbors that she had blocked the prosecutor general's convoy.

Gvozdeva and her husband were called into the police station the next day and fined 500 rubles ($17) for not giving way to a car with flashing blue lights — a charge she did not contend despite saying later in the interview that no such devices were actually used by the civilian cars in the motorcade.

"The police cars were accompanying vehicles without flashing lights as they went toward the Moscow region on a Saturday night. What kind of official business is that?" she said, referring to the fact that traffic privileges are only permitted for work purposes, not during a bureaucrat's leisure time.

The police have refused to say who the Mercedes cars belong to, but Internet users who keep track of license plates used by officials said one belongs to the Moscow police and the other to the Moscow regional legislature.

The Chaikas have made no public comment about the incident.

A written request for comment submitted to the Prosecutor General's Office on Friday was not answered by late Monday.

A Federal Guard Service official who refused to be identified because of the sensitivity of the issue said his agency was aware of an incident but declined to elaborate on the event.

But he stressed that the agency did not work for members of the prosecutor general's family. "We provide security to the prosecutor general but not to members of his family," the official told The Moscow Times.

Gvozdeva said she received an anonymous e-mail identifying her visitor as Igor Chaika. Moreover, she said the man who appeared at her door looked like a photo posted on the profile of an Igor Chaika, also 21, on the Odnoklassniki.ru social networking site. Profiles for Igor Chaika on both Odnoklassniki.ru and its main rival, Vkontakte.ru, were closed for unauthorized visitors shortly after the story hit the blogosphere.

"I can't say for sure that it was Igor Chaika, the son of the prosecutor general, but it was a man who looked very much like the son of Prosecutor General Yury Chaika," Gvozdeva said

Friday.

She has found enormous support in the blogosphere from drivers fed up with officials' use of flashing blue lights, which have been blamed for worsening Moscow's traffic jams and for a series of traffic accidents this year. Gvozdeva first posted her story on the LiveJournal community for the Blue Buckets Society, a group named after the bucket-like appearance of the blue lights.

Prosecutor General Chaika has two sons: Igor, a student at the Law Academy in Moscow, and Artyom, a businessman.

Incidentally, Artyom Chaika in 2000 testified as a witness in a criminal case against two men to whom he had given a special car pass issued by the Justice Ministry, which was headed by his father at the time. The pass gave the bearer immunity from car searches and document checks by the police.

The two men were jailed on extortion charges, but no penalties were reported for Artyom Chaika — an incident that Gvozdeva says heightens her worries.

"After I learned about his older brother, I don't know what to expect from the younger," she said.

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