

In the Spotlight

By [Anna Malpas](#)

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This week, Alina Kabayeva, the Olympic rhythmic gymnast who is now a Duma deputy, poses on the cover of Russian Vogue in a gold dress, prompting speculation about Vogue's sudden interest in rhythmic gymnastics and plenty of mean comments about the use of Photoshop to squeeze her voluptuous figure into a model-sized dress.

Kabayeva, 27, comes from Uzbekistan and won an Olympic gold at Athens in 2004. She became something of a sex symbol, with her cheery matryoshka-doll face and curvier figure than is usual in the sport. She joined United Russia and became a Duma deputy in 2007, joining fellow ex-gymnast Svetlana Khorkina. She also has a television show where she interviews sports figures.

She has been at the center of media speculation ever since 2008 when Moskovsky Korrespondent, an obscure newspaper owned by Alexander Lebedev, an opponent of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, wrote that she and Putin were about to get married. The newspaper closed down soon afterward but the story took on a new lease of life last year when Kabayeva was rumored to have given birth to a son. She was rarely seen for a time and has put on pounds since quitting gymnastics.

The Vogue cover and interview were leaked on the Internet. It goes without saying that Kabayeva makes no comment on those Putin rumors. She does mention that everyone thinks her younger sister's son, Arseny, is hers, however.

She talks of her hatred for media speculation, saying that she has been smeared with "lies and dirt" since becoming famous.

Reading between the lines, you could say Kabayeva likes powerful men. She says: "Even a strong and successful woman has to understand that a man is the main thing, the backbone. Let's not fool ourselves and say that we do everything for ourselves. Where would we be without men?"

Asked whom she respects in politics, she says, "the people who now run the country."

In the shoot, she wears some showy jewelry that could come from a wealthy admirer. The journalist writes that a huge ring that she wears, an amethyst set in white gold with sapphires, is the model's own. She also wears massive diamond earrings that she says were a gift — without elaborating.

There's no obvious reason why Vogue chose Kabayeva, who has been in the State Duma for the last three years without making any particular impact.

Russian Vogue almost always chooses models for its cover, occasionally making exceptions for stylish actresses such as Renata Litvinova, or superstars such as pop diva Alla Pugachyova.

Fashionistas are up in arms about Kabayeva on the cover of the fashion bible, saying that the previous editor who quit this year, Alyona Doletskaya, would never have allowed such an outrage.

"Kabayeva on the cover of Vogue? How is that possible? It's just a disgrace. It's simply hellishly lame. Doletskaya, come back!" a commentator called Veronica wrote on gossip web site Spletnik.ru.

Bloggers also commented acidly that the cutline "Her top victory" hovers between her thighs.

"I've got no problem with Kabayeva but I'm annoyed by this case of serious toadying," Poka wrote on Spletnik.ru.

There are plenty of stabbing comments about Kabayeva's size.

Express Gazeta published recent photographs hinting at an extra chin and said that in the Vogue shoot, "all the flaws in her figure are very successfully hidden with the help of a large portion of Photoshop."

It's true that the cover image is almost unrecognizable. Kabayeva said in the interview that she struggles with her love of desserts and Uzbek home cooking. And a colleague who saw her recently called her "plump."

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