

Rage Over Kremlin Envoy's Car Crash

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Witnesses told several media outlets that they saw Garry Minkh's BMW — equipped with flashing blue lights like the ones in this file photo that give officials' cars priority on the road — driving in t **E. Kuzmina**

Blue Buckets, a bellicose public group campaigning against abuse of road privileges by officials, confirmed on Sunday that it would stage a rally this week in support of a driver hospitalized after her car collided with that of a Kremlin official.

But the group's head, Alexei Dozorov, conceded in a phone interview that if the fault lies with the official and his driver, it will be hard to prove even if a host of witnesses come forward.

Alyona Yarosh, a 23-year-old architecture student, was hospitalized late Wednesday after her Opel Astra collided with the BMW sedan of Garry Minkh, presidential envoy to the State Duma, on Rublyovskoye Shosse outside Moscow, home to many of the city's elite.

Yarosh sustained numerous broken bones and a head trauma. BMW driver Vladimir Shugayev, 53, died on the spot, while Minkh escaped with minor bruises.

Police were reluctant to give any versions of the accident. Moscow region traffic police spokesman Yevgeny Gildeyev said Friday that an investigation was opened and that investigators were examining video from a nearby surveillance camera.

Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev has refused to comment, citing the ongoing investigation. “I like to have facts first to make an assumption,” he told Interfax.

Yarosh's father, Alexander, who arrived at the scene after the crash, said a traffic police report that he signed specified that the BMW has veered into the oncoming lane, Slon.ru [reported](#). He added that Yarosh had more than four years driving experience.

Witnesses told several media outlets that they saw the BMW — equipped with flashing blue lights that give officials' cars priority on the road — driving in the wrong lane.

“The presidential envoy was driving in the oncoming lane with the flashing light turned on. Everyone barely managed to swerve from him. We saw it, and we're ready to confirm it,” one unidentified witness [told](#) Gazeta.ru.

Kommersant also [cited](#) people who implicated Minkh's car in the crash, and a law enforcement source told Interfax that the video from a nearby surveillance camera confirmed this version.

But some Kremlin officials have already disagreed. A spokesman for the Office for Presidential Affairs, Viktor Khrekov, said it was Yarosh who drove in the wrong lane, Gazeta.ru [reported](#) Thursday. He cited unspecified “preliminary data” and said the investigation would settle matters. Asked about the accident in an [interview](#) with Ekho Moskvyy radio on Friday, Khrekov refused to blame either driver.

No witnesses had been identified as of Sunday, but Alyona Yarosh's brother, Anton, said many have left contact information with the traffic police, Interfax reported.

Cars with flashing blue lights are allowed to drive in the oncoming lane but have to go under the speed limit and take other measures to avoid accident. The flashing lights are also supposed to be used for official, not personal, trips.

Dozorov, of Blue Buckets, expressed worries that the authorities might try to cover up the accident by shifting blame on Yarosh.

“Taking into an account what Khrekov said after the accident, this is a first step toward Leninsky Prospect,” he said, referring to another high-profile accident that took place last February.

Two women died there after their car collided with the sedan of LUKoil vice president Anatoly Barkov. Police immediately blamed the women and only opened an investigation under public pressure. The inquiry cleared Barkov's driver last fall.

Dozorov speculated that the BMW driver had gone over the speed limit. Also, bloggers said videos posted earlier by user Vladimir Shugayev on MySpace showed the BMW violating traffic rules on Rublyovskoye Shosse.

The videos were [removed](#) from MySpace, but purported [copies](#) remained on YouTube on Sunday. The videos might imply that Minkh's driver — who the Kremlin's Khrekov said had 30 years of driving experience — had a habit of violating traffic rules.

Krekhov said Friday that he did not trust the videos, which he said were posted two to three weeks earlier by unspecified ill-meaning “forces.” He did not elaborate.

Minkh, 51, has not commented on the incident but said Friday that he has not seen any videos by Shugayev, RIA-Novosti reported. He also said he only used the Kremlin-owned BMW for work purposes.

Medvedev, who also has not commented on the accident, appointed Minkh as his envoy to the Duma in February 2009, replacing Alexander Kosopkin, who was killed a month earlier when his helicopter crashed during an illegal hunting trip in the Altai region. Minkh previously served as the head of the Duma's legal department.

The Blue Buckets will hold a car rally on Rublyovskoye Shosse on Saturday in support of Yarosh, Dozorov said.

Activists will refuse to give way to officials who violate everyday traffic rules on the road during the rally, he added.

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