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Ex-Ballerina Severs Ties With Party of Power

By Alexandra Odynova

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The affair between glamorous ex-ballerina Anastasia Volochkova and the ruling United Russia party ended in a scandal, as the former dancer resorted to angry expletives to announce her decision to quit.

Volochkova, 35, said the party never took any interest in her initiative, but found the time to slam her over nude photos she recently posted online. She also said United Russia tricked her into signing a letter against jailed oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky in 2005.

Volochkova first wrote about quitting the party on her blog Wednesday.

"It is my decision to move on independently — beyond political frameworks and false conventionalities," she wrote.

She was more direct in an interview with Radio Liberty on Thursday, when she called United

Russia an “[expletive] party” and an “[expletive] I had the imprudence to join.”

The party said Thursday that it could not comment on Volochkova's decision because she had not submitted a resignation letter.

Senior party boss Alexei Chesnakov said Thursday that Volochkova's decision was a display of “women's unpredictability,” but wished her good luck in her future career, Interfax reported.

Volochkova cited the incident of the open letter against Khodorkovsky as a particularly painful incident, saying she only signed it because she was told it was in support of the businessman.

“I was really deceived,” Volochkova said. “I respect Khodorkovsky very much. He paid a lot of attention to people and children. And I'm very sorry for Khodorkovsky's mother.”

She added that she did not speak about the case in public before simply because nobody asked her about it.

The letter, published in the Izvestia newspaper, was signed by 50 celebrities, including champion gymnast Alina Kabayeva and crooner Alexander Rosenbaum, both of whom are now State Duma deputies.

One of them, figure-skating champion Irina Rodnina, recently denied her involvement with it, telling Ren-TV in September that she had never signed the letter and was not even in Russia at the time.

Vladimir Pribylovsky, head of the Panorama think tank, said that more celebrities allied with the party may follow Volochkova's example as the Russian intelligentsia become increasingly supportive of Khodorkovsky.

“More people may look and follow her,” Pribylovsky said. “Even after Rodnina made her statement, there was no outspoken criticism of her.”

Volochkova joined United Russia in 2003, soon after being expelled from the Bolshoi Theater, reportedly because she weighed too much to be a ballerina.

She mostly remained a low-profile party member, except when coming under fire from United Russia bosses over the nude photos she posted on her blog last month.

She unsuccessfully ran for Sochi mayor in 2009, but did so as an independent candidate, not a party representative.

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