

Bikers' Ire Could Pose Challenge to Putin

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Prime Minister Vladimir Putin may need to schedule a third meeting with bikers if he wants to keep their support.

Motorcyclists rallied outside Moscow police headquarters in a rare display of public activism this week after a young businessman slammed his flashy Porsche into a biker, seriously injuring him.

The businessman, Tigran Sagatelyan, 30, denied in an interview published Wednesday that he was driving at 200 kilometers per hour at the time of the accident.

Sagatelyan said he was cruising in his Porsche Panamera "at a normal speed" around midnight on Ulitsa Kosygina when the biker on a Honda "darted out" in front of him, Moskovsky Komsomolets [reported](#).

Sagatelyan said he "tried to avoid a collision," but the biker, Rauf Abzalov, left him no time to maneuver.

Abzalov, 43, was hospitalized with a concussion and multiple ruptures of internal organs. He remained in a coma Wednesday.

Sagatelyan escaped unharmed thanks to airbags.

Both vehicles were damaged beyond repair. Two nearby cars also sustained damage, a witness [reported](#) on the Blue Buckets motorists' blog.

"If I had a cheaper car, there would have been no media fuss at all," Sagatelyan said.

Sagatelyan, who has not been detained, could face up to five years in prison if charged and convicted of inflicting serious bodily harm on the road. After the crash, traffic police had to hide him in their car to protect him from being attacked by other bikers who regularly gather on a nearby observation platform on Vorobyovy Gory, the daily said.

Bikers told Moskovsky Komsomolets that Sagatelyan was speeding while high on drugs, that he passed his documents over to his girlfriend, who fled the scene, and that he tried to remove the license plates of his car and offered 500,000 rubles (\$17,900) to any witness who would pretend to own the Porsche.

Further angering bikers are reports that unidentified people arrived at the crash scene and referred to Sagatelyan as "the son of an Interior Ministry lieutenant general."

The reports have not been verified, and the Interior Ministry has not commented on the crash.

Sagatelyan denied in the interview that a woman was present in the car. He did not comment on reports about him being on drugs during the crash.

More than 100 indignant bikers rallied at police headquarters on Ulitsa Petrovka on Monday, seeking to pass a letter to police chief Vladimir Kolokoltsev, whom they want to take the case under his personal control.

Only four bikers were allowed to approach the building's entrance to hand over the letter to the guard, Moskovsky Komsomolets said. Kolokoltsev did not come out.

Putin has met with bikers twice over the past year in what analysts say was an attempt to buff up his macho image while securing votes. At an annual meeting of 5,000 bikers in Crimea last summer, Putin declared their mode of transportation "the most democratic." "The bike is a symbol of freedom," he said.

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