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In the Spotlight: The Liquor Tab

By Anna Malpas

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When it comes to excess, Russians tend to take the biscuit, especially abroad, when there is national honor at stake. This week, a group of Russians walked out of a nightclub in Sardinia forgetting the little matter of the bill: 86,000 euros, including more than 90 bottles of Cristal champagne.

Extraordinarily, that huge drink bill was run up by just six people, the local L'Unione Sarda newspaper reported, saying the group was three young men and their "beautiful girlfriends." The club they went to was called Billionaire and is owned by Flavio Briatore, who once owned a Formula One team. It apparently never asks the names of its clients, so the booking was just in the name of their yacht, Kismet.

When none of the party wanted to pay the bill at the end of the night, the club came to an agreement that the captain of their 70-meter (hired) yacht would turn up the next day with the readies. How naive can you get? Naturally, there was no sign of the captain or the guests by then.

Their sins did catch up with them, as a group of carabinieri intercepted the yacht and

questioned a representative of the boat's owners and the captain. Then a fraud investigation was launched by prosecutors, La Gazzetta dello Sport reported, although the actual culprits appeared to still be at large.

On Thursday, lawyers were negotiating to pay the bill and close the case, L'Unione Sarda wrote, calling the group the lovely term of scrocconi, or freeloaders.

Back in Russia, speculation mounted on who these mystery scrocconi were. And how they managed to drink so much champagne.

"It's known that the young men are children of wealthy Moscow businessmen," Newsru.com reported.

"The Russian tourists not only drunk but also poured the wine on one another, the other clubbers said, which is logical because it would seem hardly possible to put away 90 bottles among six," Moskovsky Komsomolets commented.

Rossiiskaya Gazeta wrote a little homily, not about drinking 90 bottles of champagne, but about being tightfisted when it came to the bill. "We know how to go out in the old style, noisily, on a grand scale, bathing in champagne. ... But when it comes to paying for going out on the town like merchants did, pulling out a great purse and paying for everything drunk and eaten with a tip for the waiters, too, there we have problems," it wrote regretfully.

It even got an analyst to comment, Larisa Pautova, who said: "Our people unfortunately do not like to fulfill obligations, even small ones. And they don't need to order 90 bottles of champagne to leave without paying the bill, a bottle of beer is enough."

The culprits were "little show-offs who tried to carouse in a big way, to make an impression, but not to spend any money," she said disapprovingly.

But promoter Andrei Fomin, who organizes the annual Bal des Fleurs for rich Russians on the Cote d'Azur, disagreed. "Our distinguishing feature is more the opposite: huge tips and paying bills even for items that we did not eat or drink," he told Business FM radio.

The Corriere della Sera posted an amateur video that it said showed the blaggers, with clubbers wearing T-shirts with the slogan "Happy Birthday, Sabir."

Journalist and blogger Andrei Malgin alleged in his blog that the party boy could be Sabir, son of Kazakh billionaire Patokh Shodiyev, who lives in London.

But Sabir Shodiyev denied the accusation to Business FM radio station, saying the video showed his birthday party in 2009. "And I always pay for my champagne," he added.

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