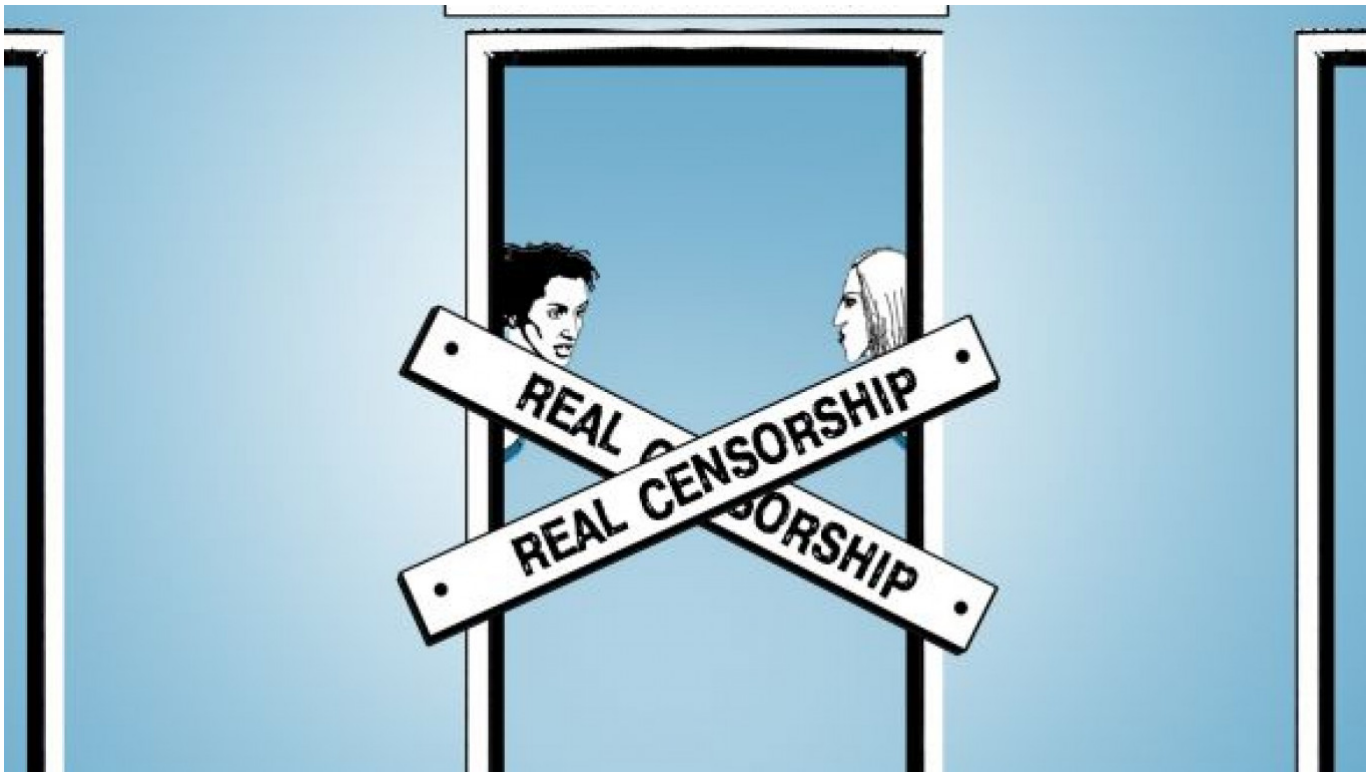
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Inthe Spotlight

By Anna Malpas

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This week, the scandal around media personality and it-girl Ksenia Sobchak and her jokey exposure of youth tsar Vasily Yakemenko at a pricey restaurant deepened, as a national channel apparently pulled an interview with her.

Last month, Sobchak filmed Yakemenko, the clean-living founder of pro-Kremlin youth group Nashi, having lunch at a restaurant serving very expensive oysters and posted the video on Twitter.

It was a rare case of poking fun at a self-righteous official, but a spokeswoman for Yakemenko's Federal Agency for Youth Affairs reacted with venom by calling Sobchak a "cheap prostitute." And, of course, the whole thing became an Internet sensation.

Sobchak then gave an interview on "Unreal Politics," a late-night show on NTV, whose hosts are journalist Andrei Kolesnikov and television star Tina Kandelaki.

But the makers said the show had been pulled. Kandelaki wrote in her blog that Kolesnikov texted her to say the latest episodes had been pulled and he had decided to close the show all

together.

She said she did not know why but guessed it was the "editorial policy of the channel's management." Kolesnikov also told Slon.ru that "naturally, this is about the leadership of the channel."

The other episode was about President Dmitry Medvedev's visit to Moscow State University's journalism department, when placard-waving students were barred.

NTV is controlled by Gazprom Media. It has run documentaries dishing the dirt on the Kremlin's enemies du jour, including billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov, former Mayor Yury Luzhkov and Belarussian leader Alexander Lukashenko.

A spokeswoman for NTV told Slon.ru that the channel worked on a contract basis with the makers of "Unreal Politics" and it was wrong to say the episodes had been pulled because they had not been commissioned. But she did not say why they were not being aired.

"Unreal Politics" was not on NTV's schedule for this Saturday.

Sobchak is close to Vladimir Putin, who entered politics through her late father, former St. Petersburg Mayor Anatoly Sobchak. She began her career as a kind of Russian Paris Hilton, blond, wealthy and uninhibited. She became a household name by hosting Dom-2, TNT's lowbrow reality show where contestants discuss their love lives around a campfire.

But she has also done more interesting things, such as interviewing famous people in a no-holds-barred style for GQ magazine. And she has firmly expressed some risky opinions, such as outspokenly criticizing the Russian Orthodox Church.

Both Kandelaki and Sobchak are avid Twitter users, so the whole story has played out there, too.

Evidently not on the best terms with Kolesnikov and Kandelaki, Sobchak on Thursday wrote that she suspected the show was on the point of closure anyway, because of low ratings, so the makers decided to go out with a bang.

Under Twitter pressure from Sobchak, Kandelaki posted both the shows on her blog.

In the interview, Sobchak was her usual provocative self, wearing a top that kept slipping off her bare shoulder.

She described Yakemenko as a "person with no sense of humor or irony about himself," recalling his rebuke to a chubby activist that by overeating he was "stealing from the country and from Putin in particular."

But she laughed off a suggestion from Kandelaki that she could be an opposition leader.

"I'm not an oppositionist. I'm not a person who will tomorrow go to the Russian March holding Navalny's hand," she said, apparently lumping all opposition in with nationalists and blogger Alexei Navalny.

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