

In the Spotlight: New Duma Deputies

By [Anna Malpas](#)

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This week, the State Duma opened for business with the new deputies including actress Maria Kozhevnikova, 27, who once posed for Playboy and this year was voted Russia's sexiest woman by the readers of men's magazine Maxim.

The actress is best known for playing a dumb blonde called Allochka in the student comedy series "Univer," with the catchphrase "pipets" ("fiddlesticks"). She also presents a dating show on Muz-TV and once dabbled in pop, joining a girl group called Lyubovniye Istorii (Love Stories). None of which are obvious qualifications for becoming a member of parliament. But then again, she is joining an eclectic lineup, including the giant boxer Nikolai Valuyev, hunky tennis player Marat Safin and the first woman in space, Valentina Tereshkova.

"Maybe thanks to Allochka, our young people will get more interested in serious politics," Komsomolskaya Pravda wrote optimistically.

Recently Kozhevnikova became one of the figureheads of the Young Guard youth movement on its public council, regularly issuing anodyne statements about motherhood and children's issues. And maybe she always had it in her: Even her Playboy interview had a hint of head girl

primness about it. She told the magazine that "I'm probably not a 21st-century girl" as it unsuccessfully grilled her on her love life.

"I've never had sex. I think people should make love," she said, while posing in nothing but Christian Louboutin heels on the leather seats of a Mercedes.

She later told Moskovsky Komsomolets in March that she regretted doing the shoot. "I didn't have the courage just to turn around and leave," she said.

Her selection as a candidate certainly raised eyebrows and it-girl and media personality Ksenia Sobchak laid into her on Twitter, posting photographs of Kozhevnikova sitting down in barely-there skirts that revealed hints of her underwear. "Maria, how did you manage to become a Duma deputy?" "Women have their secrets," she wrote in one of her more printable comments.

It was not clear when the photographs were taken, and no doubt Kozhevnikova will dress more soberly in the Duma. She told Moskovsky Komsomolets in March that her style icon was designer Victoria Beckham, and that she tried to dress "femininely in a classic style."

Sobchak linked Kozhevnikova's swift rise to power to her father, Alexander Kozhevnikov, a famous Soviet-era ice hockey player-turned-commentator. "Daddy plays hockey with Shoigu," Sobchak commented acidly, referring to Emergency Situations Minister Sergei Shoigu.

In fact the actress's father even played hockey with Putin last month at a charity event covered on the prime minister's web site.

"I wonder who Maria Kozhevnikova is working under?" Sobchak mused in an unsubtle double entendre.

She even expressed the hope that the actress would leave off her panties at a meeting with Vladimir Putin and do a Sharon Stone-style move while asking him a question. The reason for the personal attacks was unclear, but tabloids said Sobchak was bitter about Kozhevnikova stealing one of her boyfriends.

Kozhevnikova is certainly not going to be manning the barricades at election protests, unlike Sobchak, who made an appearance at the Dec. 10 rally. She warned people against going to a "dubious political scrum" in a statement on the United Russia web site, accusing the opposition of "trying to do all that it can to split us apart and stop us from getting on. To make Russia weak and controlled from outside."

She also spoke recently at President Dmitry Medvedev's much criticized appearance at Moscow State University's journalism faculty, when the more radical journalism students were not allowed in. She breathily told Medvedev that she hoped he'd seen her in "Univer," adding plaintively that "I understand if you haven't. You have very little free time."

In November, she was given a jeweled crown and a Mazda car in a ceremony organized by Maxim, after its readers voted her the sexiest woman. Afterward, she told RIA-Novosti modestly: "I don't make any effort to be seductive. I was born like this. It's my parents I should thank."

Her love life is a mystery. A fellow television presenter Viktoria Bonya, who was a long-running contestant on the trashy reality show "Dom-2," hinted on her blog that she has a wealthy protector. Her account is hardly impartial since the two appear to have fallen out after once being photographed kissing at a party. Bonya has even claimed that Kozhevnikova's Maxim-sexiest title was plagued by vote-rigging (she came in third).

Kozhevnikova commented cryptically in a March interview with the Vechernyaya Moskva newspaper that "I try to combine work and my personal life. And so far it is working out. So I am warmed by love."

Not exactly a radical feminist, she told the newspaper that "if you want a man to be with you, stop trying to overtake him on the bends. A woman should fulfill herself professionally, but should never forget that our main purpose is to be a mother and wife."

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