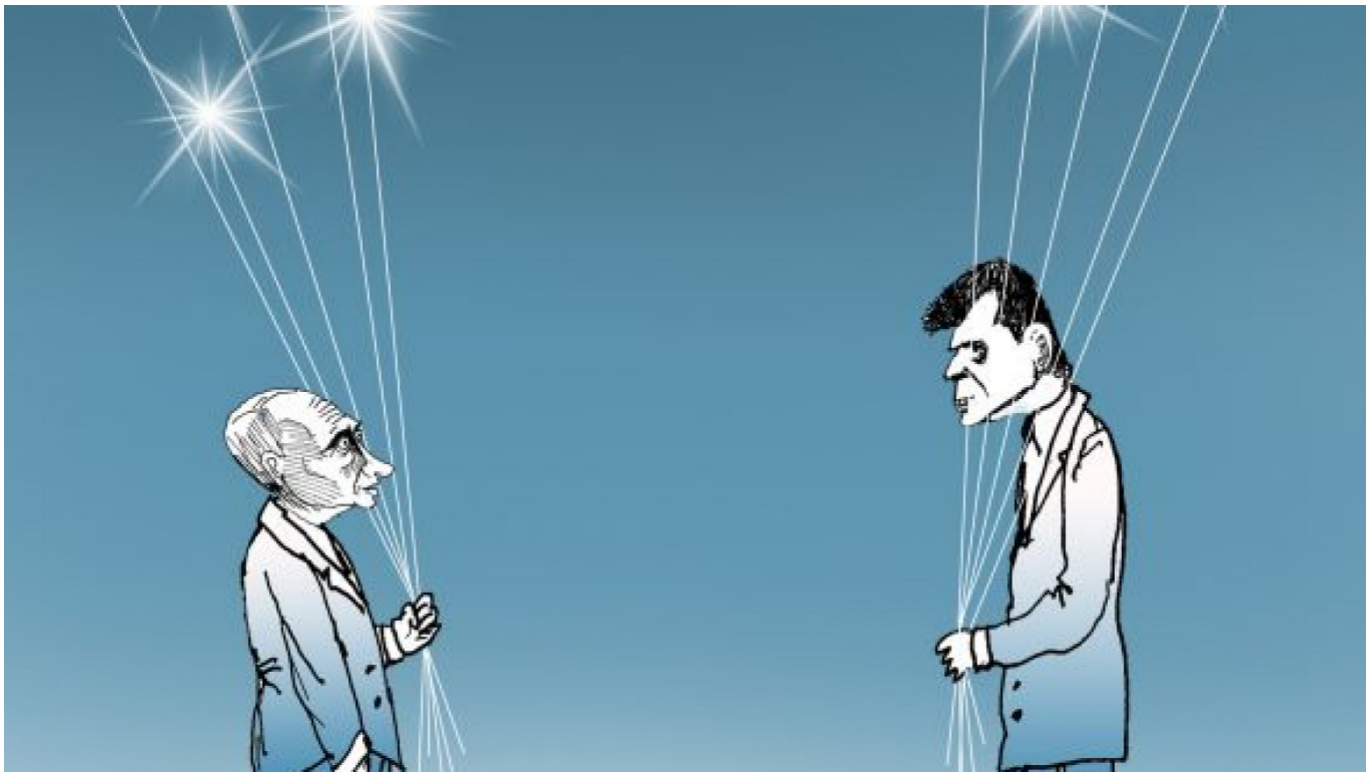
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Inthe Spotlight

By Anna Malpas

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This week, billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin lined up their teams of celebrity supporters for the presidential race, with pop star Alla Pugachyova still staunchly behind Prokhorov, even if she called him a "wimp" in his love life.

Prokhorov announced his "public council" on Monday, listing a celebrity contingent including Pugachyova, who came second in a recent rating of the most influential women in Russia. "Whatever the prima donna does, she remains a herald of personal freedom, above any political barriers," Ogonyok magazine wrote.

Perhaps the second-biggest star is quirky actor Konstantin Khabensky who starred in the hugely popular "Night Watch" films. Prokhorov also bagged film director Valery Todorovsky who made "Stilyagi," a catchy musical about Soviet hipsters, and Leonid Yarmolnik, an actor and judge on the long-running comedy show "KVN." The first meeting on Tuesday was also attended by rock star Andrei Makarevich, the frontman of Mashina Vremeni, and novelist Viktor Yerofeyev, RBK daily wrote.

Meanwhile, Putin introduced his rival "people's staff" headed by film director Stanislav

Govorukhin, who apparently writes regular posts on Twitter (@SGovoruhin) in an enjoyably grumpy old man tone, criticizing immoral television shows such as "Dom-2," Ekho Moskvy radio station and actresses with fake breasts.

Govorukhin, a United Russia deputy, is best known for making the cult detective series "The Meeting Place Cannot Be Changed" starring singer and actor Vladimir Vysotsky. Controversially, Govorukhin claimed that Vysotsky, who died in 1980 and whose songs are all about a search for personal freedom, would have supported his position.

"I don't think Vysotsky would have followed those who want misfortune and collapse for Russia. I'm sure Volodya would have supported my choice today," he told Komsomolskaya Pravda radio station.

Putin's local Moscow list includes the host of a television health show, Yelena Malysheva, who once visually demonstrated circumcision by chopping off an audience member's polo neck. Perhaps the most high-profile figure is Tatyana Tarasova, the legendary skating coach and now also a demanding judge on celebrity ice-skating shows.

Prokhorov's people are already up and running.

He published a bizarre photograph on Twitter of Yerofeyev looking over draft versions of his advertising posters with Pugachyova, who doesn't look too impressed.

The pop star gave a characteristically forthright interview to Dozhd Internet television channel. Wearing a string of pearls, she confessed that she doesn't like rallies and thinks that protest leader Alexei Navalny is "phony" about helping people and is just in it to gain power.

She praised Prokhorov as an "independent and honest man." Rather sweetly, she said he seemed to have a "shy nobility" about him, adding that maybe that is because he is still young (at 46).

But with a sparkle in her eyes and a vast rock on her ring finger after her recent marriage to television presenter Maxim Galkin, she launched into Prokhorov's lack of a love life. Regularly listed as Russia's most eligible bachelor, he has talked of believing in love at first sight. Although the Courchevel incident with an entourage of young nubile girls who reportedly hadn't bothered packing any ski suits was somewhat less romantic. As is the prospect of a permanent crick in the neck.

"I know him. He's a wimp, to be honest," Pugachyova said, using the funny-sounding words myamlik and myamlya. "He's so strong, organized, original, determined and very energetic in business, and such a doormat in his personal life."

"Girls, grab him with your bare hands," she urged Russian womanhood. "You'll get a brilliant catch."

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