

In the Spotlight

By [Anna Malpas](#)

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This week, MTV Russia switched off the reality shows for an hour to teach the kids about politics with a chat show called "Gosdep," or "State Department," presented by blond it-girl and media personality Ksenia Sobchak.

The show was a brave if slightly uncomfortable attempt to bring politicians and activists out of their traditional habitats. Dressed in braces and a T-shirt with portraits of Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev, Sobchak spent much of the time reminding the speakers: "This is MTV, you are talking to young people."

Segregated on white sofas were representatives of the Bolotnaya Ploshchad protest movement — woods defender Yevgenia Chirikova, Solidarity's Ilya Yashin and left-wing radical leader Sergei Udaltsov — as well as parliamentary party representatives including A Just Russia's Dmitry Gudkov. There were also a sprinkling of Nashi figures and the leader of Young Russia, a similar pro-Kremlin youth movement, Maxim Mishchenko.

In the MTV context, Gudkov came off the best as he has dark-haired good looks and the ability to put across a message directly. But many of the others floundered. Mishchenko

embarrassingly decided to pull on white gloves, calling them a symbol of the clean hands of the Kremlin youth. Then he pulled off one and threw it at Yashin's feet, saying the opposition were funded from abroad. It lay there limply, looking even more like a condom than the opposition white ribbons do — according to Putin.

Quick as a flash, Yashin said "your white gloves are so you can steal budget money without leaving fingerprints."

Chirikova then explained that a) the latest protest was paid for via Yandex, which doesn't accept payments from abroad and b) traveling abroad is not necessarily the same as being hirelings of Western imperialism. "Where've you been?" she asked Mishchenko. "Belarus and Egypt," he said, revealing his broad cultural grasp. She then cast the glove back at him for being in the pay of Cairo in what she called a joke.

Udaltsov looked a bit thuggish on the show despite his fluency at rallies. He got into a minor scuffle with Andrei Karaulov, a long-term host of a politics show on the Moscow city channel TV Center, who was fired shortly after ex-Mayor Yury Luzhkov. There was minor pushing and shoving, and Udaltsov called Karaulov a liar and suggested that he might be drunk.

The idea to do a politics show on MTV seems a perfect fit for Sobchak, who has been trying to move beyond her roles of professional it-girl and host of love-building reality show "Dom-2." Her future at "Dom-2" seemed in doubt this week after one of the creators, Valery Komissarov — a former United Russia deputy — said viewers needed a change, according to the Sobesednik.ru website.

And this week she has been corresponding on Twitter with new U.S. Ambassador Michael McFaul about him going on her show. "State Department" that is, not "Dom-2."

"Mr McFaul, we're planning to speak about the 'American plot' in our next show. I officially invite you to join the discussion," Sobchak dispatched via Twitter.

McFaul zipped back: "I too want to engage & learn from your audience. We'll be in touch to arrange."

If that wasn't enough, Sobchak also launched a new show on Dozhd television called Not a Word About the Elections, where she talks to the candidates about everything but the polls. First was Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov who seemed deeply uncomfortable. Pricked by questions about things he had never heard of — like hipsters — he seemed very defensive, but also more human than when he spouts Communist slogans. "I would really like you to talk to me in Russian," he reprimanded Sobchak, calling himself a "simple normal Russian person who loves the country and knows it well." He then refused to forgive her when she asked him about the "corpse" lying on Red Square.

The big question now is whether Sobchak, whose father was Putin's mentor, will get all the candidates on her show.

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