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Inthe Spotlight

By Anna Malpas

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Ksenia Sobchak is continuing her role as the unofficial queen of the barricades — even if the more hardcore activists aren't too happy about that.

Wearing a thick layer of makeup, she arrived at the Barrikadnaya protest on Wednesday evening and was immediately surrounded by journalists and people filming on their iPads. A meter away, a line of riot police stood by implacably.

In one surreal moment, Duma Deputy Dmitry Gudkov — the most glamorous member of parliament with his tan and good hair — told the crowd to stand back so he and Ksenia could hold talks with the riot police.

Sobchak is 30 now and has had a long career in show business. She became really well known as the host of TNT's "Dom-2" reality show, where contestants pair off and bitch about each other. Like most celebrities, she has a lucrative sideline as an emcee at parties and awards ceremonies. But lately she has branched out, writing articles and doing interviews and hosting a political talk show, "Gosdep-2," which airs on Mikhail Prokhorov's Snob website, after MTV Russia dropped it like a hot potato.

It looks likely that her new political activities are going to affect her career, which she acknowledged.

"I'm canceling work and filming and so on to come here. So far I do have work, probably it will end soon," she said at Barrikadnaya.

A group of protesters wrapped in blankets on a bench complained that the television lights kept them awake as she arrived. "Maybe we'll get invited to host a show on TNT," one sniped.

Sobchak earlier turned up at the Chistiye Prudy sit-in with her hair elaborately curled for filming "Gosdep-2" and wearing a very expensive-looking leather jacket.

It's fair to say that there's a lot of talk about her relationship with Ilya Yashin of the Solidarity movement, with the two even appearing in matching his-and-her's striped tops at Chistiye Prudy.

There's a definite romance for an uptown girl like Sobchak to hang out with a man who regularly gets banged up for 15 days. But you do wonder what Yashin would discuss at Sunday lunch with her kitten-bowed mother, Senator Lyudmila Narusova.

Yashin was once targeted by a pro-Kremlin honey trap, luring liberals with sex and drugs, filmed on hidden camera. He very smartly was absolutely open about it on his blog and said the worst he could be accused of was having sex with two women.

Sobchak has had an on-and-off relationship with the protest movement. When she spoke at the rally on Novy Arbat in March, she said it was time to say what the protests are "for," not just what they are "against." She stayed away from the March of Millions on May 6, writing later on Twitter that she had heard there would be "provocations."

And, of course, plenty of people feel she doesn't really belong.

Bitchy website Spletnik.ru covered her "evolution," no less, in a column this week with a lavish number of photographs from over the years.

It traced her career from partying blonde with cigarette in one hand and a minigarch in the other to that famous shot of her looking out of the back of a police van after her first-ever detention.

"I just want to shout: I don't believe it!" a commentator called Marietta wrote, while another called Alina attacked her "lying."

Spletnik sneered that Sobchak is simply on trend. "It's not fashionable any more to show off diamonds, dance on tables or smear black caviar on the walls of Courchevel hotels," it wrote. "Now everyone is reading poetry and trying to say clever things about eternal values."

Sobchak has even let her roots grow out to be like "99 percent of Russians," it bitched.

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