

More Public Figures Accused of Flouting Road Rules

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A video posted online earlier this week of a Maybach and a BMW belonging to LDPR leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky cutting through oncoming traffic on Tverskaya Street.

In the wake of President Vladimir Putin's order to cut the number of public officials entitled to use flashing lights to skirt through traffic, several incidents of alleged abuse involving high-profile figures have come to light.

On Thursday, the son of Russia's ombudsman for children failed to appear in court over his refusal to take a Breathalyzer test after getting into a minor fender-bender in April.

The case comes after years of public rancor over officials' abuse of driving privileges.

Anton Astakhov's father, Pavel Astakhov, a well-known lawyer and an outspoken advocate for young people's rights as Russia's ombudsman for children, said he recommends that his clients avoid police alcohol tests and ask for independent testing instead.

"Not everything that is done immediately is always honest," he told RIA-Novosti. But he said that if his son is guilty, he should be punished.

The case comes on the heels of an incident in which a car carrying a top manager of Gazprombank struck a 2-year-old child in the Moscow region in April.

Bloggers accused the Gazprombank official, Alexander Schmidt, of ordering the driver to leave before seeing whether the boy was OK. Media reports said the boy suffered injuries to his kidney.

Schmidt denies that his car struck the child, telling Rossia-1 that the boy simply fell in front of the vehicle. He also denies ordering his driver to leave.

Last week, a two-car motorcade — a BMW and a pricey Maibach — carrying Vladimir Zhirinovsky, leader of the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party, was caught on video driving the wrong way on Tverskoi Bulvar. An LDPR party spokesperson confirmed to Life News that one of the cars, a BMW, belonged to Zhirinovsky, but said the Maibach had "nothing to do" with the party.

The public backlash against bureaucrats and politicians violating traffic rules in cars equipped with flashing blue lights has prompted President Vladimir Putin to cut the number of officials entitled to have them in half.

But activist Alexei Dozorov of the Blue Buckets group said Putin's order was insignificant, since it doesn't specify the number of cars involved.

He also said that even without the flashing lights, officials' cars often violate traffic rules with impunity.

"Police don't stop them, so they violate the rules even more than the cars with flashing lights," he said, citing the incident involving Zhirinovsky's cars as an example.

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