

In the Spotlight

By [Anna Malpas](#)

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On Friday, television personality-turned-opposition-activist Ksenia Sobchak made her last appearance on Dom-2, the reality show she began hosting eight years ago. There were tears and white ribbons in her hair.

Sobchak turned up for the daily discussion round a campfire of the participants' relationship problems. Attention shifted briefly from whether Alexei and Elina could stop bickering and save their relationship.

Wearing a plait with white ribbons woven through and crimson lipstick, Sobchak said she had been nervous all day about appearing on the show and even got croaky with emotion as she talked about spending "a big part of my life" on Dom-2. Contestants wiped away tears as she emotionally said that "I think I am leaving here a much better person than when I came."

Her final words of advice to the contestants were to "love unconditionally" and to stop arguing all the time. "I wish you would just live in the moment and understand that all these arguments, all these petty woes aren't important," she said. Wise words, although I'm not sure what else Dom-2 contestants would find to talk about.

Not politics, for sure. None of them seemed to be interested in Sobchak's future activities at opposition protests. All their best wishes centered on her personal life. Blonde contestant Olga wished her "women's happiness," which in Russian means finding a man and having children, in case you had not guessed. And as she walked through the gates, someone shouted: "We'll come to your wedding!"

The makers aired a montage of Sobchak's moments on the show — wearing a mink coat, doing yoga, putting on a little crown. Her previous image, all blond highlights and orange makeup, was strikingly different from her more relaxed look now.

When Dom-2 started in 2004, Sobchak caught a huge amount of flack for presenting a show with open sexual content. Dom-2 became shorthand for everything that was wrong with society for Duma deputies who don't catch much pop culture.

At the time, Sobchak seemed to revel in being identified with the trashy but very popular show and her public profile leapt, allowing her to make lucrative personal appearances as well as putting out style guides and a "How to Marry a Millionaire" perfume. But it hardly sits comfortably with her recent activities at opposition sit-ins and attempts to bring political debate to television, first on an MTV show that was pulled and now on her own shows on Internet channels Dozhd TV and Snob.ru.

Sobchak has barely been on the show for a long time now, with co-presenters Olga Buzova and Ksenia Borodina handling the daily grind of campfires and emoting.

Sobchak acknowledged her perfunctory appearances as she paid her farewells. "I ask your forgiveness if sometimes I was inattentive. I am now very sorry that I would come here and leave very quickly because I had other stuff to do," she said.

Sobchak has said that it was her decision to leave the show, although the makers have not seemed overly devastated and announced they will not be replacing her. She said that she needed to "go further."

That's understandable but she is walking away from high earnings as a presenter on the show, while her television career looks in doubt due to the channels' fears of any subversive activities. Her MTV Russia talk show was pulled after the first episode pitted opposition against Kremlin supporters and she lost a long-term gig presenting MuzTV's music awards when the posters had already been printed. The reason seemed to be her sally at a film awards ceremony shown on Channel One when she broke from the script to ask well-loved actress Chulpan Khamatova why she appeared in a campaign video for Vladimir Putin.

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