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Sobchak's Mother to Lose Senate Seat

By Alexander Bratersky

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Lyudmila Narusova, seen here in a file photo from 2004, told Izvestia that her removal might be punishment for her daughter's critical stance toward the Kremlin. **Igor Tabakov**

Lyudmila Narusova, mother of socialite-turned-opposition activist Ksenia Sobchak, is likely to lose her seat in the upper house of parliament, according to her region's newly elected governor, Nikolai Denin.

The Bryansk region senator, whose term expired Oct. 14, will probably be replaced with Mikhail Marchenko, who dropped out of the region's recent gubernatorial race. Denin was sworn in as governor on Sunday.

Denin said last week that if he were to win the election, he would nominate Marchenko to the Federation Council. The move is widely seen as a thank-you to Marchenko, head of the local branch of the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party, who dropped out of the race to support Denin.

The head of the Yabloko party's local branch, Andrei Ponomaryov, also took himself off

the ballot in favor of Denin. The move prompted party leader Sergei Mitrokhin to exclude Ponomaryov from the party.

Denin, whom a local court initially removed from the ballot due to incorrectly gathered signatures, was allowed back on the ballot by the Supreme Court on the eve of election. He faced only rival Communist Vadim Potomsky and won with 66 percent of the votes.

Narusova, widow of St. Petersburg Mayor Anatoly Sobchak, who mentored Vladimir Putin in the 1990s, told the Izvestia daily on Friday that the Liberal Democratic Party "fixed" the gubernatorial race to install Marchenko in the senatorship. She said the party's head, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, who openly campaigned for Denin, was behind the maneuver.

Narusova also told Izvestia that her removal might be punishment for her and her daughter's critical stance toward the Kremlin. "It is possible that I am disturbing the glossy picture of a rubber-stamp atmosphere to the Federation Council leadership," she said.

A known television celebrity, daughter Ksenia Sobchak has become one of the most-recognized faces in the anti-Kremlin protest movement that swept Moscow following disputed State Duma elections in December.

Putin, who was once a close family friend, spoke to Narusova rather coldly in June while answering questions from senators. He didn't address Narusova by her name and patronymic, while doing so with all other senators, even little-known ones.

Sergei Markov, a pro-Kremlin political pundit and a deputy head of the Plekhanov Russian Economic University, told The Moscow Times on Friday that "many feel like both Narusova and Sobchak have betrayed all the preferential treatment they have received from Putin."

While Narusova would lose her administrative influence after leaving the senate, she might try to compensate by "getting political weight" in opposition circles, Markov said.

Narusova, who was born and spent her teenage years in Bryansk, a poor region near the Belarussian border, begin to represent the region as senator in 2010. Prior to that, she represented the Tuva republic, without having any connections to that region.

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