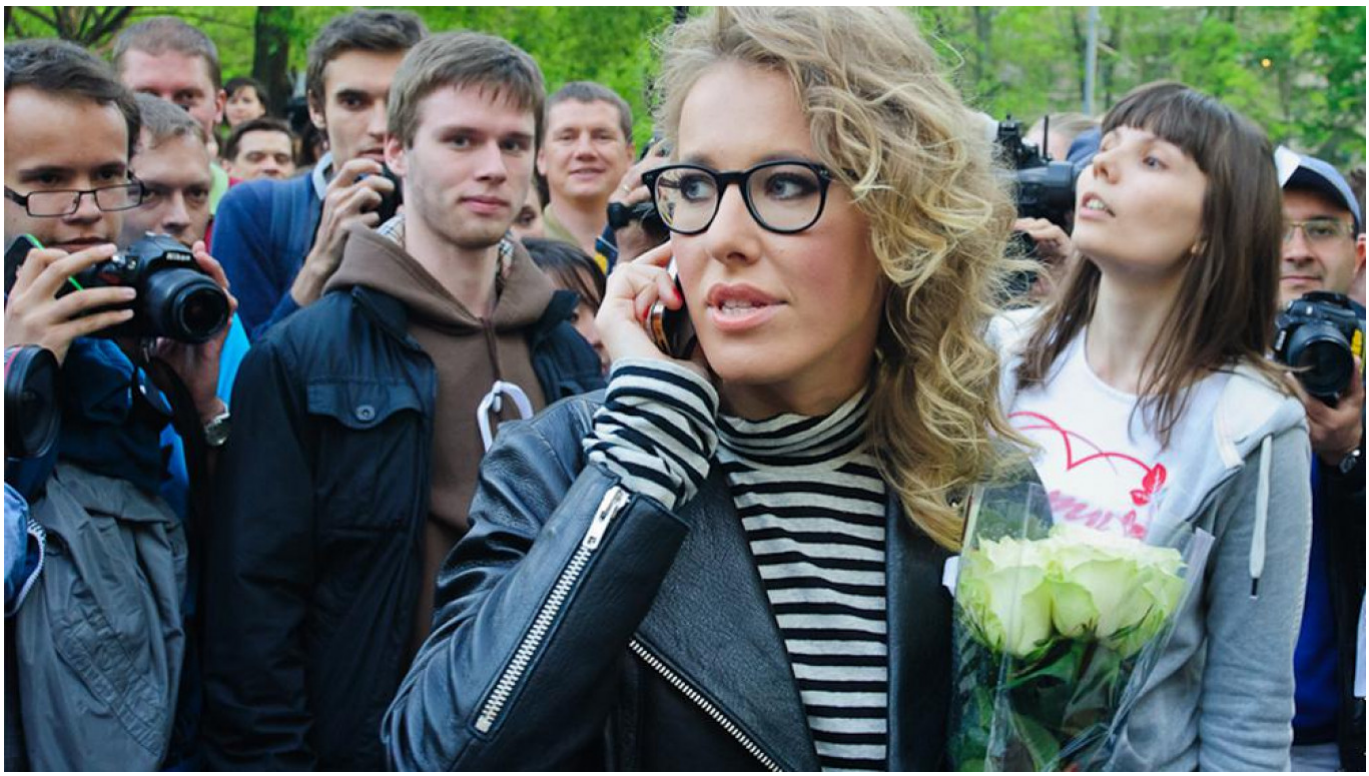
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Socialite Ksenia Sobchak Announces Bid for Russian Presidency

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Ksenia Sobchak / Evgeniy Isaev / Flickr (CC BY 2.0)

Russian journalist and socialite Ksenia Sobchak announced on Wednesday she will run in presidential elections next year.

Sobchak made the announcement Wednesday on a special episode of her "Sobchak Live" show on the opposition-leaning Dozhd TV news channel.

The former reality television host is the daughter of Anatoly Sobchak, the first democratically elected mayor of St. Petersburg and the former boss of President Vladimir Putin.

She also sent a letter to the daily Vedomosti news site outlining her reasons for running against Putin, who is expected to confirm his candidacy at the Valdai conference Oct. 19, where the Kremlin said he will make "an important announcement."

Sobchak said elections in which prominent opposition leader Alexei Navalny — barred from running over fraud convictions — was not allowed to participate should not be boycotted.

"By rejecting the legal and safe but still significant manifestation of our will as participants in controlled, imperfect, even dishonest elections, we do not leave ourselves any out except street resistance," said Sobchak, adding that protests were not for everyone.

History shows that even elections controlled by authoritarian governments "turned into reasons and instruments for authentic democratic changes," she said.

"This always occurred when the opposition took part in elections, and never with its silent non-participation," she added.

Sobchak's name first surfaced last month when a Kremlin source said she would be an "ideal" candidate to challenge Vladimir Putin in the March 18, 2018, vote.

Sobchak then did not deny her potential candidacy in a recent interview with the Russian edition of U.S. fashion magazine Glamour. Sobchak's presidential ambitions have been well-known, with her friends saying she opted to run in earnest after initially considering it as a part of a political show.

The New Times news website preempted her announcement by several hours, citing sources as saying that Sobchak will act as a spoiler candidate for the liberal vote.

In exchange for running the spoiler campaign, the news website wrote that Sobchak would be offered to return to state-controlled television or even take the helm at Kremlin-funded RT.

It is widely reported that Sobchak had been effectively banned from appearing on federal channels after her participation in 2011-2012 anti-government protests.

Her campaign will be staffed by liberal politicians, strategists, experts and journalists, including former and current Dozhd TV colleagues, according to The New Times.

The Bell outlet cited two sources as saying that Vitaly Shkliarov, a political consultant who worked on the Bernie Sanders campaign in the 2016 U.S. presidential race will work on Sobchak's campaign.

Shkliarov recently helped two opposition politicians gain an unprecedented number of seats in the Moscow municipal elections.

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