

Ksenia Sobchak, Who Wants to Be President, Reignites Crimea Controversy

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Ksenia Sobchak (Vedyaskin Sergei / Moskva News Agency)

Russian celebrity and presidential hopeful Ksenia Sobchak's comments on the status of the annexed Crimean peninsula have reinvigorated a debate in Russian political circles.

Sobchak last week announced she would run for president in March 2018 elections, which are expected to give Vladimir Putin a fourth term. Sobchak's critics have dismissed her as a "spoiler candidate," included in the campaign for entertainment value.

During her first press conference since announcing her candidacy, Sobchak said that "according to international law, Crimea belongs to Ukraine. Period."

Russia annexed the Black Sea peninsula from Ukraine in March 2014, to widespread international condemnation.

"We violated our word, we violated the 1994 Budapest Memorandum. We promised and we did not fulfill that promise," Sobchak said.

In liberal circles, her comment was received with skepticism. Commentators pointed to earlier posts from Sobchak in which she appeared to support the annexation.

“All of my friends are against Crimea,” she [said](#) on Twitter in March 2014. “I’m alone and proud in believing it was a brilliant political maneuver.”

In pro-Kremlin circles, however, her recent remarks stirred controversy for a different reason. Russia’s jurisdiction over Crimea “is in no way up for discussion with anyone,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Wednesday.

“This is an incorrect statement in substance and in form,” Peskov was [cited](#) as saying by the state-run TASS news agency.

Crimea’s former Prosecutor General and current State Duma Deputy Natalia Poklonskaya also jumped on the bandwagon.

“[Sobchak’s words] can only be uttered by a person who can’t see beyond their clubbing circuit and the creative minority,” Poklonskaya [told](#) the state-run RIA Novosti news agency on Tuesday. “Surely there is no one by now who doesn’t know that Crimea and Sevastopol are part of Russia?”

“Literally no world power, not even Belarus, has recognized Crimea’s incorporation into Russia,” Sobchak [quipped](#) in response in an Instagram post. “Not even Russia’s [state lender] Sberbank recognizes Crimea as part of Russia.”

In his usual exaggerated style, Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy described Sobchak’s statement as a crime.

“She should be jailed for five years,” the RIA Novosti news agency [cited](#) Zhirinovskiy as telling reporters on Wednesday. “It is nonsense, savagery, and no one will shut her mouth.”

Asked by reporters whether Sobchak could be held criminally liable for the remarks, Peskov declined to comment.

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