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Socialite Sobchak Faces Blowback for Interview With Russian Serial Rapist

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Russian investigators said they will open a probe into the interview over threatening remarks Viktor Mokhov made toward one of his victims. **Screenshot Ostorozhno Sobchak / YouTube**

Russian socialite and television presenter Ksenia Sobchak is facing widespread criticism for interviewing a convicted serial rapist after he was released from prison earlier this month.

Viktor Mokhov, 70, spent 17 years in a corrective labor colony after being convicted in 2005 of abducting and repeatedly raping two teenage girls. He held his victims captive in a basement bunker near his house in the small town of Skopin for nearly four years before his arrest, earning him the moniker "Skopinsky Maniac."

Sobchak's interview with Mokhov, which has received over 3 million views since it was published on YouTube Monday, ignited controversy almost instantly, with critics accusing her of giving a free platform to a convicted criminal and of paying Mokhov for the interview.

Leader of the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) Vladimir Zhirinovsky called on state-run television to refuse airtime to Sobchak and suggested banning interviews with

people convicted of rape or murder.

“Why would we allow maniacs and murderers to speak on television? [It will inspire] new scoundrels to hide women in basements and then give interviews in exchange for money,” Zhrinovsky tweeted.

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Vladimir Solovyov, head of the Russian Union of Journalists, told the Govorit Moskva radio station that he doesn’t even consider Sobchak’s interview to be journalism, labeling it “the lowest of the low” and calling for legal restrictions on interviewing convicts.

Sdai Pedofila (Turn In A Pedophile) rape crisis network head Anna Levchenko echoed the criticisms, calling the interview a “savage act” that would inspire copycat acts among Mokhov's followers.

“If these followers start building their own bunkers in our country, start abducting schoolgirls, it would indirectly be the fault of Kseniya Anatolyevna [Sobchak] and her team,” Levchenko wrote.

“One shouldn’t pour wine for a maniac even if he already served his time and was released; one shouldn’t let him drink to the interviewer’s health and, most importantly, one should never show [footage of] it,” prominent journalist Natalia Gevorkyan wrote of the interview on Facebook.

Sobchak defended the interview as an “exploration of the limits of good and evil” and a “journalistic right” while denying rumors Mokhov was paid for it. She added that if a ban on such content was introduced, it would also encompass “far more inspiring” works of fiction.

“You cannot understand the nature of evil by avoiding it,” she wrote on her Telegram channel. “All this talk about Ksenia Sobchak’s work inspiring or inciting someone to commit a crime is of course flattering, but you’re overestimating my abilities.”

Russian Investigative Committee chief Alexander Bastrykin on Tuesday ordered a probe into the interview following a request from prominent feminist lawmaker Oksana Pushkina, who cited threatening comments Mokhov made toward one of his victims.

“When a person voices their intention to, I quote, ‘Help one of his victims to conceive children’ — that sounds dangerous. I, my granddaughter, my children and many others are scared to walk the streets when such a creature is around,” Pushkina told the independent Dozhd broadcaster of her appeal.

Sobchak herself voiced support for the probe, saying she intentionally kept the remarks in the interview in hopes that the Investigative Committee “would actually put the interview materials to good use.”

Yekaterina Martynova, one of Mokhov's victims, confirmed Wednesday that she is in contact with investigators and plans to file a request to open a criminal case against him over the

comments.

Speaking to Dozhd, Martynova said that she “couldn't watch” the interview and that people like Mokhov should never be given a platform.

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