

After Years of Secrecy, Women in Putin's Orbit Step Into the Public Eye

By [Moscow Times Reporter](#)

March 01, 2025



Alina Kabaeva. [Yegor Aleyev / TASS](#)

Alina Kabaeva, the Olympic gymnastics champion believed to be the longtime partner of President Vladimir Putin, has led a largely reclusive life for years. According to one investigation, she even [watches](#) her and Putin's sons play hockey with their father from behind an opaque glass screen.

Yet this month, Kabaeva [appeared](#) in the headlines when Irina Viner, the longtime head coach of the national rhythmic gymnastics team, suddenly [resigned](#) following a feud with Kabaeva.

The ouster of Viner — who had coached Kabaeva to Olympic gold in 2004 — is the latest reflection of how Kabaeva and other women close to Putin are gingerly stepping into public life after spending years in the shadows.

Kabaeva was sanctioned by the West in 2022 as part of measures targeting Russia's elites in

response to the invasion of Ukraine.

A January report by the BBC Russian service [noted](#) a change in her public profile beginning that fall, when she founded an international association of rhythmic gymnastics clubs called Nebesnaya Gratsiya (Sky Grace). A club by the same name opened soon after at a location in Sochi at Putin's initiative, BBC Russian said.

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To support the newly founded club, state-run gas giant Gazprom gifted the club a building worth more than 2 billion rubles (over \$20 million), according to the article.

Since then, Kabaeva has been seen taking an active role in training rhythmic gymnasts in social media posts from the Nebesnaya Gratsiya club. The governing body of the sport in Russia now requires that Kabaeva's club agree to any regulation changes for rhythmic gymnastics, elevating it to a de facto special status, the article said.

The exceptionalism granted the Nebesnaya Gratsiya academy had at times put Kabaeva at odds with Viner, Kabaeva's former coach and head of the Russian Rhythmic Gymnastics Federation until her resignation in October 2024, when the organizing body was restructured.

Maria Vorontsova and Katerina Tikhonova, widely believed to be Putin's daughters by his ex-wife Lyudmila, have also emerged into view, though Putin has still not publicly named them as his children.

Vorontsova, Putin's eldest daughter, made a rare public appearance at a high school, the Agentstvo news outlet [said](#). She was part of a delegation from Moscow State University presented at the school as one of Russia's leading scientists, according to Agentstvo,

In a January 2024 interview, Vorontsova, an endocrinologist, [said](#) her favorite writers included Pushkin, Dostoevsky and Aldous Huxley and [described](#) Russia as a “human-centered” society.

In June 2024, both Vorontsova and Tikhonova appeared at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF). Tikhonova leads Innopraktika, [a development company](#), and has [competed](#) internationally in acrobatic rock'n'roll.

This month, a report circulating on Russian Telegram channels [claimed](#) that Vorontsova traveled to the front line in Ukraine to set up a field hospital where she treated wounded Russian soldiers — and was herself wounded in the process.

“The story about the allegedly heroic participation of Putin's daughter in combat operations is necessary for pro-war Russians,” social anthropologist Alexandra Arkhipova [wrote](#) of the since-debunked story.

“For them, this story is proof that the president spares nothing for the front. Apparently, this is the main reason why the legend not only arose but also spread so widely,” Arkhipova said.

Media have also linked 21-year-old [Elizaveta Krivonogikh](#) to Putin, reporting that she is the daughter of the president and Svetlana Krivonogikh, a cleaner-turned-bank owner. Also called Luiza Rozova, she was [active on Instagram](#) until abruptly closing her social media account after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Today, Elizaveta Krivonogikh is reportedly studying in Paris despite her alleged father being sanctioned by the West for invading Ukraine.

And Anna Tsivilyova, a woman the West has called a "close relative" of Putin's, was [named](#) a deputy defense minister amid Putin's shake-up of the military last year.

Liza Fokht, a journalist for the BBC Russian service, [called](#) the growing public profile of Putin's family "a testament to how the war in Ukraine has changed the lives and prospects of Russia's political elites."

Beyond Putin's partner and daughters, several family members of elites have [risen](#) to official positions since the invasion, including Yury Kovalchuk's son Boris, Nikolai Patrushev's son Dmitry and Tsivilyova's husband Sergei.

"Even as pressure on the elite increased, it became possible for the first time to move in the open, without caring about public opinion," Fokht wrote for Carnegie Politika. "The appointment of Putin's first cousin once removed as deputy defense minister might be seen as nepotism, but who has time to worry about corruption amid Russia's confrontation with the West and the retaking of cities in the Donbas?"

A previous version of this article incorrectly said that Alina Kabaeva replaced Irina Viner as head coach of the Russian national rhythmic gymnastics team. Viner was replaced by Tatyana Sergaeva.

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