The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Instagram Star's Appeal to Putin Sets Off a War of Words, From State TV to the Opposition

By Moscow Times Reporter

April 22, 2026



Viktoria Bonya. **victoria.bonya / Facebook**

A series of video appeals by celebrities to President Vladimir Putin about the plight of ordinary Russians has set off an unusually public debate across the political spectrum.

At the heart of the discourse is influencer and former reality TV star Viktoria Bonya, who went viral last week for saying that "the people are afraid" of Putin and accusing officials of hiding Russians' problems from the president.

"There is a huge wall between you and us ordinary people," Bonya said in the 18-minute video, which got over 30 million views.

A handful of other celebrities followed suit with similar appeals, sparking discussion about the potential rise of protest sentiment in Russia and whether it is still possible to criticize the

authorities at all.

The Moscow Times takes a closer look at how officials, pro-Kremlin figures and the opposition responded to the appeal.

Why is everyone reacting?

Beyond Instagram, where Bonya's video got 1.6 million likes and 85,000 comments, her appeal has drawn reactions from pro-government figures and opposition voices alike.

Analysts and public figures said Bonya "has articulated issues that, first and foremost, genuinely concern people" and that her appeal is "one of the few available ways to see what people are willing to talk about" amid increasing political repression.

Bonya, who currently has 13.6 million followers on Instagram, first rose to fame on the popular reality TV show Dom-2 ("House-2") in the mid-2000s. Now based in Monaco, she is also known for promoting conspiracy theories ranging from the alleged dangers of 5G towers to vaccine-related chipping during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Related article: 'The People Are Afraid of You': In Rare Appeals, Celebrities Ask Putin to Address Russians' Suffering

Yet to ordinary Russians, Bonya, who first moved to Moscow from a small town in Russia's Far East, is also seen as "our Vika" — a relatable figure "who managed to get rich and move to Monaco," some political activists say.

Her appeal even prompted a response from the Kremlin, which said last week that "none" of the problems she mentioned — including flooding in Dagestan, oil pollution along the Black Sea coast and internet shutdowns — had been ignored.

As the debate spread, pro-Kremlin media were reportedly instructed not to "pursue Bonya's video appeal anymore," a source told the exiled news outlet Meduza.

Pro-Kremlin bots, which left around 1,500 comments on social media network VKontakte last week, have also stopped posting about Bonya, the exiled investigative outlet Agentstvo reported Tuesday, citing a project tracking state-aligned bot activity.

What do pro-government figures say?

Pro-Kremlin media outlets and figures were quick to accuse Bonya of being influenced by foreign interests and echoing Western rhetoric and called on authorities to declare her a "foreign agent."

State TV host Vladimir Solovyov said on air that it was "not for that worn-out w****e to open her filthy mouth and pollute the space."

He also referred to Bonya as an "infiltrated agent" of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and said he had asked the Investigative Committee to find out if she receives foreign funding.

Ultra-conservative lawmaker Vitaly Milonov dismissed Bonya as a "Dubai escort" and said that in Monaco, "there's no smelt [fish] and no shawarma, that's why she's so angry."

"She should come to Russia, we could walk together among the birch trees," he added.

Pro-Kremlin blogger Yury Podolyaka, who runs a Telegram channel with 2.7 million subscribers where he discusses the war in Ukraine, claimed that the video was "part of a broader plan to destabilize Russia."

Related article: Influencers Versus Putin? What a Farce!

Meanwhile, veteran Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov complained that his party had long been raising many of the issues Bonya discussed.

"She listed all the issues that were raised here and you had heard them: why there is an oil spill in Anapa and why there was no timely response to provide assistance to Dagestan and the Chechen republic [after the floods]," he said in the lower-house State Duma.

He warned that "economic collapse is inevitable" if the issues go unaddressed, and that "by autumn we will face what happened in 1917," referring to the revolution that toppled the Romanov dynasty and led to the creation of the Soviet Union.

How did the opposition react?

While some opposition figures criticized Bonya's appeal to Putin, which was encased in praise for the president, others welcomed the fact that a celebrity was speaking up about Russia's problems for once.

Exiled opposition figure Lyubov Sobol said Bonya's statement was important because "a public figure drew attention to the problems," but criticized her for calling Putin "a strong politician."

"If Putin isn't aware of what is happening in the country, then he is incompetent," Sobol said. "He knows everything."

Ivan Zhdanov, a close ally of the late Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, said that "Bonya has a good sense of trends" and "understands the public mood" because she works with social media.

"At some point, she decided to ride this wave and see what would happen if she recorded a video on the topic. I think even she was somewhat surprised by the reaction," he said.

What has Bonya said?

In response to criticism from pro-Kremlin figures, Bonya called on women to speak out against verbal abuse and said she plans to file a class-action lawsuit against men who publicly insult women.

"I want to address women. Enough! We have stayed silent and tolerated this for too long. It is

time to ensure that these people are held accountable for their words," Bonya said in response to Solovyov and Milonov.

"Much is now being said about traditional values," she continued in the clip, which has received 21 million views. "But are these traditional values, when men on state TV channels allow themselves to insult women, call them 'escorts' or 'old'?"

In a previous video, Bonya said that she did not consider herself part of the Russian opposition, but was simply "a person with a heart," adding she had not been paid to record the original appeal.

She also received support from media personality and fellow "Dom-2" alum Ksenia Sobchak, who asked the Investigative Committee to examine Solovyov's remarks about Bonya.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2026/04/22/instagram-stars-appeal-to-putin-sets-off-a-war-of-words-from-state-tv-to-the-opposition-a92576