

Putin Spokesman's Lavish Sochi Wedding Ignites Media Firestorm

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As President Vladimir Putin's longtime spokesman Dmitry Peskov wed Olympic figure skating champion Tatyana Navka this weekend in a glitzy seaside ceremony, a multimillion-ruble watch spotted on the groom's wrist sparked a media frenzy.

The ceremony was held in the Olympic host city of Sochi at the ultra-luxurious Rodina (Motherland) Hotel, the entirety of which was reserved for Peskov and Navka's hundreds of celebrity guests.

In July, the bride-to-be said in an interview with Tatler magazine that Putin had been among the invited guests. By Sunday it remained unclear whether he had attended.

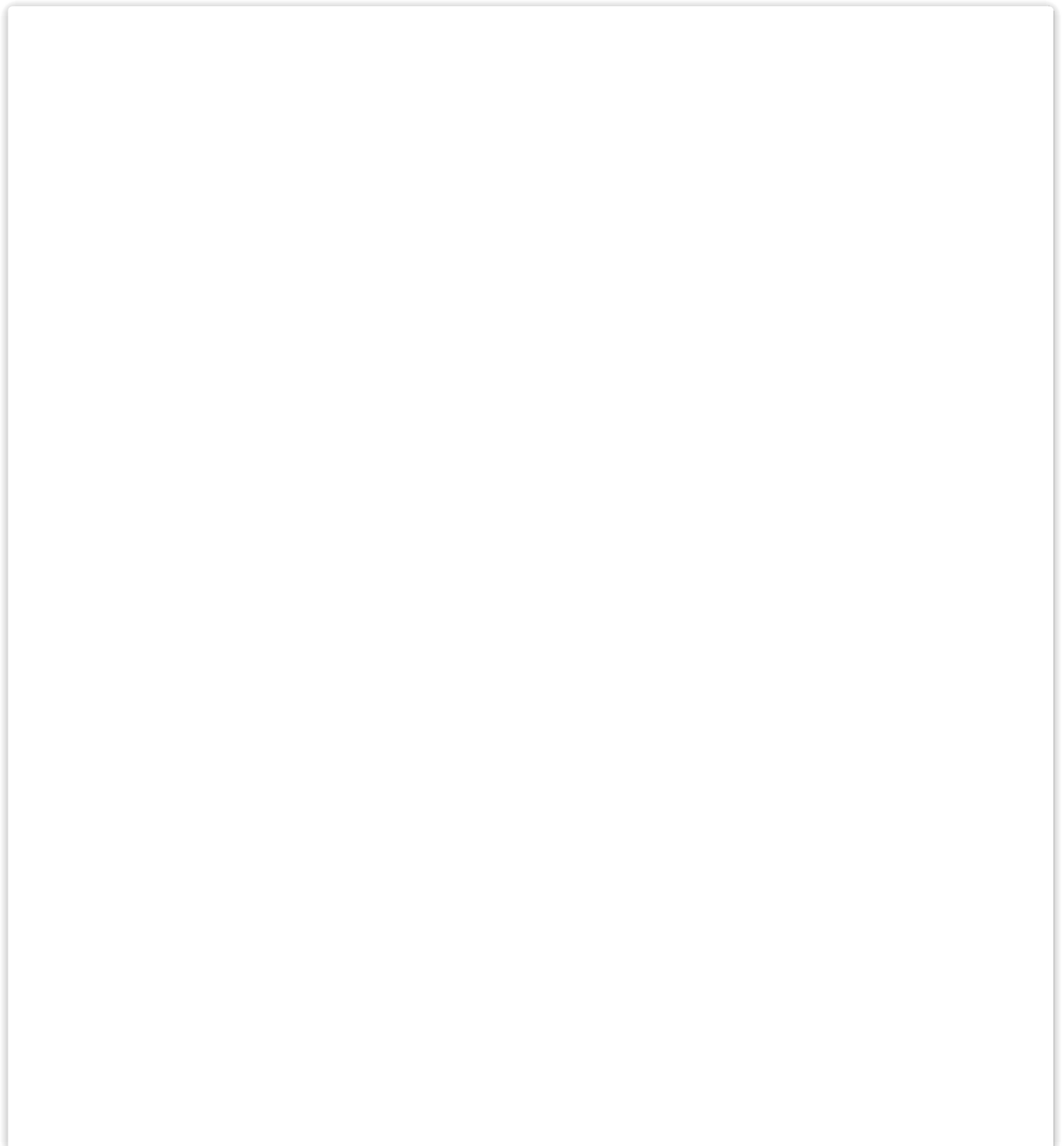
On the eve of the wedding, local news sites reported that guests from the three nearby hotels had been relocated in order to ensure security.

"All the beaches [nearby] will be guarded. Today they began to evict guests from three

neighboring hotels. They will be given different accommodations for three days and will be able to return after the wedding," an unnamed employee of the Rodina hotel was cited as saying Friday by local news site Bloknot.

The morning after the nuptials, two photos quickly dominated Russian headlines: a photo of Peskov and Navka kissing after being pronounced man and wife, and a photo of the official wearing a watch that — according to opposition leader Alexei Navalny — was worth some \$620,000.

Navalny claimed in an irate blog post Sunday that it would have been impossible for Peskov to have paid for the watch on his official salary, which the activist pegged at about 9 million rubles (\$146,000) annually.



Peskov was quick to defend himself, telling the RBC news agency that the watch had been a wedding gift from his bride, who has become a popular television personality since winning Olympic gold in 2006. But bloggers found photos of him wearing it several months ago in the Instagram account of his daughter Yelizaveta Peskova, news site Meduza reported.

Meanwhile, former federal environmental inspector Oleg Mitvol, who was among the glitterati in attendance, told tabloid Moskovsky Komsomolets that the whole affair had been an elaborate ruse.

According to Mitvol, Peskov borrowed the watch from one of his well-heeled guests in a conscious effort to toy with the media and perpetuate a baseless sensation.

Rumors about Peskov's relationship with Navka have provided ample Russian tabloid fodder since 2012, when he divorced his second wife Yekaterina, The Moscow Times reported last month.

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