

First Governor Ousted Amid Unrest

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Kaliningrad Governor Georgy Boos was ousted Monday amid growing public discontent in his region, becoming the first from the batch of governors appointed after the Kremlin scrapped direct elections in 2004 to be unceremoniously dumped from office.

Both pro-Kremlin and opposition politicians praised the firing of the unpopular first-term governor as a sign that democracy was working, although the opposition said it feared that the next governor would not run the region better.

United Russia decided on Monday not to include Boos, 47, on its list of gubernatorial nominees because he lacked popular support, party secretary Vyacheslav Volodin said. "Unfortunately, while support for our friend and colleague Georgy Boos was strong, it was not enough for him to continue his work," Volodin said in a statement published on United Russia's web site. "The decision," he added, "was made in accordance with Boos' opinion."

Kaliningrad, an exclave wedged between Poland, Lithuania and the Baltic Sea, was rocked

earlier this year by large rallies where protesters demanded both the resignation of Boos and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who heads United Russia.

Volodin said Kaliningrad might have been too tough a challenge for Boos, whose five-year term in office expires next month.

"He might be acceptable for some other region, but the Kaliningrad region is a special case," he said. Instead, United Russia on Monday presented President Dmitry Medvedev with three candidates with strong ties to the region: Kaliningrad Mayor Alexander Yaroshuk, his predecessor and current State Duma Deputy Yury Savenko and Nikolai Tsukanov, who heads one of the city's districts. Boos was born in Moscow.

Speaking at his Sochi summer residence, Medvedev embraced the party's reasoning, saying regional leaders must enjoy trust from the local populace.

"They need to be people with absolute support and trust from the citizens who live there," he said, Interfax reported.

The Kremlin first responded to the protests in Feb. 5 by firing Oleg Matveichev, a presidential aide overseeing Kaliningrad.

Medvedev said Monday that the popular support of governors remained a vital ingredient to local government even though regional leaders are no longer directly elected.

Gubernatorial elections were scrapped by Medvedev's predecessor and mentor Vladimir Putin in 2004 in favor of a system in which the president appoints candidates and regional legislatures confirm them. Under Medvedev, new rules were introduced that allow the party that controls the regional legislature to submit three candidates to the president, who can then select one or go with someone else altogether.

Alexander Kynev, an independent analyst, said Boos' ouster demonstrated the failure of the Kremlin's policies toward the regions. Unlike other United Russia governors, Boos tried to establish a dialogue with the opposition early this year. "But he did that only after the situation verged on a crisis," Kynev said.

Kynev said he feared that the federal government would not respect Kaliningrad's more liberal traditions, which have seen residents develop closer ties with Western Europe than with Moscow. "The Kremlin has the same rules for every region, and it is likely to cure all illnesses with aspirin," he said.

But Sergei Markov, a State Duma deputy with United Russia, said Boos' dismissal showed that democracy was working in the country because it was a response to opposition demands to replace the unpopular governor. "The governor collided with nongovernment organizations and the opposition. Russian democracy is often criticized, but this is an example of working democracy," Markov said by telephone. In January, about 10,000 people protested in central Kaliningrad against rising communal tariffs. Another protest was held weeks later. The rallies were organized by several opposition groups, including the Solidarity movement and the Communists. Igor Revin, head of the Communist faction in Kaliningrad's regional parliament, said his party's demands had influenced the decision to replace Boos. "This was a good

example of how to make the authorities fear [the opposition],” he said by telephone from Kaliningrad. ❖ However, he added that he felt uneasy about the replacement of Boos. He said the Communists would oppose all three candidates forwarded by United Russia because “as managers they are even weaker than Boos.” ❖ Revin said his party was especially upset with Savenko, who as Kaliningrad mayor had a Lenin statue removed from the city's central square. “They moved the monument, and now they are moved like pawns,” he said about the three candidates. ❖ United Russia had supported Boos as recently as July 19, when State Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov, who heads the party's Duma faction, said, “Of course, we're going to propose Boos as a candidate, and the president will choose,” according to comments carried on United Russia's web site.

While Kaliningrad has prospered somewhat in recent years, the region still relies on federal subsidies, and locals say Boos has failed to deliver on promises of an economic takeoff. ❖ Monthly incomes average \$400, and unemployment is more than 10 percent, higher than anywhere else in the country's Northwestern Federal District, according to figures released by the Federal Statistics Service in June.

United Russia's policies in the region will remain the same after Boos' departure, a local party official said. “Boos was not much liked here, but who cares who will come next?” the official said, requesting anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media. ❖ Boos, who briefly served as head of the Federal Tax Agency in the mid-1990s, will likely get a new post on the federal level, said Volodin, the United Russia official. ❖ It was unclear Monday what role a scandal about Boos' military rank might have played in the party's decision to oust him.

Boos attended a May 9 Victory Day ceremony this year wearing the uniform of an Air Force reserve colonel, although he had only reached the rank of captain, national media reported last week.

A Defense Ministry official confirmed Monday that the governor was a captain in the reserves and explained that he had been promoted to lieutenant colonel and subsequently to colonel because of a “technical mistake,” Interfax reported.

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