OSCE Monitors Eye Polls

By [Natalya Krainova](#)

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European election monitors, who backed out of observer missions for Russia's 2007 and 2008 elections because of Russian restrictions, want to be invited for 2011 and 2012 elections without limitations.

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe is seeking to deploy monitors for Russia's next two national elections "without any restrictions," ODIHR director Janez Lenarcic told Kommersant in an [interview](#) published Friday.

Lenarcic said it was "in the interests of" Russian authorities "not to limit the activities of international observers."

Otherwise, "it gives the impression that Russia has something to hide," he said.

State Duma elections are scheduled for 2011, while voters will elect a president in 2012.

Alexander Kynev, an analyst with independent elections watchdog Golos, called the presence of foreign monitors at Russian elections "a litmus test of the intention of authorities' to carry out serious reforms."

Kynev said it was important for invitations to be sent to OSCE observers far ahead of the elections and for the number of observers to be maintained, so as to "not to provoke a refusal" of foreign observers to attend.

With the 2007 Duma elections, Moscow slashed ODIHR observer numbers from 400 to 70 and sent invitations just a month beforehand. ODIHR then canceled its mission amid complaints that Russian authorities were slowing down the process of delivering the visas.

For the 2008 presidential race, ODIHR again canceled after Moscow delayed the visit and limited it to 70 observers.

Lenarcic, who became ODIHR director in July 2008, said he has managed to "build close cooperation" with Russian authorities.

Last year, Russian authorities complained twice that the OSCE had appointed Russian citizens to foreign observer missions without discussing the move with Moscow.

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