

Elections Chief Re-Elected Easily in Uncontested Race

By [Natalya Krainova](#)

March 28, 2011

The  Moscow Times

Vladimir Churov, the incumbent head of the Central Elections Commission who has steadfastly stood by vote results condemned by the opposition and independent monitors as unfair, was re-elected to a five-year term in a one-horse race Monday.

The re-election of Churov, 58, a longtime associate of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, comes ahead of State Duma elections in December and the presidential vote that Putin or President Dmitry Medvedev might run in next March.

Fourteen of the elections commission's 15 members voted for Churov in a secret ballot Monday, Itar-Tass reported. The term for service has been extended to five years, from the previous four.

Churov, a graduate of the Leningrad State University who majored in physics and journalism and worked with Putin in St. Petersburg's City Hall in the early 1990s, was first elected as

commission head by a 13-15 vote in March 2007. Before that, he served four years as a Duma deputy with the Liberal Democratic Party.

Ahead of Duma elections in December 2007, Churov promised to shave off his Santa-like beard if the Duma vote turned out to be unfair. But after independent election monitors declared the vote rigged, Churov denied any violations and backed off on his promise.

In April 2008, a month after Medvedev was elected president with then-President Putin's blessing, Putin decorated Churov with the prestigious Order of Service to the Fatherland.

Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov congratulated Churov on his re-election Monday, writing on his [blog](#) that Churov was able to "fully meet the complex challenges that lie ahead for the Central Elections Commission in the near future."

According to official results, United Russia garnered 64 percent of the vote in the 2007 elections, winning 315 of the 450 seats in the Duma, compared with 57 seats for the Communist Party, 40 for the Liberal Democratic Party and 28 for A Just Russia.

None of the seven other parties that took part in the elections came near the 7 percent threshold or even managed to reach the 3 percent necessary for the return of their 60 million ruble (\$2.4 million) deposits to register to participate in the vote. The liberal Union of Right Forces, for one, won just 1.1 percent of the vote.

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