

Federal Minister Slams City Managers

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Regional Development Minister Viktor Basargin has denounced a growing practice of replacing elected mayors with hired city managers as "ineffective."

"We're not done analyzing their work, but from the results we have we cannot recommend expanding the institution of city managers to towns and small localities," Basargin said Friday, RIA-Novosti [reported](#).

City managers are ineffective largely because they bear no responsibility for their performance, he said. He did not say whether he advocated the rollback or the revision of the reform.

No official statistics are kept on the issue, but direct mayoral elections have been abolished in half of the country's cities with populations of more than 200,000, according to research conducted by Alexei Sidorenko at Moscow State University.

City managers, an institution established in the United States and gradually introduced

in Russia since 2003, are appointed by local legislatures to handle economic- and finance-related tasks, limiting the scope of responsibilities of elected mayors to ceremonial duties and interaction with the federal government.

The institution is seen as a Kremlin attempt to strip city authorities of their independence, making them a part of the "power vertical." Russia's international obligations explicitly prohibit the cancellation of mayoral elections, and the Council of Europe criticized the implementation of city managers in 2006.

Prominent cities with managers include Chelyabinsk, Nizhny Novgorod, Murmansk, Perm, Tyumen, Volgograd and Yekaterinburg. Several of the cities saw public protests when the post was introduced.

Many cities that introduced the institution did so on the advice of regional governors, who themselves have not been elected since 2004 and often are embroiled in fights with mayors.

"The mayoral elections are the last stand of democracy," said Mark Feigin, a member of the Solidarity opposition group who served as Samara's deputy mayor during Boris Yeltsin's presidency in the 1990s.

Basargin's criticism of city managers echoes a recent exchange on local self-government between President Dmitry Medvedev and Right Cause leader Mikhail Prokhorov.

Prokhorov said at a June congress for Right Cause that elected him as party leader that he was "strongly against" the institution of city managers. He also urged Medvedev during a subsequent meeting in the Kremlin to change the tax system to allow local authorities to keep a bigger share of revenues for local needs.

Medvedev voiced cautious support of Prokhorov's ideas, saying the "centralization of power, even in such a complicated federation like Russia, could not last forever," according to the Kremlin's [web site](#). Medvedev said he has asked governors to create task forces to create proposals on possible reforms to the electoral system and the distribution of power in the country.

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