

St. Pete Governor Is Chided for Secrecy

By [Nikolaus von Twickel](#)

August 01, 2011

The  Moscow Times

St. Petersburg Governor Valentina Matviyenko faced a storm of criticism Monday as her political rivals warned that a controversy over her bid to join the Federation Council would undermine her planned tenure as speaker of the upper house.

The Just Russia party, which broke the news over the weekend that two local council by-elections had apparently been planned for her secretly, suggested that Matviyenko could be stripped of office if any participant released details about how the elections were planned.

"At the bottom of this fraudulent operation is a bombshell that could go off at any moment," said Oleg Nilov, leader of the party's faction in the St. Petersburg city legislature.

"This is a shame for the whole planet," Nilov said in comments carried by Interfax.

Matviyenko's candidacy in the Aug. 21 elections in two St. Petersburg districts only became known only after the registration deadline, barring opposition parties from nominating strong challengers.

The city's election committee said it received official notification about the elections only Monday morning — more than a month after they were decided by local election officials — and announced an investigation.

"We will investigate this situation," committee deputy head Dmitry Krasnyansky told Interfax.

Krasnyansky said Sunday that the committee only recently asked all district election bodies to inform it about all elections they had scheduled so far this year. "We got no information about [these] elections," he said, Interfax reported.

Yabloko leader Sergei Mitrokhin said Monday that he had complained to President Dmitry Medvedev. "These so-called elections are a derision of the law," he said in the letter, a copy of which was [published](#) on his party's web site.

Matviyenko has denied any wrongdoing, [arguing](#) that the by-elections had been announced in local newspapers in accordance with the law.

Those newspapers were identified Monday as the official mouthpieces for the districts where Matviyenko is going to stand.

The Petrovsky District newspaper's June 30 edition, available [online](#), contains a Page 2 announcement of a June 27 decision to call a by-election after three local deputies resigned.

The Krasnenkaya Rechka district's [web site](#) was "closed for maintenance" Monday, but the paper's editor confirmed that a similar notice was published on the same day. "It was in our June 30 issue," Anastasia Shubina said by telephone.

Both districts have been described as safe territories for the United Russia ruling party, for which Matviyenko will run.

Matviyenko, an increasingly unpopular governor who has helmed St. Petersburg since 2003, somewhat reluctantly agreed to become Federation Council speaker after Medvedev suggested her for the job — even though the Constitution grants the president no say in the nomination of senators.

According to a reform introduced by Medvedev himself last year, to become a senator, candidates must have won an election to a local legislature. The law stipulates a simple majority and also allows running in more than one district at a time. Candidates are not required to actually take up their seats.

Nikolai Petrov, an analyst with the Carnegie Moscow Center, said he doubted that the election flap would result in Matviyenko's dismissal as Federation Council speaker. "This won't add much to her popularity and authority, but judging from past scandals it is unlikely to pose a serious challenge," he said.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/08/01/st-pete-governor-is-chided-for-secrecy-a8633>