

Outgoing Lawmakers Adopt a Populist Tone

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State Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov kicked off the outgoing parliament's fall session with a call to refrain from populism before December elections, but his request fell on deaf ears.

The Duma has 479 bills in the pipeline, including 84 "priority" ones introduced by the executive branch of power and usually fast-tracked without major alterations, First Deputy Speaker Oleg Morozov said, Interfax reported.

The bills include a softening of punishments for economic crimes, the introduction of free legal support for suspects, a proposal for sweeping health care reform, and the 2012 federal budget.

Deputies will also review a proposal to cut the threshold to win Duma seats from the current 7 percent to 5 percent. Even if passed, the legislation would only come into force for the next elections in 2016.

The United Russia-dominated Duma has 18 plenary sessions to pass the bills before the Dec. 4 elections. The next batch of legislators will be the first to hold office for five years instead of the current four, as per amendments introduced by the Kremlin in 2008.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who leads United Russia, proposed on Monday to involve members of his All-Russia People's Front — an informal group created as an ally for the ruling party ahead of the Duma vote — in sessions of the Duma committees.

A Just Russia founder Sergei Mironov, once a staunch supporter of Putin who was discarded by the Kremlin after his party began to encroach on United Russia's constituents, said at Tuesday's session that the Duma resembled "sailors in a toy fleet" that only sails "because someone is puffing hard."

He also called to make the Duma more independent from the government and pledged to double the representation of his party, which now holds 38 of the 450 Duma seats, in the December vote.

The Communists began a pre-election offensive by demanding that Federal Space Agency leaders report to the Duma about a string of failed high-profile launches in recent months. They also said they want a parliamentary check into a state campaign to curb this year's wildfires, which they deemed unsatisfactory.

The fourth and final Duma faction, the Liberal Democrat Party, targeted the United States on Tuesday, with Deputy Sergei Abeltsev saying the U.S.-Russian "reset" in relations has failed and the Cold War is back.

The party, known for its nationalist rhetoric, called on the Foreign Ministry to more actively combat Washington's purported attempts to make Russia an "exile state."

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