

649 Foreigners Set to Monitor Duma Vote

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The State Duma elections will be monitored by at least 649 foreign observers, nearly half of whom will come from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe, officials said Tuesday.

Vladimir Churov, head of the Central Elections Commission, told reporters that 649 international observers have been accredited to date, Interfax reported.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or OSCE, is sending the bulk of the observers, almost 300. A total of 200 of them are from the OSCE's Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, including 40 long-term observers who have been working in 20 regions since Nov. 1.

The OSCE's Parliamentary Assembly is sending a separate delegation, which will consist of almost 100 lawmakers, the assembly's spokesman Neil Simon said by telephone

from Copenhagen.

The Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, or PACE, [said](#) on its web site that it was sending a 34-member delegation, headed by Tiny Kox, to observe the elections.

The rest of the observers will represent the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and other groups, Churov said, without giving specific numbers.

Churov confirmed that the elections commission had accredited all the PACE lawmakers, even though he had lambasted them earlier this month.

Kox, a Dutch lawmaker, had criticized campaign conditions at a Nov. 11 press briefing in Moscow, prompting Churov to ask the Prosecutor General's Office to investigate whether he had violated the law.

But Churov said Tuesday that he had received no answer from prosecutors. "Therefore we accredited all [PACE] observers," he said.

PACE initially announced a 40-member mission, but a spokesman said Tuesday that the reduction to 34 was purely because of last-minute changes.

Limitations imposed by Moscow on foreign observers have regularly led to clashes with the West. In 2007, the OSCE canceled its core observer mission for the Duma elections, complaining that too few accreditations had been issued and they had been issued too late.

Both the OSCE and PACE have criticized past elections as not free or fair. Next Monday, their three missions will present a joint report at an afternoon news conference, OSCE spokesman Jens Hagen Eschenbächer said by telephone from Warsaw.

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