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# Ex-Mayor Hints He Stands With Navalny

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Yury Luzhkov

Former Mayor Yury Luzhkov said he did not vote for United Russia on Sunday and that he would consider rallying under the banners of arrested Kremlin basher Alexei Navalny.

But he avoided directly calling this weekend's State Duma elections illegitimate in an interview with Dozhd television late Tuesday, even though he admitted that violations distorted the vote result.

"I did not vote for United Russia," Luzhkov told a team of three interviewers, including politically conscious socialite Ksenia Sobchak.

Luzhkov refused to name his pick, but indicated that Yabloko, the Communists and the tiny Patriots of Russia were the only parties he did not dismiss outright. When explicitly asked whether he voted for the Communist Party, Luzhkov refused to say.

United Russia won 49.3 percent of the vote — down 15 percent from its 2007 showing. The result was achieved amid a flurry of violations reports, which prompted thousands to rally in Moscow on Monday and Tuesday, clashing with police.

The former mayor struggled to voice support for the protesters without directly criticizing the Kremlin or reneging on his own past practice from his mayoral days of cracking down on unsanctioned protests.

"If people come out [to the streets] ... it means that they want to speak about their discontent with the election results. This has to be respected, and I think the need is to address their concerns, not suppress these people," Luzhkov said.

About 300 people were detained in Moscow after a sanctioned rally on Monday, and another 600 at an unauthorized event on Tuesday. The opposition is planning nationwide protests for Saturday.

Luzhkov said he only attends public rallies when invited and that he would turn down invitations from opposition leaders Boris Nemtsov, Eduard Limonov and Sergei Udaltsov.

But he said he would "consider" a call from Navalny, the famous whistleblower who is in detention until Dec. 21 after the Monday rally.

"His stance is close to my mind," Luzhkov said, though adding that he was referring to Navalny's anti-corruption activities, not nationalist sentiments.

Despite his moderately outspoken comments, Luzhkov said he would not return to politics any time soon because there are "no perspectives for independent political activity." He dodged a question about why that does not stop Navalny.

A longtime political heavyweight and co-founder of United Russia, Luzhkov was sacked by President Dmitry Medvedev in September 2010 after a political standoff.

The former mayor has since criticized the Kremlin in numerous interviews, accusing it of viewing Moscow as a business asset to take over.

Luzhkov's billionaire wife Yelena Baturina sold her real estate business and moved to London after his sacking. Investigators in Russia have demanded she come in for questioning in an embezzlement case that Luzhkov has repeatedly said is fabricated.

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