

Election Protests Liveblog

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The Moscow Times

Welcome to The Moscow Times liveblog of today's election protests. In case you need reminding, 30,000 people were expected in central Moscow on Saturday for the largest anti-government protests in Russia in recent years. Their demands: cancel the results of last Sunday's parliamentary elections, which they say were fraudulent.

11:00 p.m. — Wrapping up the liveblog for the night. Here is the final post: our [second article](#) on Saturday's protests, this one covering activist Yevgenia Chirikova and following political adversaries as they marched between meetings.

Thanks for following us today!

9:20 p.m. — The Moscow Times has published [its first article](#) on Saturday's protests. More news and news analysis will be forthcoming from our reporters and editors.

8:30 p.m. — Vedomosti is leading its web site with the headline "United Russia Promises to Hear Out Protesters." If you read Russian, see Vedomosti's [live blog](#) of the day's events and

developments.

06:11 p.m. — The demonstration has ended peacefully, with the crowd melting away at the appointed time. Bolotnaya Ploshchad is now empty except for police and a few stragglers. Thus ends a truly remarkable day of action. Our reporters are heading back to warm cafes and newsrooms to file copy — stand by for our full article rounding up the day's events.

05:52 p.m. — We messed up the time a bit there, now adjusted. The Moscow branch of the Interior Ministry — that's the police, in shorthand — estimate there are still 12,000 braving the cold on Bolotnaya. Their estimate for the peak of the protest: 20,000 on the square and 5,000 in surrounding areas.

Also, the music just stopped...

05:43 p.m. — With 30 minutes to go, the protest has become a concert — beginning, of course, with Kino's perestroika-era anthem Peremen. It's dark now, and it looks like many people are ready to head home. But we can see a large platoon of riot police drawn up in a block behind some trucks at the western end of the square. We're guessing they will be deployed to clear the square at 6 p.m. Hopefully without using too much force — it has been a remarkably good-natured and peaceful day so far.

05:26 p.m. — Moscow Times' Lukas Alpert reports: Mass troop movement. OMON forces lining up en masse along western end of Bolotnaya Ploshchad. Telling everyone to leave as it won't be safe otherwise. Crowd moving out quickly.

05:23 p.m. — Moscow and St. Petersburg definitely remain the centers of this protest movement if the numbers being reported are to be believed. Organizers claim "around 10,000" people are on St. Petersburg's Pioneer Square, according to Interfax. No estimate from the police there yet. Difficult to get estimates from elsewhere, but there are reports of 500 in Ufa (in the southern Urals) and about the same number in Vladivostok.

04:59 p.m. — Bit of a debate about numbers going on here. Police apparently say 30,000 at the peak of the protest, but those on stage have claimed 100,000. Our view is partially obscured by trees, but that seems like an optimistic over-estimate.

The crowd has contracted, but only very slightly. There seem to be several thousand here determined to stay to the very end, which is scheduled for 6 p.m., about an hour from now.

04:39 p.m. — It's getting dark, and the snow got a bit more serious for a few minutes, but seems to have eased off again. Some people are peeling off, but the crowd on Bolotnaya is still vast. Meanwhile the BBC reports that several people have been arrested during a confrontation between police and protesters in St. Petersburg. A police spokesperson told Interfax that "about 10" people had been detained and would be charged with administrative violations.

04:25 p.m. — Our correspondent Lukas Alpert reports a sizable contingent of riot-gear clad security personnel massing just across the river to the south of Bolotnaya Ploshchad. Maybe

30 trucks and roughly 1,000 officers.

04:10 p.m. — An update from our correspondent Nikolaus Twickel, who has finally found a phone that works. There's a joyous and upbeat atmosphere on the square, people hanging from the trees, and an interesting mass of groups. There are nationalist flags next to Communist flags next to Solidarnost flags. They're not natural allies and there is some fear of clashes, but there aren't any so far.

03:58 p.m. — The flares were let off by a group of nationalist demonstrators on the square, says Moscow Times' Alexandra Odynova, who is on the scene. No harm done. The atmosphere remains peaceful and the police well-behaved. Crowd continues to chant alternatively for the ouster of elections commissioner Vladimir Churov and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

03:53 p.m. — To clarify that: There appears to be some smoke rising from the trees toward the back of the crowd. We believe we saw flares among the trees. There is no mobile phone contact with our correspondents on the square itself, but we'll bring you an update as soon as possible.

03:47 p.m. — Smoke on the square, flares visible.

03:43 p.m. — A large convoy of OMON trucks has arrived on Bolshoi Kameny Most, just behind the stage at Bolotnaya. They appear to head north.

03:30 p.m. — The demonstration in Moscow remains peaceful, with passing cars honking their support. Meanwhile reports are coming in of an unsanctioned rally in Yekaterinburg. Komsomolskaya Pravda's web site says OMON troops are "preparing for disorder" there and estimate the crowd at less than 1,000. BBC Russian say they've received claims of 4,000 people at the protest in the Urals city.

03:27 p.m. — There are various estimates of numbers being bandied around on the Internet. This crowd is huge. We are definitely talking in the tens of thousands.

03:18 p.m. — Mobile networks near Bolotnaya appearing to get overloaded. Our reporters are having difficulty phoning in. People continue to cheer what has become the slogan of these protests: Russia without Putin. Also, we just saw a black 4x4 with a migalka (a blue light used by officials' cars) and a large police escort pull up. Colleague cries "Putin's arrived!" but almost certainly not him. At least, he didn't get out.

03:17 p.m. The crowd is roaring and people are still streaming into the square from both directions. Kommersant journalist Oleg Kashin read an address by Alexei Navalny, who is serving 15 days in prison after being arrested. You can read it [here](#) (thanks to Kevin Rothrock @agoodtreaty for that).

02:59 — Some political developments. A Just Russia has nominated Sergei Mironov as a presidential candidate. It's likely to disappoint those hoping that the center-left party would follow its recent oppositionist rhetoric by nominating a candidate whom opposition voters could unite behind.

02:48 — State-owned news agency RIA-Novosti reports a police warning that the footbridge to Bolotnaya could collapse. It is completely packed with people.

02:48 p.m. — Vedomosti reports 30,000 people on the square. It's difficult to count, but from where we're sitting that is well believable. The square and the adjoining park are crammed, as is the footbridge from Tretyakovskaya. And it looks like the police have wisely stopped trying to preserve the lawn, which is now crammed with protesters.

02:36 p.m. — Protesters are using Yandex Probki, a web typically used for reporting traffic jams, to post messages of support around the Bolotnaya map location using symbols reserved for road accidents. Some examples:

- "Rostov is with you!"
- "Police guys — be with us! Together we can overcome everything."
- "The white ribbon is getting dirty — the reality is that United Russia leads everyone into the inferno."
- "14:13. Is everyone gathered? And who are we supposed to give power too, huh?"

And this one, which is a bit more disturbing:

"14:09 — in Tainskii Garden they are handing out rebar."

Rebar means the metal rods for reinforcing cement, but it could also be used as a weapon.

02:25 p.m. — Meanwhile at Bolotnaya, the group Rabfak is on stage with a rendition of their Internet hit "Nash Durdum Golosuet za Putina." That means "Our Nuthouse Votes for Putin." Crowd loves it.

02:24 p.m. — BBC Russian service reports arrests on Ploshchad Vosstaniya in St. Petersburg. That's despite earlier reports that the gathering there was authorized by the city.

02:17 Speeches have started at Bolotnaya. An immense crowd filling the square — police trying to keep people off the grass in the park, but they will probably have to give in soon — people are flooding in from both the north and south sides of the park.

02:13 p.m. — Police have so far confined themselves to using loud bullhorns to tell the unauthorized crowd at Revolyutsii that the main protest is at Bolotnaya. They would have been within their rights to arrest dozens on the pretext of an unauthorized gathering. That suggests that they've been ordered to show restraint.

02:09 p.m. — "500 absolute maximum" in the Ploshchad Revolyutsii crowd, says Moscow Times' Kevin O'Flynn at the scene. Funniest thing so far: RotFront (a left-wing group) has a mini-protest against the liberals "privatizing" the protest.

02:05 p.m. — Boris Nemtsov is leading a column from Ploshchad Revolyutsii wearing a white ribbon and carrying white flowers. He tried giving one to Alexei Venediktov of Ekho Moskvyy radio as a "symbol of purity." Venediktov refused to take it — "I'm an observer."

01:51 p.m. — Grass-roots activist Yevgenia Chirikova and "dozens" of supporters are gathering on the platform at Ploshchad Revolyutsii metro station. Moscow Times' Alexandra Ordynova says a policeman prevented Chirikova from giving a television interview because "there was no permission" for filming in the subway.

01:44 p.m. — More on those flowers. Journalists Yana, 24, and Olga, 23, say they are bringing pink carnations and daisies to Bolotnaya Ploshchad because "we're coming in peace." They declined to give their last names or say which media they work for, as they are attending as private citizens.

01:40 Bolotnaya Ploshad is crammed. There are also orange Solidarnost flags and one or two Russian tricolors.

01:35 p.m. — The unmistakable strain's of a familiar song from the stage ... is that Kino's "Peremen"?

01:28 p.m — Bolotnaya Ploshchad is slowly filling with people, a steady stream of protesters crossing the footbridge from Tretyakovskysya south of the island and from Bolshoi Kamenny Most from the north.

01:22 p.m. — The Moscow Times' Rachel Nielsen reports a steady stream of people heading from the Tretyakovskysya metro station toward Bolotnaya Ploshchad clasping single red roses.

01:15 p.m — RIA-Novosti reports 38 of around 60 protesters arrested at the unsanctioned rally in Khabarovsk, citing local police.

01:03 p.m — There's a platoon of Interior Ministry troops forming up alongside about six army trucks outside the Dom-na-Naberezhnaya, an apartment complex facing Bolotnaya Ploshchad.

12:59 p.m. — Large police presence already reported at Ploshchad Revolyutsii. Handfuls of people beginning to arrive at Bolotnaya, where they still seem to be setting up a sound system and stage.

12:55 p.m. — Protests are reported in Chita, Krasnoyarsk and Barnaul in the Altai region.

12:49 p.m — A reminder on venues: The authorities have authorized an opposition rally on Bolotnaya Ploshchad, just across the Moscow River from the Kremlin. But some opposition figures still intend to start at Ploshchad Revolyutsii, in the shadow of the Kremlin, and march to Bolotnaya. Fear is that could be a flash point for confrontation with the police.

12:45 p.m — @font-face { font-family: "Times New Roman"; }p.MsoNormal, li.MsoNormal, div.MsoNormal { margin: 0cm 0cm 0.0001pt; font-size: 14pt; font-family: "Times New Roman"; }table.MsoNormalTable { font-size: 10pt; font-family: "Times New Roman"; }div.Section1 { page: Section1; } Maria Bovykina is headed to Ploshchad Revolyutsii and then Bolotnaya Ploshad to protest the outcome of Sunday's elections. The 29-year-old analyst with Alfa Bank wants to see the election results overturned and new elections called. But she

noted the claims by officials this past week that no elections violations had occurred and said, "I doubt they'll over turn the elections."

12:36 p.m — Moscow Times reporters have hit the streets to gather a sense of the mood. A first-time protester outside Okhotny Ryad tells us he's heading to Bolotnaya because "our government is becoming an authoritarian monarchy."

12:30 — Read our editorial: We are People, Citizens

<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/editorial-we-are-people-citizens/449649.html>

10:55 a.m. — Apologies for the delay. We are now live from Bolotnaya Ploshchad — the approved venue for today's rally. Follow us for live up dates of developments and reports from Moscow Times reporters on the ground.

10:40 a.m. Interfax reports protests have already taken place in the far east. Reports say about 500 people gathered for a peaceful demonstration Vladivostok, while in Khabarovsk "tens" of people were arrested after a flash mob on the central square.

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