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50,000-Strong Rally Approved

By Rina Soloveitchik

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Dashing fears that a second major rally over the State Duma elections would be banned, City Hall on Wednesday authorized a protest for Dec. 24 on Prospekt Akademika Sakharova, a Duma deputy said Wednesday.

A total of 50,000 demonstrators will be allowed to gather from 2 to 6 p.m. in the area near the Krasniye Vorota metro station, the deputy, Ilya Ponomarev of A Just Russia, said on Twitter.

The decision, however, remains verbal and has not been put into writing, said Solidarity activist Nadezhda Mityushkina, who attended a City Hall meeting where the rally was approved, Interfax reported.

Organizers were initially worried that the rally might not go forward after finding out that the nationalist group Slavic Union had petitioned City Hall to hold events in all three venues where the opposition had wanted to protest: Prospekt Akademika Sakharova, Manezh Square and Vasilyevsky Spusk, Gazeta.ru reported.

The opposition filed their application on Monday, Lenta.ru reported. It was unclear when the nationalists had filed.

By Wednesday evening, more than 18,000 people had signed up on Facebook to attend the opposition rally.

Opposition leader Vladimir Ryzhkov wrote on his Facebook page that the aim was to attract at least 300,000 people.

"When the government wants to prohibit a demonstration, they find a way. But given that tens of thousands have agreed to come, they probably did not find it profitable to forbid the rally," opposition activist Sergei Davidis, who participated in the City Hall talks, told The Moscow Times.

Meanwhile, Time magazine announced Wednesday that it had selected "The Protester" as its person of the year. In explaining its decision, the magazine mentioned dissent across the Middle East that has spread to the European Union, the United States and Russia and is influencing global policies.

"This title definitely also applies to Russia, and everyone who saw what happened on Dec. 10 would agree," said leading activist Yevgenia Chirikova, referring to last Saturday's rally of tens of thousands of people.

"I am proud to say that our protest is the most cultured and civilized of all the protests," she said. "It's sad that the deafness of the officials have blocked our protests so far, but the protests have united the people, which is already an achievement."

Separately, Russian envoy Konstantin Dolgov has assailed U.S. and European authorities for using "brutal" force against protesters from the "Occupy Wall Street" movement.

U.S. and European "citizens are practicing their fundamental democratic rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association," Dolgov said in a Foreign Ministry statement.

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