

Churov Snaps At Election Observers

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Elections chief Vladimir Churov on Friday clashed with European lawmakers preparing a final report about the disputed State Duma elections.

"He got very angry when I confronted him with the multiple reports on violations and told me that I was not objective," Marietta de Pourbaix-Lundin, a member of the Swedish parliament, told The Moscow Times.

She said Churov asked her to invite him to observe the next Swedish elections.

"He said he would find as many violations as I claim were found in Russia," Pourbaix-Lundin said on the sidelines of a news conference Saturday.

The lawmaker for Sweden's conservative Moderate Party is part of a six-member post-election mission of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, or PACE, in Moscow. The delegation also held talks with political parties and civil society groups.

PACE sent 34 lawmakers to observe the Dec. 4 elections, which opposition parties say were riddled with fraud.

At ensuing mass protests, tens of thousands of voters demanded the ouster of Churov as chairman of the Central Elections Commission. Churov has dismissed the allegations and said many online videos showing evidence of ballot box-stuffing and other violations were doctored.

PACE will publish its final report on the observer mission Monday, when the assembly, made up of 318 lawmakers from 47 countries, will also debate the vote.

The head of the PACE mission, Dutch Senator Tiny Kox, told reporters Saturday that he had told Churov that the elections commission suffers from widespread lack of trust in society and needs a major overhaul.

"He responded by saying this would be very difficult," Kox said.

Kox welcomed the protests, saying they had acted as a "real wake-up call" to the government. But he also said political change should be substantial and not implemented half-heartedly as a "survival mechanism" for the current government.

Elections commission officials were not available for comment over the weekend. A report about Friday's talks on the organization's [web site](#) merely described them as constructive and said the commission had advised the guests to visit more often "and to introduce the Russian experience of organizing open and transparent elections in their countries."

The Investigative Committee [said](#) Saturday that it had opened 26 criminal cases into possible election violations. The committee, in a statement on its web site, said it had received more than 350 voter complaints of which 158 had already been dismissed. It promised to make its investigations fair and nonpartisan.

The Prosecutor General's Office said earlier in the week that 95 people had been punished in connection with some 3,000 minor violations connected to the elections.

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