

Prokhorov Touts 'Victory' at Glitzy Reception

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Prokhorov gesturing after voting at a polling station outside Krasnoyarsk. **Yuri Antonov**

At a post-election reception that resembled a cocktail party more than a victory gala, Mikhail Prokhorov complained of election violations but said he would consider his campaign a success regardless of the final tally.

He also refused to commit to Monday's opposition rally, saying he would attend, work permitting. "I'd like to

go. ... The majority of the protesters will have voted for me," he said.

He said the fact that City Hall and protesters were able to come to an agreement on the rally was a sign that civil society was developing.

Prokhorov said he would be disillusioned if he came in last place, but regardless of the result, he would be proud of his campaign. "I think we won regardless of the result because now

active, thinking, not-indifferent people ... will form a new political force after the election. If you think the election ended on March 4, you're gravely mistaken," he said.

He promised to launch a political party in two weeks.

The most egregious of the more than 4,000 violations documented by his polling station observers occurred in St. Petersburg and the Moscow region, Prokhorov said, adding that he was willing to take the cases to court.

He said the measures taken by the government to prevent fraud — including installing web cameras in all of the nation's more than 95,000 polling stations — were mostly ineffective.

"There are no cameras where the votes are counted," he said, adding that it was too early to predict the results.

The billionaire voted Sunday morning in a village in the Krasnoyarsk region, where he is registered.

Campaign manager Anton Krasovsky told The Moscow Times that the location was symbolic of Prokhorov's commitment to all of Russia.

"He's running for all of Russia, not simply for Moscow," Krasovsky said.

Prokhorov returned to Moscow for Sunday night's reception at the Reka nightclub in the trendy Red October neighborhood. Guests sipped wine and Perrier, admiring the view of the Moscow River in between bites of grapes and goat cheese smattered with pine nuts and smoked salmon with guacamole. Among those present was opposition-minded socialite Ksenia Sobchak.

Gennady Zyuganov

Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov appeared tired and emotionally drained as he walked out to face a bank of cameras at his party's headquarters in a two-story mansion near the Tsvetnoi Bulvar metro station.

His first words, however, were not about the election but about his anger with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin for not considering an anti-crisis economic plan drafted by his party. While warning that Putin faced a looming economic crisis, he said he saw a silver lining. "I can tell you that they cannot rule like they did in the old times," he said, suggesting that Putin would have to shuffle the government.

Zyuganov also denounced the election as unfair. "I cannot call the election honest or respectful because during an honest election candidates take part in debates. But Putin declined to take part in debates," he said.

"Honest elections mean waging a dialogue with the opposition."

Zyuganov took the stage at precisely 9:30 p.m. — as his aides had promised — and spoke to a packed hall of journalists nibbling on bread with ham and kolbasa and sipping tea.

Asked by a Moscow Times reporter as he left the hall about how he felt, Zyuganov replied, "I'm in a working mood."

Vladimir Zhirinovsky

Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky failed to show up to face reporters at his party's cramped headquarters near the Chistiye Prudy metro station as speculation mounted that the veteran nationalist firebrand may have been beaten into fourth place by newcomer Mikhail Prokhorov.

"We only compete to win, and we're sure our result will be more than satisfactory," State Duma Deputy Alexei Ostrovsky told reporters late Sunday.

Responding to exit polls that showed Prokhorov in third place, he said the party was sure of a "satisfactory" result. "There are several of our strongest regions — for example we are very active in the Leningrad region — where the results have not come in yet." Ostrovsky said the party was confident of achieving more than 20 percent in some precincts in Siberia.

Ostrovsky, who spent the day in the Smolensk region before heading to Moscow to watch the results come in, said the party had deployed "about 20,000" observers nationwide and that they had spotted "a significant number" of violations.

He was unable to give a rough estimate of the number of violations when a Moscow Times reporter asked him to elaborate, saying he needed more time to consult the figures.

Sergei Mironov

Sergei Mironov cut a resigned figure at A Just Russia's headquarters on Sunday night.

Pre-election polls did not rate well for the leader of the social-democratic A Just Russia party, and exit polls on Sunday suggested that he would obtain as little as 3 percent of the vote, despite his party achieving 13 percent in December's State Duma elections.

Few Just Russia Duma deputies were present at the party's headquarters, but those there drank wine, nibbled on food and spoke to journalists like they were hearing the results they had expected, rather than those outraged at being cheated by ballot fraud.

Nonetheless, Mironov gave a brave speech that dwelled on election violations and A Just Russia's success in "canceling" the votes of students who were "carouseled" to polling stations in the Vladimir region.

The elephant in the room, though, was that Mironov might have received far fewer votes than his party did in December. But party chairman Nikolai Levichev refused to be drawn on the reason for this.

"First, we should wait to see the actual results before we judge and, second, the types of elections are entirely different," he told The Moscow Times. "Duma elections are a team effort, whereas presidential ones are much more personal. They are impossible to compare."

Brief excitement broke out among journalists when police flooded the area in response

to what turned out to be a bomb hoax.

Many believe that Mironov's decision not to attend opposition rallies has meant that he has not effectively distanced himself from his 2004 election campaign, when he ran for president while supporting Putin's successful bid, saying he was running to make sure that an election took place.

However, even on Sunday night he refused to call for instant action. "Before we go out onto the streets and protest, we should wait to see the results," he said.

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