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Putin Says Government Post Available for Prokhorov

By Ezekiel Pfeifer

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Speaking with journalists Wednesday for the first time since winning a third term as president, Vladimir Putin played down the possible impact of alleged falsifications in Sunday's election and said presidential also-ran Mikhail Prokhorov could potentially join the new government, if the tycoon would accept the offer.

Putin was elected president Sunday with over 63 percent of the vote. Communist Party candidate Gennady Zyuganov and opposition leaders have said vote fraud and unfair campaign laws make the election result illegitimate.

On Wednesday, newly formed vote monitoring group League of Voters, organized by prominent opposition figures including author Boris Akunin and journalist Leonid Parfyonov, said in a statement that it too does not recognize the results.

Putin said the group's evaluation did not surprise him.

"There's nothing new here. They announced this even before the election," he said, Interfax reported.

"First they admitted that your humble servant received more than 50 percent, and then thought, picked their nose, and decided that no, for them that's a little too much," Putin said.

He implied that the group was not taking heed of his support among voters.

"They say the government should listen to the voice of the people. The opposition should also listen to that voice," he said.

Answering a question about alleged falsifications that resulted in additional votes in Putin's favor — including so-called "carousel" schemes in which voters cast ballots at multiple polling sites — the president-elect said he was confident that only a small portion of votes could have been unfairly tallied for him.

"You know, you won't bus in 45 million people. There are things that are impossible to argue with," Putin said.

"Probably, there were some [fraudulent votes], but they could influence hundredths of a percent; about one percent, I can imagine. But no more," he said.

Estimates by election watchdogs of falsified votes have been much higher. Representatives of the League of Voters said at a press conference Wednesday that they believe the real total for Putin was 53 percent.

Putin addressed media speculation regarding Mikhail Prokhorov's possible inclusion in the new government by saying there could be a spot available for the third-place presidential finisher.

"Mikhail Dmitriyevich is a serious person, a good industrialist, [and] in principle he could be needed in the government, if he himself wants [that]," Putin said.

He said he would discuss the makeup of the new government in the coming days with President Dmitry Medvedev, whom Putin has said will become the new prime minister. Some have said Prokhorov covets that post, though the billionaire has denied it.

Speaking about his loved ones' reaction to his return to the Kremlin, Putin was characteristically laconic, saying only that their response was not positive.

"It does not really make my loved ones happy," Putin said. "But that is a private matter. I wouldn't like to talk about it publicly."

Putin's wife Lyudmila made a rare appearance in public on election day, when the couple voted together. The last reported instance of their being seen together in public was in October 2010. Their two daughters, Maria and Katerina, are virtually never photographed by the media or sighted in public.

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