

## 2 More Members Quit Putin's Human Rights Council

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Valentin Geftter

President Vladimir Putin's human rights council is down two more members and is coming very close to not meeting its 20-person quorum.

Sixteen people have left the 40-member council since Putin was elected to a six-year term in March.

The latest string of departures follows the announcement that an online popularity contest would play a large role in determining new members.

Veteran rights defender Lyudmila Alexeyeva, head of the Moscow Helsinki Group, quit the council Friday.

Valentin Geftter, [head](#) of the Moscow-based Human Rights Institute, and Boris Pustyntsev, [chairman](#) of the St. Petersburg-based Citizens Watch group, have followed suit, the council

[said](#) Monday.

Currently, new members are chosen by the president from a list of nominees put together by sitting council members.

But last week the presidential administration proposed a new system whereby NGOs would nominate candidates who would then be voted on by Internet users. The winning names would then be forwarded to Putin for the final decision.

Gefter, also a board member at Memorial, an independent human rights group that has been a harsh critic of the Kremlin, said the new method violated the council's statutes.

Pustyntsev called it a "cover-up operation" to cull the majority of the council's members from "government-organized nongovernmental organizations."

The NGO nomination system is expected to begin in July, followed by Internet voting in August.

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