

Mitvol Accuses Kremlin of Ruining His Campaign

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Critics see Mitvol's decision to run in the Khimki election as a Kremlin-approved move to strip votes from opposition leader Yevgenia Chirikova.

Khimki mayoral candidate Oleg Mitvol has accused the Kremlin of undermining his campaign in the Moscow region town.

"The authorities are destroying all visual campaign ads on the streets. Banners for [acting Mayor Oleg] Shakhov are everywhere, and no one touches them. Ours were gone after two hours," Mitvol, who is also the Green Alliance party's leader, told Interfax.

Moscow region officials said Mitvol's team plastered the town with 30,000 posters Thursday night, and residents were "very unhappy" with the scale of the campaign.

"Grandmothers tear the posters down," a representative of the Moscow regional government said.

But Mitvol laid the blame elsewhere.

"The authorities are doing everything to stop us from campaigning," Mitvol said. "[They] call into question the fairness of this election."

Mitvol was formerly a deputy head of the Federal Inspection Service for Natural Resources Use and also served as head of Moscow's Northern Administrative District until his patron, Yury Luzhkov, was ousted as mayor in 2010.

He is one of 13 candidates registered to run in Khimki's election on Oct. 14.

Other candidates include ecowarrior-turned-opposition-leader Yevgenia Chirikova and Igor Belousov, a former Yabloko member who represents the newly formed Novaya Rossia party.

Critics have said that Mitvol's decision to run looks suspiciously like a Kremlin-approved move to strip votes from Chirikova, who came to prominence after leading local resistance to a road being built through the Khimki forest.

Chirikova, a Khimki native, is backed by the anti-Putin opposition movement, and several speakers appealed for volunteers and donations to help her campaign at the last March of Millions rally in Moscow on Saturday.

She has also been endorsed by the Yabloko party, which has tried to define itself as a "green party" in recent years. She has named Shakhov her "main adversary" in the contest, accusing him of directly benefiting from and implementing the Khimki highway project.

Mitvol founded the Green Alliance earlier this year and said he wanted to create a "European-style green party."

The party will contest local and municipal elections in 15 regions, Mitvol said at a news conference earlier this week, though the Moscow region will be the main focus.

But he appeared to stumble when asked to name a few key points of the party's program, replying that it would vary from region to region. He then listed "human life and health," corruption, public transportation and immigration as issues voters are concerned about.

After apparently checking his phone, he added that he planned to challenge plans to build several garbage processing plants in the Moscow region.

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