The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Bill Seeks to End Election of Governors

By Alexander Bratersky

December 18, 2012



Flamboyant lawmaker and author Alexei Mitrofanov is among those who back canceling gubernatorial elections.

A bill that could once again abolish direct gubernatorial elections, which were reinstated this year, was submitted to the State Duma on Tuesday by members of the majority United Russia party.

Popular elections of governors were discontinued following the Beslan school hostage crisis in 2004, when Vladimir Putin, early in his second term as president, suggested that they could be used to install terrorist sympathizers.

The first such elections following reinstatement took place in October.

At a meeting with Putin last week, Alexei Machnev, a parliament member from the Caucasus republic of North Ossetia, said the return of popular gubernatorial elections had led to "incitement of interregional strife and threats to security," RIA-Novosti reported.

Putin said it would be possible to give regions the right to determine their own means of choosing their leaders, but he added that "it doesn't mean that [we] need to encourage the vast majority of subjects to return to the previous formula."

He also said that in regions where "people are sensing a threat of destabilization and interethnic conflicts, a right needs to be established to more flexibly resolve such issues."

The bill, submitted Tuesday by United Russia and Liberal Democratic deputies, as well as Leonid Levin, considered an independent after his expulsion from the Just Russia party for purportedly toeing the Kremlin line, seeks to allow regions to decide their own means of selecting governors, including by circumvention of popular elections.

The bill's backers include United Russia deputies Alexei Zhuravlyov and Mikhail Starshinov, both considered not very influential in the party. Support for the bill was led by Liberal Democrat Alexei Mitrofanov, who heads the Duma's media committee.

Alexei Makarkin, deputy director of the Center for Political Technologies, said the absence of "senior heavyweights" among the bill authors indicated that it was only to "test the waters."

"If the public really opposes it, they could change it," he said, but he added that the move was "dangerous enough."

"It shows that gubernatorial elections are not considered an optimal solution for authorities," Makarkin said.

Makarkin was echoed by opposition leader Ilya Yashin, who said the bill's introduction indicated that a "debate was taking place in the Kremlin."

"The gubernatorial elections that have taken place haven't satisfied the Kremlin or the opposition," Yashin said. "This is an indication that legislation will be reformed, which means that the system might go back to the way it was."

The reintroduction of popular elections was widely seen as a peace offering to the opposition after mass protests erupted following disputed parliamentary elections in December 2011.

A rollback of popular gubernatorial elections is likely to spoil hopes for opposition candidates to win regional elections.

Tuesday's bill, as relayed by Interfax, provided that political parties could directly propose gubernatorial candidates to the president, who would then make the final decision on whether to appoint them.

Related articles:

- Putin Offers Little Political Reform
- Coordination Council Backs Gudkov for Governorship
- Kremlin Filters Will Change in Next Elections

Original url:

https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/12/18/bill-seeks-to-end-election-of-governors-a20296