Governor's Favorite Declared Mayoral Vote Winner

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A pamphlet for Andrei Voityuk's election campaign.

Governor Andrei Vorobyov's preferred candidate was on Monday declared the winner of a small town mayoral election marred by allegations of widespread fraud.

Sunday's election in the Moscow region town of Zhukovsky, 25 kilometers southeast of the capital, was seen as a litmus test of people's trust in the ruling party governor ahead of the gubernatorial election in the fall.

Zhukovsky has been a stronghold of opposition sentiment, as similar allegations of ballot fraud in the previous mayoral election in 2009, as well as the felling of prized local forestland for a new highway, have sent shockwaves through this town of 106,000 in recent years.

The new mayor, Andrei Voityuk, who ran as an independent but was publicly backed by United Russia's Vorobyov, officially garnered 36.8 percent of the vote, with only 39 percent of the

town's residents having cast ballots.

Voityuk, 51, who heads the Emergency Situations Ministry's local air rescue center, was followed by Igor Novikov from billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov's Civil Platform party, with 27.7 percent of the vote, and Communist Alexander Anikanov, with 25 percent.

The other nine candidates received between 0.3 and 5 percent of the vote. They included A Just Russia's Sergei Knyshov, Liberal Democrat Alexander Kurichev, Nikolai Stepanov of the "Green Alliance — People's Party," and thrash metal band leader Sergei Troitsky, a.k.a. "Spider."

Regional police received 45 complaints from observers about possible electoral violations at a number of Zhukovsky's 52 polling stations on Sunday, and 12 people were briefly detained on suspicion of committing electoral violations, regional police said on their website.

Independent elections watchdog Golos received 62 complaints about possible electoral violations in Zhukovsky by late Sunday, the group said in a statement.

Among the complaints, 26 concerned violations of the rights of observers, election officials and reporters; 17 consisted of forcing voters to cast their ballot in favor of a certain candidate and violating vote secrecy; and 16 were home voting violations and illegal voting, Golos said.

"The elections cannot be considered fair and transparent," third-place candidate Anikanov said by telephone Monday. "The most contemptible electoral schemes were applied, including vote buying," he said.

Voityuk and Troitsky were implicated in vote-buying reports, but they, as well as Novikov, Knyshov and Anikanov, denied wrongdoing on Sunday afternoon.

Prokhorov, leader of the Civil Platform party, called on regional authorities on Monday to "declare the election invalid" and, in a post on LiveJournal, said United Russia was guilty of ballot fraud.

But the head of the Moscow region's election commission, Irek Vildanov, called Sunday's election "fair" and said there were "no grounds to rule the election invalid," Interfax reported.

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52