

Prokhorov to Skip Mayoral Election

By [Jonathan Earle](#)

June 13, 2013



Prokhorov speaking to reporters at the news conference on Thursday. **Igor Tabakov**

Citing problems with transferring his foreign assets to Russia, billionaire businessman Mikhail Prokhorov announced Thursday that he would not run for mayor of Moscow, removing perhaps the strongest potential opponent to acting Mayor Sergei Sobyanin from the September vote.

It is possible to move his foreign assets, including legal ownership of the Brooklyn Nets basketball team, to Russia in accordance with recently passed election laws, but it can not be done in a manner that is sufficiently transparent, Prokhorov said, explaining his decision.

“I personally wanted very much to run in the election. I feel Muscovites' support — they voted for me in the presidential election,” he said at a press-conference in Moscow on Thursday. “But objective circumstances and the authorities' tricks won't let me.”

Prokhorov said his Civil Platform party would instead use the election to attract voter attention in preparation for Moscow City Duma elections next year. “The mayor is yours, the

duma is ours,” he said, addressing the powers that be.

Prokhorov was seen as possibly the strongest challenger to Sobyanin, a close ally of President Vladimir Putin, who earlier this month announced that he would step down as mayor — he was promptly named acting mayor — and participate in early elections now scheduled for Sept. 8.

Although many have questioned Prokhorov's independence from the Kremlin, his popularity among Moscow's restless middle class seemed clear when he won just more than 20 percent of the vote in presidential elections in early 2012, finishing second to Putin in his strongest showing nationwide.

Prokhorov denounced the snap mayoral vote as a “trick” and accused the authorities of doing everything to derail his candidacy. Regarding requirements that candidates' assets be in Russia, he said, “It's legal, but it's dishonest. These are obviously measures to prevent Prokhorov from running.”

“Such an honest, open position is a sign of strength, not of weakness,” Prokhorov said of his decision.

The businessman, who made his fortune in metals and mining, did not exclude throwing his support behind another candidate, possibly including beleaguered opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who has announced that he will attempt to run on behalf of the RPR-Parnas party.

Political analyst Pavel Salin said by telephone that the decision not to run was probably made by Prokhorov's powerful backers, including members of local elite elbowed aside when Sobyanin took power following the firing of Mayor Yury Luzhkov by then-President Dmitry Medvedev in 2010.

Either Prokhorov's backers struck a deal with Sobyanin, perhaps boosting their access to lucrative city contracts, or the mayor's supporters threatened to release compromising material on Prokhorov, Salin said. One way or another, it's evidence that Prokhorov was considered a serious candidate in high circles.

As if anticipating questions about his independence, which have dogged Prokhorov ever since he announced his candidacy for president and later resolved to devote himself to politics, the businessman emphasized that he had made the decision not to run himself.

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