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Without Sobyanin, First Mayoral Debate Brings Little Excitement

By The Moscow Times

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The first televised debate leading up to Moscow's Sept. 8 mayoral election ran smoothly but offered little in the way of surprises.

Five of the race's six candidates gathered Monday evening on Moskva 24's sleek, futuristic stage: the Communist Party's Ivan Melnikov, Yabloko's Sergei Mitrokhin, Mikhail Degtyarev of the Liberal Democratic Party, Nikolai Levichev from A Just Russia and Alexei Navalny of RPR-Parnas.

Notably absent was acting Mayor Sergei Sobyanin, who officially declined to participate on Saturday. The head of his campaign staff said that he wanted "to focus on his campaign platform and direct communication with Muscovites," Itar-Tass reported.

The 90 minute debate included mild bickering between candidates, but mostly focused on common concerns like corruption, Moscow's new paid parking system and immigration

problems.

The candidates were also asked to describe their future cabinets, prompting some unexpected responses.

Degtyarev announced plans to launch a website through which any citizen could apply for an official post, while Melnikov stood in favor of a coalition government.

Navalny emphasized the importance of establishing an open and transparent system for appointing officials, adding that he would wait until the second round of elections to unveil members of his potential government.

Moskva 24 will host two more debates on Wednesday and Friday evening. Doveriye will televise three morning debates on Aug. 26, 28 and 30, with six more to be broadcast on Moscow radio stations.

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