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Election Monitor Golos Evicted Again

By The Moscow Times

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Independent election watchdog Golos has been kicked out of its offices for the second time in the span of a few months and less than three weeks before mayoral and gubernatorial elections are scheduled to be held around the country on Sept. 8.

Last month, Golos reclassified itself as a "movement" after the Justice Ministry suspended its activities until December, saying it had violated the "foreign agent" law introduced last year.

The law states that NGOs receiving funding from abroad and engaging in “political activity” must register with the ministry as “foreign agents,” but Golos refused to do so, saying it had stopped receiving foreign funding. After its activities were suspended, the group accused the Justice Ministry of trying to prevent them from monitoring the upcoming elections.

Following the suspension, Golos was evicted from its offices after the owner said he had been pressured into kicking them out.

After spending time in a temporary office, around a month ago the organization was offered a

new space on Bolshoi Kharitonevsky Pereulok for free by the Russky Lad movement headed by State Duma Deputy Vladimir Nikitin, Vedomosti reported.

Golos had begun training staff at the office, which it shared with other election-observer groups including Rosvybory, Sonar and Grazhdanin Nablyudatel ("Citizen Observer"). It had planned to hold press conferences at the office during the week of the elections.

Now they are being forced to leave that space as well: Melkonyants told Vedomosti that some "powerful people" had forced the office owners to suspend the usage agreements with all the election watchdogs.

"I still hope it is a mistake," Melkonyants told Moskovskiye Novosti. "I hope it is not the official position of Moscow authorities to oust independent observers from their offices."

Melkonyants told Ekho Moskvy radio that the eviction would not have an impact on their work during the elections.

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