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Roizman Backs Plans to Give Yekaterinburg Federal Status

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Russia's fourth-largest city seeks federal status, which will put it on par with St. Petersburg and Moscow.

Yekaterinburg Mayor Yevgeny Roizman has supported a proposal to seek federal status for his city, which would free Yekaterinburg from the jurisdiction of the Sverdlovsk region's authorities and place it on a par with Moscow and St. Petersburg.

"Such a situation would remove all the conflicts with regional authorities, in particular concerning the budget, and would also present opportunities for the strategic development of the city and independence from the attitudes of regional officials," Roizman told Itar-Tass on Thursday.

The idea was initially proposed by City Duma deputies at a meeting of the budget committee, Znak.com reported.

"The procedure is quite complex, the process is long, but we are prepared to begin this

journey," Roizman said.

Vladimir Pligin, the head of the State Duma's Constitution and State Affairs Committee, publicly opposed the idea later the same day.

Making Yekaterinburg a "city of federal significance" with the same status as republics, regions and other federal subjects, would require changes to the Constitution that are "unlikely to be worthwhile," Pligin said, RIA Novosti reported.

St. Petersburg and Moscow are the only two cities with federal status for a reason: Moscow is the country's capital and both have significantly higher populations than other Russian cities, Pligin said.

Roizman responded that he had already spoken with Pligin, who had agreed to discuss various options for changing Yekaterinburg's status.

Roizman's proposal follows conflicts between the Yekaterinburg City Hall and the Sverdlovsk regional government concerning distribution of the regional budget.

City authorities have repeatedly said that, despite contributing up to 70 percent of the budget, Yekaterinburg does not receive adequate financing.

The region ignored the city's complaints and passed a budget last month which City Hall said leaves them 7 billion rubles ($211 million) short of the funds necessary to develop Yekaterinburg's road infrastructure, public services, and health care and education systems.

If the Sverdlovsk region were to lose Yekaterinburg, its single major urban center, the status of the region and of its political leaders would decrease significantly.

Roizman has repeatedly clashed with regional authorities both before and after he won the race for mayor in September.

In an interview with Dozhd television immediately after the election, Roizman said that he had essentially been forced to run for mayor due to the criminal prosecution of his close associates and political pressure leveraged against his anti-narcotics organization City Without Drugs.

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