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2 Opposition Candidates Blocked From Moscow City Duma Election

By Allison Quinn

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Publicist Olga Romanova, pictured, and activist Maria Gaidar have been denied the right to register for the upcoming Moscow Duma election.

Two opposition candidates who had planned to run for spots in the Moscow City Duma have been denied the right to register for the upcoming election mere days after most of their allies from the "For Moscow" political coalition were rejected as candidates.

Activist Maria Gaidar and publicist Olga Romanova submitted an impermissible number of invalid signatures, Interfax reported on Thursday citing election officials.

Candidates were required to submit the signatures of at least 3 percent of voters by last Friday.

Of the nine "For Moscow" candidates that were required to submit signatures, Gaidar and Romanova were the only two to gather enough signatures to be granted the right to run in the race.

However, 22.5 percent of Gaidar's signatures were deemed invalid, and it is on "this basis that Gaidar will be denied registration as a candidate for the Moscow City Duma," Interfax cited a representative of the Elections Commission as saying on Thursday.

Romanova's submission was also found to surpass the permitted threshold for faulty signatures, 10 percent. About 20 percent of Romanova's signatures were deemed invalid or incomplete.

An examination of the signatures reportedly carried on through the night on Wednesday.

"It is 2 a.m. We are still in the district offices. And that's it, they are writing up the protocol. They threw out about 20 percent of the signatures. Mainly for technical reasons, like the signer did not include his date of birth, and that is a contestable subject," Romanova wrote on her Facebook page Thursday.

She noted that no major violations had been uncovered, such as falsified signatures, or the signatures of deceased individuals or residents who have emigrated.

Gaidar, for her part, tweeted on Thursday that "hundreds of falsifications" had been found in the submission of United Russia-backed candidate Olga Sharapova, who was allowed to register.

The collection of voter signatures has long been a bone of contention between opposition candidates and members of the ruling party in election campaigns, with both sides flinging accusations of falsification.

Critics often refer to the signatures requirement as a Kremlin-engineered filter to lend the illusion of electoral legitimacy, while ultimately serving to exclude threatening candidates out of elections.

Natalya Chernyshova, a contender in last year's mayoral race, suggested a petition at the time to do away with the mandatory collection of signatures.

See also:

Navalny's Opposition Candidates Knocked Out of City Council Race

Contact the author at a.quinn@imedia.ru

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