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Whistleblower Accuses Moscow City Election Candidate of Plagiarism

By Allison Quinn

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Irina Ilyichyova

A United Russia candidate scheduled to run next Sunday in the Moscow City Duma elections used a counterfeit diploma to secure her spot on the ballot, activists have claimed.

Shtab SAO (Headquarters of the Northern District of Moscow), a coalition platform that aims to "promote friendly candidates" in the municipal elections, filed a complaint this week with a Moscow court seeking a ban on campaign materials advertising candidate Irina Ilyichyova as a Ph.D. holder.

Her Ph.D. is fraudulent, the group claims.

In preparing its judicial complaint, the organization worked with famed grassroots advocacy group Dissernet, which strives to hunt down and expose degree holders that either plagiarized or purchased their dissertations on Russia's thriving black market for academic research.

“While conducting a thorough check of all deputies for the Moscow City Duma, we wasted most of our efforts searching for Ilyichyova’s dissertation, or at least an author’s abstract, but to no avail. How could that happen if the dissertation actually existed and was defended?” Andrei Zayakin, the co-founder of Dissernet.org, was quoted as saying in Shtab SAO’s statement, which was released via their LiveJournal account on Tuesday.

The diploma Ilyichyova submitted to the elections commission bears blatant signs of being a counterfeit, Shtab SAO said in their statement.

The first sign of foul play in the diploma, the activists said, is its stamp of approval by a government body that did not exist at the time the diploma was meant to have been received.

Ilyichyova’s diploma cites the National Higher Attestation Committee of the Russian Federation as the agency that certified her credentials, though that agency was only in existence from 1997 to 1998, the group said. The municipal political hopeful claims to have received her diploma in 2004.

In addition, the diploma should have been certified by the university where the degree was earned, not by a government body, the statement said. Shtab SAO published scanned images of other degrees earned in 2004 to substantiate their claim.

Furthermore, no trace of Ilyichyova’s dissertation could be found, either online or in the library of the university she attended, the group said.

The Russian State Library, where published dissertations are generally held, told Dissernet activists there was no record of Ilyichyova’s work, according to the statement.

Zayakin said in Shtab SAO’s statement that the Moscow State Pedagogical University rector in charge at the time Ilyichyova’s dissertation was supposedly defended gained notoriety for running “a powerful plagiarism factory,” which later led to his firing at the hands of the education minister.

Activists noted that they had no trouble finding the dissertations of other Moscow City Duma candidates, providing links to online copies of the work.

In addition to assisting in Shtab SAO’s quest to weed out unworthy candidates from the municipal ballots, Dissernet made waves Wednesday by publishing evidence of rampant plagiarism in the dissertation of Moscow City Duma speaker Vladimir Platonov.

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