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No Vote? No Participation: Russia Drops Out of PACE Until 2016

By Anna Dolgov

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"We are leaving PACE until the end of the year," Pushkov was quoted as saying by state-run Sputnik news agency.

The Russian delegation at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has resumed its boycott after the organization agreed to suspend Moscow's voting rights, news reports said.

Russia will not allow monitors from the European human rights political body, or PACE, on its territory and has withdrawn its invitation for PACE monitors to visit Ukrainian pilot Nadezhda Savchenko, head of the delegation Alexei Pushkov said Wednesday, media reported.

"We are leaving PACE until the end of the year," Pushkov was quoted as saying by state-run Sputnik news agency.

"The Parliamentary Assembly may focus on all the issues it wants to, but without our

participation," he added.

"It is clear that it will not cooperate with Russia, and it will not have access to Russia on the monitoring missions level. Of course, all our proposals regarding all contacts are canceled now, including Savchenko and the human rights report on Crimea."

The move came in response to the European political body's resolution earlier on Wednesday to renew its suspension of Russia's voting rights, which was originally imposed last spring over the annexation of Crimea.

PACE has repeatedly called for the release of Savchenko, who claims she was captured in Ukraine by pro-Moscow separatists and then smuggled across the border. Moscow has accused Savchenko of abetting the killing of two Russian journalists in Ukraine, but human rights organizations have named her a political prisoner.

Just two days before the latest round of the Russian boycott, media reports suggested that the Russian delegation had extended its support to the PACE appeal for Savchenko's release.

The supposedly abrupt U-turn occurred during a PACE session on Monday, Ukrainska Pravda reported, citing unidentified sources who took part in the meeting.

Pushkov said the latest suspension by PACE will prompt Russia to consider leaving the Council of Europe altogether, the BBC reported.

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