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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Opposition Party Allowed to Join Kostroma Election Race

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The election campaign in Kostroma is already under way, so the initial ban means Parnas will have less time on the streets than other parties.

Russia's Central Elections Commission ruled Thursday that the Parnas opposition party could take part in upcoming regional elections in Kostroma, offering a glimmer of hope for anti-Kremlin groups that have been blocked from participating in a slew of imminent such votes across the country.

"A decision was taken to annul the removal of Parnas from the elections in the Kostroma region," Ilya Yashin, deputy chairman of Parnas and an ally of slain opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, wrote on Facebook.

Local election officials had barred Parnas from running in the Kostroma region, east of Moscow, because they said the group did not have enough valid signatures from potential voters to qualify for participation. Similar reasons were given for rejecting opposition parties in Novosibirsk and Magadan.

Opposition leaders claimed that the Kremlin was blocking them from elections as an alternative tactic to ballot stuffing, which provoked street protests after it was used in the 2011 Duma elections.

“The authorities' calculation is obvious. By registering us in Kostroma they are hoping ... to save face against the background of a general disqualification of the opposition from elections,” Yashin said.

The election campaign in Kostroma is already under way, so the initial ban means Parnas will have less time on the streets than other parties. Voting will take place on Sept. 13.

“Kostroma is now the most important point for the application of strength of the Democratic Coalition,” opposition leader Vladimir Milov tweeted Thursday, referring to the umbrella group that is made up of Russia's most significant opposition parties.

The surprise decision from the Central Elections Committee comes after Kremlin deputy chief of staff and political heavyweight Vyacheslav Volodin reportedly told members of the presidential Human Rights Council on Monday that opposition candidates might be allowed to participate in regional elections.

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