

Russian Region Cancels Elections, Ousts Mayor, Reinstates Elections

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Ousted Petrozavodsk Mayor Galina Shirshina

Regional deputies in Russia's republic of Karelia have passed the first reading of a bill to reinstate mayoral elections in the region's cities after they were canceled last year, the Kommersant newspaper reported Thursday.

City council deputies in Petrozavodsk, the region's capital, ousted Mayor Galina Shirshina from office after canceling mayoral elections in the republic.

Petrozavodsk was one of the few Russian cities with an elected mayor not from the ruling United Russia party. The small, industrial city, built on the shores of Lake Onezhskoye, had hosted a battle between its opposition mayor and its legislative assembly.

Shirshina, 37, was an independent candidate in the 2013 election race supported by the liberal Yabloko party, and won a surprise victory against incumbent mayor Nikolai Levin of United Russia.

The local legislature, made up predominantly of United Russia deputies, presented Shirshina with an “unsatisfactory” mark during the annual evaluation of her work in June 2015.

At the same time, Petrozavodsk lawmakers introduced an amendment to the city charter that canceled the city's mayoral elections in accordance with an earlier decision to cancel elections made in the regional parliament.

Petrozavodsk is one of a number of cities where elections have been canceled and then replaced by a system which sees municipal deputies appoint a mayor from candidates chosen by special commission.

Although Shirshina vetoed the amendment passed by the regional legislative assembly, deputies succeeded in removing her as mayor on Dec. 25, 2015, Russian media reported at the time.

Shirshina has repeatedly appealed the decision, but the legality of her termination were upheld at the Karelia Supreme Court in February 2016.

The Petrozavodsk mayor is elected for five years.

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