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Russian Opposition Primaries Undermined by Website Hacks

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Russia's Central Election Commission (CEC) has ruled the final results of the Democratic Coalition's online primaries void after their website came under attack from hackers. Personal data belonging to thousands of opposition voters was leaked online after the coalition's website was targeted. The CEC ruled that it was impossible to establish any final results.

"Due to external access to the server resulting in the unauthorized collection of data, the CEC believes it was impossible to continue safe and reliable voting procedures in these primaries," said the Electoral Commission in a statement posted on the VKontakte page of the PARNAS opposition party.

The hackers gained access to voters' names, dates of birth, email addresses and phone numbers. The information, which was later released online, also contained account passwords and information on cast ballots.

The Democratic Coalition was created in 2015 to unite a number of liberal opposition factions. The union eventually split in April 2016 when Alexei Navalny, Vladimir Milov and Ilya Yashin announced their withdrawal amid a scandal involving PARNAS leader, Mikhail Kasyanov.

Kasyanov had been initially chosen to head the coalition candidate list regardless of the primaries' outcome, but refused to withdraw after details of his private life became public.

Following the hacks, Navalny called for Kasyanov to stand down and issued an apology — which he posted on his Twitter and Facebook pages — for encouraging people to vote in the primaries.

Meanwhile, Ilya Yashin, one of the other key PARNAS leaders, has said he suspects the hacks to be the work of an "FSB mole" inside the party, pointing his finger at Natalya Pelevina.

"We need to look for 'moles' in the first instance within those people who had access to the PARNAS website," he said, adding: "I have a lot of questions for this woman."

Kasyanov later announced that some of the primaries results will be taken into account. "A third of the registered electorate voted successfully, we can't ignore their opinion completely," he said.

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