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Russia's Internet Watchdog Blocks Sites Calling for Election Boycott

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Russia's Internet watchdog Roskomnadzor has blocked four websites that called for mass boycotts of the upcoming State Duma elections, it stated in a message posted on its website.

Roskomnadzor said that it received a request to block the sites from the Prosecutor General's Office.

"Reasons [for blocking the websites] include the publication of propaganda material intended to promote among the Russian people the idea of boycotting the State Duma elections."

In addition, Roskomnadzor believes these sites attempted "to coordinate the actions of citizens by organizing protest actions in violation of the established laws."

Two of the four websites only had the information regarding boycotts removed and placed into the registry of forbidden information, while access to the other two websites was blocked.

The names of the blocked websites are not included in Roskomnadzor's statement.

The watchdog warned that they will continue to monitor the Russian Internet for such content, at the request of the Prosecutor General.

“In the case of illegal copying of information to other sites, they will also be included in the registry, and access to them will be limited.”

The previous session of Russia's State Duma notably gave Roskomnadzor extended powers, allowing it to extrajudicially block websites calling for “mass riots” or “extremist activities.”

Until 2006, Russian election ballots at all levels listed a “none of the above” option, allowing citizens to exercise a right to not vote for any political party on the ballot.

In the 2011 Duma and 2012 presidential elections, more than a million ineligible ballots — those with multiple parties or candidates marked or covered in markings — were counted, and there was a small movement of marking one’s ballot in such a way in protest.

In 2014, the Duma passed a law on the return of “none of the above” to municipal elections, but not federal. With up to a third of Russians believing that the upcoming Duma elections will be rigged, according to a recent poll by the Levada Center pollster, simply not voting remains the only recourse.

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