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Russian Opposition Politician Calls for 'Day of Free Elections' Rally in Moscow

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Ilya Yashin (Yelena Palm / Interpress / TASS)

Opposition politician and local deputy Ilya Yashin has called for a rally later this month to inform citizens of their voting rights ahead of the 2018 presidential elections.

A nationwide vote has been scheduled for March 18, 2018 — the anniversary of Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine. President Vladimir Putin announced his reelection bid earlier this month and is widely expected to win a fourth term in office, which would extend his tenure into 2024.

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In a post on his Facebook page, Yashin wrote that "it's no secret" that Muscovites were poorly informed about their voting rights.

Yashin, who heads the Krasnoselsky District local council, called for a rally to be held in his district on Dec. 24 to inform citizens about their constitutional rights and to collect signatures of potential election observers.

“This is the first time that we have a chance to see a truly competitive [presidential] campaign in a long time,” Yashin wrote. “Of course, with the condition that all of the major candidates are allowed to participate in the elections."

On the same day six years ago, there were mass protests against voter fraud in the same district.

The opposition candidate Alexei Navalny, who has been sidelined from the elections because of a previous criminal conviction which his supporters say is politically motivated, called on Muscovites to attend the “beautiful” event on his blog.

Moscow authorities have called Yashin's announcement a “provocation,” saying that the organizers need to apply for a permit at least one month before the planned event.

The rally organizers need to “carefully study the legislative and regulatory framework of the city," the head of the city's department for regional security and anti-corruption Vladimir Chernikov said on the Govorit Moskva radio station.

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