

Russia's Communist Candidate Criticizes Lack of Access to State TV

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Andrei Lyubimov / Moskva News Agency

The Communist Party's candidate for upcoming presidential elections claimed on Friday he was getting less airtime on state television than other candidates ahead of the vote.

Pavel Grudinin was a surprise nomination to the Communist Party's ticket late December supplanting Gennady Zyuganov who had headed the party since 1993. Grudinin made the rounds on talk shows on state-run channels after his nomination, but complained on Friday that other candidates were getting more airtime.

"It shows the weakness of the government," Grudinin told journalists at the Lenin Sovkhoz, a former state farm collective which he has been the director of since 1995. "They should show us so the voters can hear the ideas of opposition candidates."

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Party spokesperson Alexander Yushenko noted that the Communist Party has been monitoring federal television channels for their coverage of the electoral campaign.

“We are monitoring how much they show our candidate,” he said. “We are regularly sending this information and formalizing complaints to the Central Election Commission.”

The Sovkhoz, where the press conference was held, is run as a socialist enterprise, which Grudinin says could be a model for modern-day socialism in Russia. On Friday, Grudinin cited it as a reason he would make a successful president, comparing its success to Russia’s poor economy.

He faulted President Vladimir Putin for country’s finances but avoided critiquing him directly.

“I wouldn’t say that I am against Putin,” Grudinin said. “I would say that I am for a different direction for this country.”

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Since he announced his candidacy, pundits have questioned whether Grudinin is a true opposition candidate or if he is helping the Kremlin increase voter turnout on March 18.

The opposition politician Alexei Navalny has been barred from balloting in the election due to a conviction he and his supporters say is politically motivated. During the press conference, Grudinin sought to attract Navalny’s supporters to his side.

“Navalny and I are in the same battle together,” Grudinin said. “We are both battling corruption.”

Still, he distanced himself from Navalny’s decision to boycott the election — a nationwide protest is planned for Jan. 28 — saying that he believes if everyone comes out to vote in March, an opposition candidate could defeat Putin in his bid for a fourth term.

“If [Navalny] told his supporters to vote for a candidate who could unite the opposition, then I believe we would win.”

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