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Yekaterinburg Lawmakers Vote to Abolish Mayoral Elections, Sparking Mass Protests

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Yekaterinburg Mayor Yevgeny Roizman **Donat Sorokin / TASS**

Thousands of residents in Russia's fourth-largest city of Yekaterinburg rallied in support of keeping direct mayoral elections on Monday, preceding a local lawmakers meeting to abolish their right to choose city leaders.

With only nine out of Russia's 85 regional capitals left to have elected mayors, deputies in Yekaterinburg's region of Sverdlovsk met to consider on Tuesday a bill abolishing popular elections of mayors and city councils in the region. Yekaterinburg, population 1.4 million, has been under a "double-headed system" since ruling party lawmakers handed the task of running the administration to hired city managers in 2010.

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“Fair elections for free people! We are citizens, not a population!” outspoken Yekaterinburg Mayor Yevgeny Roizman tweeted from the demonstration Monday.

Attendees signed a resolution demanding full-fledged mayoral elections and the removal of governor Yevgeny Kuivashev, who submitted the draft bill cancelling the mayoral vote, the Meduza news website reported.

A survey conducted by the Socium Fund pollster shows that 62 percent of Yekaterinburg residents oppose doing away with direct mayoral elections, with 17 percent saying they favor the changes.

Local authorities said that 1.7 thousand people attended the protest, while opposition figures said that at least 8 thousand people attended, making it the largest demonstration in the city since 1999, the RBC business daily reported.

On Tuesday, Sverdlovsk’s legislative assembly voted to pass in the first reading the bill to abolish direct mayoral elections. A total of 42 deputies voted for the bill, while four voted against, the Znak news website reported.

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