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Russia Eyes Early Parliament Elections Amid Putin's Power Shake-Up

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State Duma lawmakers are holding a key vote for President Vladimir Putin's sweeping constitutional amendments Tuesday. **Andrei Nikerichev / Moskva News Agency**

Update: Karelin removed his amendment from consideration after Putin rejected the proposal in a surprise Duma speech.

Russian lawmakers will consider holding early parliamentary elections this year, the speaker of Russia's lower house of parliament has said on the day of a key vote for President Vladimir Putin's sweeping constitutional amendments Tuesday.

The State Duma elections were originally scheduled for September 2021.

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State Duma lawmaker Alexander Karelin, a representative from the ruling United Russia party, said that Putin's constitutional overhaul to be voted on Tuesday "grants us greater

powers."

"That's why I believe it would be fair to hold new elections under our new capabilities," Karelin said at the Duma's opening session broadcast live on its website.

Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin said that lawmakers will consider Karelin's proposal for early State Duma elections during the ongoing session.

Volodin previously dismissed media reports of early Duma elections as "absolutely contrived, just fake" in January.

Shortly before Karelin's proposal, firebrand lawmaker Vladimir Zhirinovsky suggested Sept. 20, 2020, as the date of the next parliamentary vote. Zhirinovsky added that, under his proposal, Russia should scrap presidential elections and delegate that authority to a decisionmaking body known as the State Council.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that Putin plans to consider and address the early election initiative in the near future.

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Putin set off a political storm in January when he suddenly proposed changes to the Constitution and dismissed his longtime ally Dmitry Medvedev as prime minister.

Soon after, the State Duma unanimously approved the constitutional reform bill in a first reading, after less than two hours of debate. A third and final reading may also take place as early as this week.

Russian citizens will vote on the constitutional reforms once the legislation has been approved by both houses of parliament. The plebiscite has been set for April 22.

Putin, 67, has been in power for two decades and is required by the Constitution to step down from the presidency in 2024 after his fourth Kremlin term ends. Observers say the constitutional reforms could grant him the ability to extend his power past his term limit.

AFP contributed reporting to this article.

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