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Russian Lawmakers Adopt Putin's Sweeping Constitutional Amendments

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The amendment allows a sitting or a former president to run for office "regardless of the number of terms which that person held at the time when the amendment came into force." **Andrei Nikerichev / Moskva News Agency**

Russian lawmakers have backed a set of constitutional amendments Wednesday that would allow President Vladimir Putin to stay in power until 2036.

Putin, who has dominated the Russian political landscape either as president or prime minister for the past 20 years, is constitutionally mandated to step down in 2024. He paved the way for running again in 2024 when he backed a "reset" of presidential terms in a surprise visit to the Russian parliament Tuesday.

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The State Duma voted 383 to 0 in favor of lifting the restrictions Wednesday, with 43 abstentions. Putin said Tuesday that the Constitutional Court would have to rule whether this

would not contradict Russia's main law.

The amendment allows a sitting or a former president to run for office "regardless of the number of terms which that person held at the time when the amendment came into force."

If, as Putin's critics suspect, the court gives its blessing to the amendment and it is backed in a nationwide vote in April, Putin could serve another two back-to-back six-year terms.

Were he to do that, Putin, 67, could stay in office until 2036 at which point he would be 83. Putin has not spelled out what his plans for the future are, but he has said he does not favor the Soviet-era practice of having leaders for life who die in office.

Wednesday's State Duma vote came after Putin unveiled a major shake-up of Russian politics and a constitutional overhaul in January. The lawmakers cast their votes as opponents of the presidential "reset" held single-person pickets outside the State Duma and upper-house Federation Council buildings.

Opposition activists said they planned to protest against what some called a rewriting of the constitution in the interests of the ruling elite. One group said it had applied for permission to stage a demonstration on March 21.

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Moscow's government said in a statement late Tuesday that it would stop all public gatherings in the city of more than 5,000 people until April 10 due to coronavirus-related risks.

Russia's upper-house Federation Council also passed the amendments hours later in a 160-1 vote with three abstentions.

The package of amendments now needs to pass in Russia's regional legislatures before landing on Putin's desk for signing. The public will then vote on the measures on April 22 before they enter into force.

In addition to paving the way for 12 more years of Putin's rule, the constitutional amendments include pledges to adjust pensions to inflation and guarantee a minimum wage. The reforms also enshrine faith in God and marriage as a heterosexual union.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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