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Russia Bars Campaigns Against Reforms Extending Putin's Rule

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A package of proposed constitutional changes includes a provision that would reset Putin's presidential term count. **State Duma Press Service**

Russian election officials say activists are not allowed to campaign against a package of constitutional amendments that would allow President Vladimir Putin to extend his 20-year rule into the next decade, the RBC news website reported Tuesday.

Putin announced the vote will take place on July 1 after the coronavirus outbreak that has infected more than 432,000 Russians forced him to postpone the original April 22 date. A key provision in the proposed changes would reset Putin's presidential term count, opening the way for him to serve two more terms until 2036, when he would turn 83.

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Opponents of the amendments have asked the Central Election Commission (CEC) to allocate media time and space for their campaign, RBC reported. They argue that they are being

deprived of a chance to express their opinions amid an ongoing campaign urging Russians to vote for the reforms.

CEC member Maya Grishina told RBC that it's merely "informing" the public with billboards and television ads about the vote, adding that the constitutional voting act does not include provisions on campaigning for or against the amendments.

"Election commissions and the media are responsible for informing about voting on the amendments," Grishina said.

She vowed to consider the opponents' request for equal time once she receives it.

The opponents, who include prominent economists, journalists and politicians, are now considering suing the CEC.

"The television ads on the constitutional amendments vote are in fact campaigns," Moscow municipal deputy Yulia Galyamina told the Znak.com news website Wednesday. "These ads should undergo a linguistic analysis."

One ad by pro-Kremlin groups went viral for drumming up support for a constitutional definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman by depicting a gay couple adoption.

"We started the information [campaign] as soon as the first decree on voting was published. We suspended the preparatory campaign [due to the coronavirus] but there was no need to suspend the information campaign so it continued all this time," Grishina told RBC.

The Meduza news website reported Tuesday that the Kremlin is eyeing a turnout of 55% with a 60% "yes" vote.

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