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Russia Reshuffles Regional Heads Ahead of Fall Elections

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Vyacheslav Bitarov will leave his post as head of the republic of North Ossetia. **Kremlin.ru**

President Vladimir Putin signed a decree to remove Vyacheslav Bitarov from his post as head of the republic of North Ossetia, replacing him with former Sevastopol governor Sergei Menyailo, the Kremlin said Friday.

Bitarov becomes the latest regional head to lose his post this week, joining the republic of Tuva's head Sholban Kara-ool and Ulyanovsk region Governor Sergei Morozov.

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Last month, analysts at the Minchenko Consulting agency published a ranking of the political stability for each of Russia's regional heads that placed all three men in the "red zone," or the most likely to resign.

According to Minchenko Consulting, Bitarov's political standing was damaged by protests

against coronavirus restrictions in the North Caucasus as well as a high-profile road accident involving his brother.

Kara-ool and Morozov, who had been in power since 2007 and 2005, respectively, were branded as old ruling elites whose support was fading in a new political reality.

The departures come as the Kremlin gears up for this fall's key regional and State Duma elections, where it seeks to maintain a majority for the ruling, pro-Putin United Russia party.

Election day "will be one of the most difficult and strategically important for the federal authorities — in addition to regional elections, elections to the State Duma are coming, the outcome of which will define the contours of the 2024 solution and the future political regime," the Minchenko Consulting report said, referring to the year when Putin's current presidential term ends and he will be able to seek re-election for a fifth term under newly passed legislation.

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