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Pro-Navalny Moscow Municipal Leader Yashin Steps Down, Citing State Pressure

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Ilya Yashin's announcement comes after election officials removed him from the Moscow City Duma ballot over his ties to Navalny's groups. **Sergei Fadeichev / TASS**

Moscow opposition municipal deputy Ilya Yashin said Monday he is stepping down as chairman of a local assembly over state pressure he attributes to his support for jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

Yashin's announcement comes less than a month after election officials removed him from the Moscow City Duma ballot, citing a new law that bars anyone affiliated with "extremist" organizations from running for public office. Russia banned Navalny's activist and political networks as "extremist" in June, banning their activities and putting members at risk of imprisonment.

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“I wrote my resignation letter from the post of district head. I will remain an ordinary municipal deputy on a voluntary basis after my vacation ends at the end of the month,” Yashin said on Facebook.

Yashin, 38, said authorities have also ramped up pressure on the council of deputies of the Krasnoselsky municipal district in central Moscow, which he had headed since 2017, with “endless” inspections.

“I believe that the prosecutor’s office is carrying out a political order that has to do with my opposition activities. The task is to paralyze our work and destroy what we have built over these four years,” Yashin wrote.

“I wouldn’t want to leave ruins behind me. I think it’s important to get the municipality out of harm’s way and preserve the chance for my team to win the next municipal elections in the fall of 2022.”

Acknowledging that his efforts to restore his candidacy through Russian court is next to impossible, Yashin endorsed fellow opposition municipal deputy Yelena Kotyonochkina as his replacement in the July 27 by-elections.

“The road to the ballot is effectively closed to me,” he said.

Navalny’s “extremist” designation and the recent law that has barred several of his allies from the ballot comes as the pro-Kremlin United Russia party seeks to maintain its supermajority in the lower-house State Duma despite historically low approval ratings.

Kremlin critics say the authorities have also been stifling dissent ahead of the Duma elections this September with arrests, detentions and raids against opposition politicians and activists.

Unlike fellow opposition politicians facing state pressure who have fled abroad, Yashin said he does not plan to leave Russia.

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