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Direct Mayoral Elections Ended in Novosibirsk

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Novosibirsk Mayor Anatoly Lokot. **Kirill Kukhmar / TASS**

The legislature in the Siberian region of Novosibirsk has voted to end the practice of holding direct mayoral elections in the regional capital as well as in the adjacent scientific research center of Koltsovo, Interfax reported on Monday.

The bill to stop one of the last major cities in Russia from having a directly elected head was adopted after two readings in one session on Monday, with 49 of 65 regional legislators approving the measure.

While deputies representing the ruling United Russia party and the far-right Liberal Democratic Party of Russia supported the bill, representatives of the Communist party and the liberal New People party voted against it.

"1.5 million citizens got deprived of their right to vote and take part in the management of their destiny and budget," Communist party deputy Yakov Novoselov said during the debate.

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A few activists organized one-man pickets to protest the legislature's decision.

The head of the Novosibirsk region Andrei Travnikov, who represents the ruling United Russia party, lauded the decision, saying: "I think that this initiative is timely today, there is no reason to delay its adoption."

The mayors of Novosibirsk and Koltsovo are currently serving until 2024 and 2025, respectively. In the future, their replacements will be chosen by members of the regional legislature from a pool of candidates submitted by the competition commission, according to news website Tayga.info.

Only seven Russian cities still hold direct mayoral elections, a practise the Kremlin has long wanted to end as it has tightened its political control over Russia's restive regions.

Moscow and St. Petersburg are now the only two cities in Russia with a population of over 1 million people where the mayor is chosen directly by the electorate.

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