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Putin Promotes Donetsk Official to Be Omsk Region Governor

March 30, 2023



Vladimir Putin meets with acting Omsk governor Vitaly Khotsenko via video link. **kremlin.ru**

Russian President Vladimir Putin has for the second time appointed an official serving in one of the Russian-installed administrations in occupied Ukrainian territories to head one of Russia's regions where gubernatorial elections are due to place later this year.

Putin named Vitaly Khotsenko, who was appointed prime minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic last year, as acting governor of Western Siberia's Omsk region on Wednesday.

The reshuffle came two weeks after Putin named Vladislav Kuznetsov, a former deputy head of the Luhansk People's Republic, as acting governor of the Chukotka autonomous district in Russia's Far East.

Both Omsk and Chukotka are among the 25 Russian regions due to hold gubernatorial elections in September.

The partially Russian-occupied Ukrainian regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson are also expected to hold gubernatorial elections later this year.

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Observers have called the upcoming gubernatorial elections a "testing ground" for the 2024 presidential race in which Putin is expected to run for a fifth term in office.

The new appointees are both members of the ruling United Russia party. They are also alumni of "Leaders of Russia," a reality show-style contest organized by the first deputy head of the presidential administration Sergei Kiriyenko.

Putin's gubernatorial reshuffle was otherwise marked by the dismissal of the few remaining regional leaders who were not members of United Russia, who fell victim to what analysts term the "gubernatoropad," or the annual dismissal of governors ahead of the September elections.

Khotsenko's predecessor in the Omsk region, Alexander Burkov, was a member of the left-wing A Just Russia party.

On March 17, Putin chose United Russia member Vasily Anokhin to replace Alexei Ostrovsky, a member of the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party, as acting governor of western Russia's Smolensk region.

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