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Russia to Allow Elections in Occupied Ukrainian Territories Under Martial Law

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A "Logistical Humanitarian Center" in the Russian-occupied city of Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region. **Sergei Malgavko / TASS**

Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a law that allows elections to be held in areas under martial law, Russian state-controlled media reported Monday, paving the way for votes to take place in Russian-occupied Ukraine.

Russian regional elections are scheduled for September and presidential elections are set to be held in spring next year.

The legal changes are the latest step in a bid to integrate occupied areas of Ukraine into Russia and legitimize Moscow-installed administrations as fighting in Ukraine enters its 16th month.

“No surprise here. The Kremlin wants these "elections" to take place and give local regimes quasi-legitimacy,” tweeted Nikolaus von Twickel, a Berlin-based analyst focusing on eastern Ukraine.

“At the same time, martial law is a handy tool to curb civil liberties.”

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According to the legislation, Russia’s Central Election Commission will be able to call elections in regions under military rule after consulting with the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Ministry of Defense.

The law also made other minor changes to how martial law is implemented.

Following the full-scale invasion of its neighbor last year, the Kremlin annexed Ukraine’s Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions in a move that was widely condemned by the international community.

However, large parts of these areas — including two of the regional capitals — are not currently under the control of Russian forces.

Heavy fighting continues in all four of the Ukrainian regions partially occupied by Russia ahead of an imminent Ukrainian counteroffensive.

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