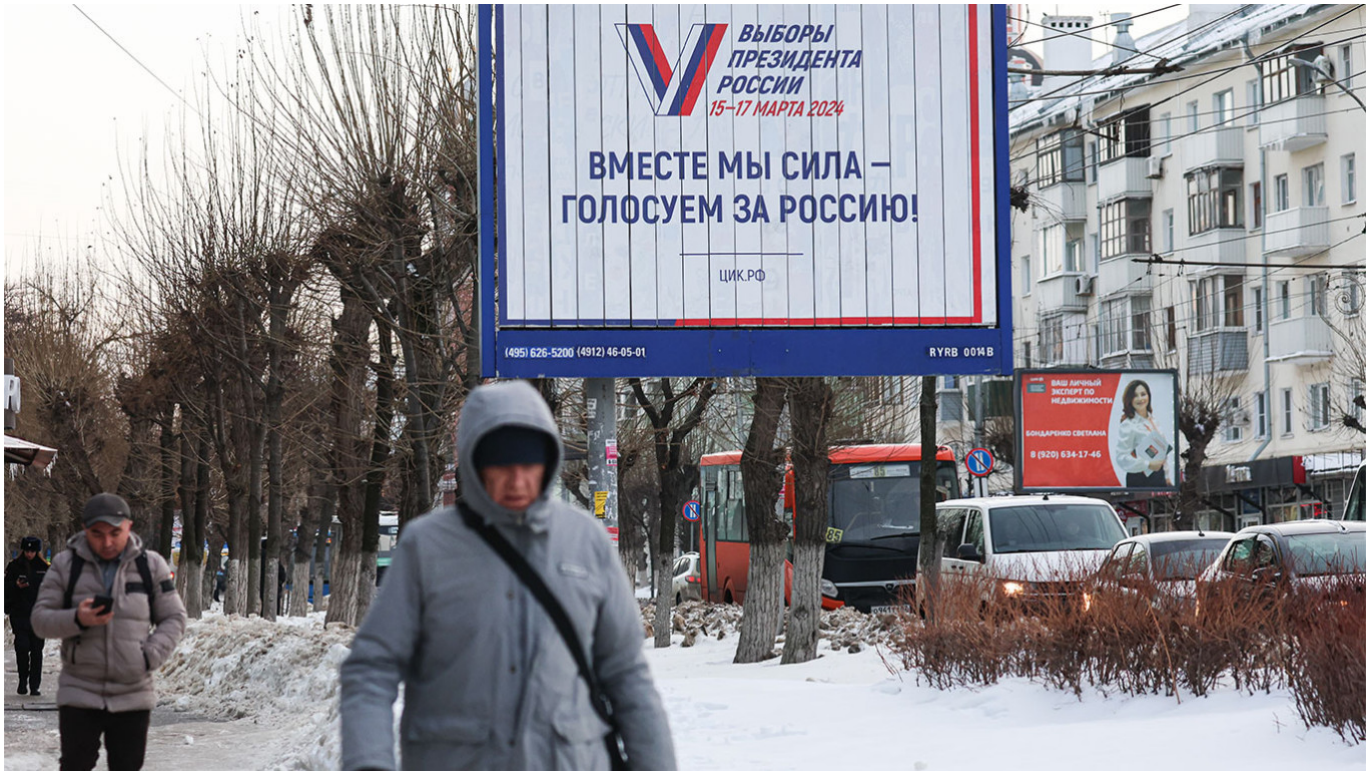
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2 Russian Presidential Hopefuls Withdraw From Race, Endorse Putin's Candidacy

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A street advertisement for Russia's 2024 presidential election. **Alexander Ryumin / TASS**

Two presidential hopefuls announced Tuesday that they will not be running in the March election and called on supporters to cast their vote for President Vladimir Putin as he seeks re-election.

Sergei Baburin, who leads the Russian All-People's Union, an extra-parliamentary conservative party, said he was withdrawing from the race shortly after submitting the 100,000 signatures of endorsement required by election authorities.

"Now is not the time to divide the people's strength in this difficult hour for the motherland," Baburin told reporters as he urged fellow nationalists to "unite around the national leader Putin."

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“Don’t stop, finish the denazification and demilitarization of Ukraine,” he said, referring to Russia's voiced war aims as it wages war on its neighbor.

Baburin ran in Russia's 2018 presidential election, placing last with just 1% of the vote.

Meanwhile, the conservative Democratic Party of Russia, which was formed in 1990 and last had parliamentary representation in 1995, said its would-be candidate Irina Sviridova had failed to gather the required 100,000 signatures of endorsement and thus could not qualify to run.

The party's chairman Alexander Zorin told state-run media that the party will support Putin in the upcoming race.

Russia’s Central Election Commission (CEC) has so far registered four candidates, including Putin and three members of political parties represented in Russia’s parliament.

Putin is widely expected to secure his fifth presidential term during the election, which is scheduled for March 15-17.

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