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Russian Election Chief Clashes With Moscow-Installed Zaporizhzhia Governor Over 'Illegal' Dismissal

October 24, 2025



Yevgeny Balitsky. **kremlin.ru**

Russia's Central Election Commission (CEC) has accused the Kremlin-installed head of Ukraine's partially occupied Zaporizhzhia region of overstepping his powers by firing the head of the local election commission.

Yevgeny Balitsky announced late Thursday that he had dismissed Galina Katyushchenko from the post of chair of the Zaporizhzhia region's Moscow-backed election commission due to a "loss of trust," following a report by his anti-corruption committee.

"No official, regardless of rank, is above the law," he wrote on Telegram, insisting that the decision complied with Russian law.

The CEC argued the corruption allegations were based on "minor technical errors" in Katyushchenko's financial disclosures that were not grounds for dismissal.

Russia's CEC chair, Ella Pamfilova, said Friday that her office would ask the Russian Prosecutor General's Office to overturn Balitsky's "administratively and legally void" decree.

Pamfilova maintained that an election official can only be removed at the request of the CEC.

In a pointed statement, she accused Balitsky of "secretly preparing" the decree without notifying the commission, saying the move effectively disrupted the work of an independent electoral body.

"This managerial blunder suggests either blatant arbitrariness — a relic of practices from the neighboring country [Ukraine] — or deep legal ignorance among the governor and his team, turning him into a public laughingstock," Pamfilova said.

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The dispute follows months of tension between the CEC and Balitsky. Over the summer, it accused him of withholding salaries from local election officials and trying to evict the regional commission from its office.

On Thursday, the Kommersant business newspaper reported that Balitsky submitted a draft regional law granting himself the power to dissolve the local election commission.

Pamfilova warned regional lawmakers in writing that such legislation would "destroy the region's electoral system" and directly contradict federal law, which gives only courts or the CEC authority to dissolve commissions, according to the publication.

Balitsky denied the report in a Telegram statement announcing Katyushchenko's firing.

Analysts told Kommersant the standoff reflects an ongoing struggle over control of Russia's electoral machinery in newly annexed territories.

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