

Amid Intense Pressure, Rights Defender Quits Kremlin

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Ella Pamfilova. The rights proponent just resigned as head of the Kremlin's human rights council after nearly eight years in the post.

Ella Pamfilova, the outspoken veteran head of the Kremlin's human rights council, quit Friday after months of pressure from United Russia and pro-Kremlin youth groups for her resignation.

Pamfilova, widely seen as a lone critical voice in the Kremlin, did not explain her decision. But disappointed supporters reckoned that the constant pressure had worn her down and expressed concern about the council's future work.

"The main reason for Pamfilova's departure was hounding by the mass media and, in particular, by the pro-Kremlin youth," human rights champion Lyudmila Alexeyeva told The Moscow Times.

She said it was "unclear how the council will work without Pamfilova, who was its soul."

Pamfilova proposed to the Kremlin that Alexander Auzan, an economist who has served on the council since 2002, replace her.

"This is my personal decision. No one forced me. It didn't come suddenly," Pamfilova said Friday, Interfax reported.

"I am planning to cardinally change the sphere of my activities, and it will definitely not be politics or state service," she said.

President Dmitry Medvedev has accepted Pamfilova's resignation, Medvedev's spokeswoman Natalya Timakova told journalists, adding that Pamfilova had raised the subject of her resignation several times.

Medvedev is considering several candidates for Pamfilova's post, Timakova said, without elaborating.

Repeated calls to Pamfilova on her cell phone and an e-mail sent to Auzan went unanswered. A Kremlin spokeswoman could not elaborate on Timakova's departure.

Auzan told Interfax that he had not decided whether he would take Pamfilova's job if offered.

"I had completely different plans, but I realize that the council must be preserved at all costs. I'm not prepared to say either yes or no at the moment," Auzan said.

Auzan also bemoaned Pamfilova's resignation, saying in a commentary published Friday that it "means nothing good for the council's activities."

Auzan said the council's members had joined the body because they trusted that Pamfilova could "solve difficult issues" and "translate" the council's proposals into "special terms" understood by the Kremlin and the government, according to [the article](#) on Russky Zhurnal's web site.

Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy predicted that the new council head would be just the opposite of Pamfilova: a "controllable, gentle" person who would "do as he is told."

Zhirinovskiy said in a [statement](#) that Pamfilova had tried "to keep a neutral position" without siding with any group but failed and "decided to leave in order not to discredit her name."

In an odd twist, Zhirinovskiy said Saturday that he was ready to replace Pamfilova himself if the Kremlin approved, Interfax reported.

He said he was a good fit for the job because he is a member of the opposition, a professional lawyer and, unlike Auzan, well-known nationwide.

Zhirinovskiy's party brands itself as opposition, but it consistently toes the Kremlin line.

Pamfilova had faced mounting calls to quit after criticizing the actions of pro-Kremlin youth groups as bordering on extremism. Just on Thursday, a senior United Russia official, Alexei

Chadayev, said she should resign if she insisted on getting involved in political issues.

Chadayev was referring to Pamfilova's recent criticism of an exhibit at the pro-Kremlin youth camp at Lake Seliger that depicted Alexeyeva and opposition leaders Eduard Limonov and Boris Nemtsov as fascists.

"I think that if Pamfilova can't wait to do politics, she should resign as head of her council and join a political party of her choosing," Chadayev [told the United Russia web site](#) ER.ru.

Pamfilova, [speaking to Ekho Moskv](#)y radio on July 27, called members of the pro-Kremlin youth group Stal, which made the exhibit, "tamed animals of our spin doctors" and said they were "selling their souls to the devil."

She also accused pro-Kremlin youth, without naming a particular group, of book burning, apparently referring to a publicity stunt in 2002 by the now-defunct Moving Together group, which burned books by writer Vladimir Sorokin in central Moscow.

Nashi, the successor to Moving Together, said last week that Pamfilova was defaming its members and [threatened to sue her](#).

Last fall, Nashi activists called for Pamfilova's dismissal after she condemned them for "persecuting" journalist Alexander Podrabinek for his criticism of World War II veterans.

Pamfilova, 56, a native of Uzbekistan and 1976 graduate of Moscow Energy University, worked as social care minister between 1991 and 1994 and a Duma deputy from 1993 to 1999.

She was appointed as head of the Kremlin's human rights commission in 2002 by then-President Vladimir Putin. The commission was renamed a council in 2004.

Auzan, 56, a Norilsk native and 1979 graduate of Moscow State University, would "continue the dialog with the civil society," said Alexei Makarkin, an analyst with the Center for Political Technologies, Interfax reported.

Alexei Malashenko, an analyst with the Carnegie Moscow Center, concurred that Auzan would be a good replacement, saying he is "very charismatic, energetic and clever," and "almost always says what he thinks" and "treats himself and his partners with respect," Interfax reported.

Auzan is president of the Association of Independent Centers of Economic Analysis, a member of the business lobbying groups Opora and Delovaya Rossia, and a senior professor in Moscow State University's economics department.

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