

Sobyanin Allows Larger 31st Rally

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New Mayor Sergei Sobyanin's administration on Monday made another conciliatory move toward the opposition by significantly boosting the number of people who will be allowed to rally on Triumphalnaya Ploshchad this weekend.

Authorities have allowed 1,000 people to attend the Oct. 31 rally, veteran human rights activist Lyudmila Alexeyeva said, RIA-Novosti reported.

Last week, the interim city government authorized the opposition to stage the rally but limited the number of participants to 200. It was the first time that City Hall had sanctioned the rally after denying 11 similar requests since 2009.

“This decision is a first step toward solving the situation under the new mayor,” Alexeyeva was quoted as saying.

The protests have been held on the 31st of every such month to draw attention to Article 31 of the Constitution, which grants freedom of assembly.

The activists had requested a protest with 1,500 participants. They will only be given a small part of the square because most of it was fenced off for construction work last month.

On Saturday, City Hall allowed another opposition rally on Pushkin Square, a gathering that human rights activist Lev Ponomaryov has called a “compromise” by City Hall.

Analysts say the softer stance on protesters was not introduced by Sobyanin but by the presidential administration.

Kremlin deputy chief of staff Vladislav Surkov spoke against the ban on Triumfalnaya rallies in a recent interview with Vzglyad.

"City officials are following precise signals from the Kremlin," Alexei Mukhin, an analyst with the Center for Political Information, said by telephone, referring to Surkov's interview.

But Sobyanin, who was inaugurated as mayor Thursday, sent more mixed signals Monday.

The first city government session to be chaired by him will be closed for the press, City Hall spokeswoman Galina Sugak told Gazeta.ru. The only media outlet allowed in will be TV Center, the City Hall-owned television channel, Sugak said, adding that reporters would be allowed at future sessions.

Sobyanin also delayed the start of city government's first session by one hour and reduced the items on the agenda from two to one. The government will meet Wednesday at 11 a.m. instead of 10 a.m. and will only debate the city's electricity supply through 2020, City Hall said on its [web site](#).

Also Monday, Sobyanin ordered his subordinates to cut the number of days Muscovites have to spend without hot water during the summer, RIA-Novosti reported, citing an unidentified city official.

Hot water is switched off for 10 to 14 days in most parts of the city to allow for repairs to the aging plumbing system.

Separately, Sobyanin chaired a session on preparation for the winter, after which he said all departments should gear up for a cold one. He also made a suggestion regarding air quality, telling City Hall that unlike roads, the air was full of dust and this should be fought with "vacuum cleaners," City Hall said in its [web site](#).

But the very first [decree](#) Sobyanin signed Monday had nothing to do with water, television or vacuum cleaners. His first act was to sign a decree to confirm that he had taken up his new post, his press service said on its web site.

Sobyanin is expected to revise much of the work of his predecessor, Yury Luzhkov. Among other things, he has promised to fight the city's catastrophic traffic jams.

Yabloko leader Sergei Mitrokhin said Monday that he would continue a legal battle about the Genplan, a disputed plan for the city's development through 2025.

Mitrokhin said he had filed an appeal after the Moscow City Court rejected his plea to cancel

the plan. Mitrokhin said the plan was not agreed upon with the federal authorities as required by law.

He also said Moscow's traffic woes were a direct consequence of the plan, which advocates more office construction in the city center. "If he does not revise it, Sobyenin will show that he is following Luzhkov's legacy," Mitrokhin said.

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