

Mironov Criticizes United Russia Plan

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Federation Council Speaker Sergei Mironov is on a collision course with the Kremlin after he opposed United Russia-backed reforms for the upper house of parliament and demanded the direct election of its members.

In an [article](#) published Tuesday in Vedomosti and on his web site, Mironov argued that electing senators by popular vote is the best of all models.

"I have always, from my first day of work in the council, adhered to this position," he wrote.

He also criticized a proposed reform to strip his office of the right to confirm new senators by inspecting their credentials.

"This will greatly increase the risk of corruption and significantly weaken checks and balances between the regions and the center," he said.

The article immediately drew fire from United Russia. Party secretary Sergei Neverov [accused](#)

Mironov of acting in narrow party interests and hampering democratization.

Mironov also heads A Just Russia, a pro-Kremlin party that has had an uneasy relationship with United Russia in the past.

Analysts said the clash reflected Mironov's understandable fears of losing his main vestiges of power in the Federation Council.

The upper house consists of two senators for each of the country's 83 regions. One of them is elected by the regional parliament, while the other is nominated by the governor and confirmed by the regional parliament.

Unlike the State Duma, the Federation Council is not divided into party factions. But because of United Russia's overwhelming strength in most regions, the number of senators associated with other parties is dwindling.

The picture for A Just Russia and other opposition parties will be even bleaker after Jan. 1, when a new law comes into force that stipulates that only members of regional parliaments can become senators.

Mironov said in his article that he supported this reform because it will make the council's composition more democratic.

But analysts said the reform deals him a blow because it will greatly reduce the number of candidates not affiliated with United Russia.

Neverov took a similar line by pointing to United Russia's dominance in local politics. "We have parliamentary majorities in practically all regions, and practically all governors are members of our party," he said.

The next reform, which senators are poised to pass Wednesday, is to remove the right of the Federation Council's executive office to review the appointments of new members. Instead, senators would automatically enter office 10 days after being confirmed in their regions.

"Mironov has used this right in the past to delay or block appointments he did not like," said Nikolai Petrov, an analyst with the Carnegie Moscow Center.

Neverov said the reform would free future senatorial candidates from "bureaucratic interference."

But Yury Korgunyuk, an analyst with the Indem think tank, said the reform would weaken both Mironov and A Just Russia. "Much of this party's influence rests on the fact that its leader is the Federation Council speaker," Korgunyuk said.

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