

An Election With Only One Voter

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The people don't have elections, but the authorities do. This may be the best way to sum up the frantic efforts by the Kremlin before the December State Duma elections.

Almost all of the strong efforts the Kremlin has made lately are directed at one goal: to make sure that United Russia walks away with 65.2 percent of the vote in the elections.

To help achieve this, the Kremlin created the All-Russia People's Front, which will soon have among its ranks nearly 40 million agrarians, railroad workers, postal workers and blondes.

A second strategy was to divide up A Just Russia, which only took votes away from United Russia; get rid its former leader, Sergei Mironov, from the Federation Council; and put St. Petersburg Governor Valentina Matviyenko in his place.

The Kremlin had to get Matviyenko out of St. Petersburg quickly. The voters can't stand her. Every day she spent as St. Petersburg governor meant hundreds of voters turning their backs on United Russia. The only thing coming close to Matviyenko's unpopularity was former Kaliningrad Governor Grigory Boos, who became such a liability to United Russia that he was axed last September.

A third strategy involved acting Federation Council Speaker Alexander Torshin. The day he was appointed to this post after Mironov's dismissal, Torshin introduced a bill to the Duma that allows Russia not to fulfill European Court of Human Rights rulings despite the fact that Russia signed the European Convention on Human Rights in 1988 that obligates the country to subject itself to the European court's decisions.

Clearly Torshin was trying to demonstrate his loyalty to United Russia and the Kremlin before the elections. But there is a more pragmatic reason for Torshin's initiative if he succeeds: Opposition parties will no longer be able to challenge the Russian government in the European Court of Human Rights for illegally disqualifying them from participating in the elections.

The fourth strategy was to fire Tver Governor Dmitry Zelenin, despite the fact that there was healthy economic growth in the region. It seems that the real reason for his dismissal was that the "party of crooks and thieves" received only 35 percent of the vote in the last regional elections. This dismissal is a signal to all governors that they don't need to work harder; they just need to count votes better.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin resurrected the Right Cause party, a small iParty for a small iPresident. Unlike A Just Russia, the Right Cause doesn't compete for the same electorate as United Russia, but it is still likely to do more harm than good.

It is clear that billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov could not turn down the top position in the Kremlin's "party of business." Although Prokhorov can't really change the rules of the game, he wants to do everything possible to tweak the system within the current framework.

Despite all of this pre-election bustle and intrigue, there is one paradox: There will be no elections. Even if there are still a few people who don't know who the next president will be, at least they know for sure who will be the only voter in the election.

So why are the authorities putting up such a fuss over the elections? There are two possible reasons: They are looting money, or they know something. The people won't have any elections, but the authorities certainly will.

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