

## Opposition's Council Left in Limbo

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From left, Dmitry and Gennady Gudkov and Navalny at a rally on Sept. 15 last year. **Igor Tabakov**

An alliance of Russia's nonparliamentary opposition that was formed at the peak of large-scale street protests in Moscow last year has seen an exodus of its leaders, prompting predictions of its impending political death.

Former mayoral candidate Alexei Navalny, Solidarity co-leaders Boris Nemtsov and Ilya Yashin, former State Duma deputies from A Just Russia Dmitry Gudkov and Gennady Gudkov, and leader of the For Khimki Forest movement Yevgenia Chirikova have said they would not stand for re-election to the opposition's Coordination Council, Russian media reported.

The body is an alliance of 45 liberals, socialists and nationalists, elected for a one-year term last October through an Internet vote in which about 80,000 people took part. At the time, there were high hopes for the council, with many predicting that it would successfully unite and revitalize the opposition movement enough to pose a challenge to the Kremlin.

"They gave us the mandate of trust and made us responsible for coordinating efforts

of dozens, hundreds, thousands and millions of people who want positive changes in our country," Navalny said last October, after collecting the most votes in the council's online elections.

But at the council's penultimate meeting Saturday, it became clear that the group's fate was in limbo, as its most prominent members seemed disinterested, at best.

The council meeting at the Izmailovo hotel in the east of the city Saturday, covered by less than two dozen journalists, including one private television channel, Ren TV, only managed to gather the quorum of 21 members.

By the end of the meeting, it remained unclear when an election for the second term would be held and whether its organizers could pull enough resources together to hold one.

State news agency Itar-Tass was the first to break the news about Navalny, Chirikova, Dmitry Gudkov and Gennady Gudkov late Thursday. The agency [cited](#) Chirikova and Dmitry Gudkov as the source of the information about themselves, and Gennady Gudkov and nationalist leader Vladimir Tor for the information about Navalny.

Nemtsov said Friday that he might choose not to run in the elections for the second council, [Gazeta.ru reported](#).

A number of other members of the council who are less prominent will not stand for re-election, Itar-Tass and [Gazeta.ru](#) said. They include businessman Vladimir Ashurkov, who heads Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, senior Solidarity members and rally organizers Pyotr Tsarkov and Sergei Davidis, journalist Sergei Parkhomenko and writer Dmitry Bykov.

Most of the opposition leaders said the council should continue its work, but they refused to take part in organizing the election, demonstrating a general lack of interest in the council.

Navalny, Nemtsov, Yashin and Dmitry Gudkov, speaking for himself and his father, Gennady Gudkov, refused to take part in the election's organization. Chirikova and Davidis volunteered themselves for that task, implying that they would probably not run for re-election.

The council elected five other volunteers apart from Chirikova and Davidis to hold the elections: economist and former presidential adviser Andrei Illarionov, nationalist leader Vladimir Tor, Parnas co-founder Anton Dolgikh, activist Ilya Konstantinov, and Left Front activist Akim Palachayev.

Many journalists regarded the news of the departure of the council's leaders as yet another failed attempt by the motley opposition crowd to come to terms, but at the meeting Saturday, most council members agreed that the body's work had been efficient.

"The number of people who learned that there is an alternative [to the regime]... increased greatly," Davidis said, summing up the results of the opposition campaigns for the Sept. 8 election in Moscow and Yaroslavl.

Participation in the Sept. 8 elections allowed opposition candidates to "attract a large number of citizens to political work," Navalny said.

However, others lamented the council's failure to field candidates capable of dominating over those backed by the pro-Kremlin party United Russia in the Sept. 8 regional elections, and its inability to become an "executive body" rather than just a "discussion club."

"We have really failed to create an effective group that would organize rallies of protest, coordinate the activities of the opposition during elections and help candidates in elections," said Yashin, who presided over the council's meeting Saturday.

"All the successes that the opposition has had in the past year, including in street protests and regional elections, have had only a very relative connection to the Coordination Council," Yashin said.

"In essence, the Coordination Council only voiced approval or disapproval [to opposition projects]," he said.

Nemtsov called Yashin's claims against the council "mostly well-founded" but said they stemmed from "excessive expectations." The adoption of a joint political program of nonparliamentary opposition in February was one "proven success" of the council, he said.

Navalny slammed the council for "turning into a political body that believes that some executive committee is working for it" when it was itself elected to be an "executive body."

While most agreed that the council should continue its work, few were eager to take part in it.

Navalny and Nemtsov said they planned to concentrate on compiling a list of candidates for the 2014 City Duma election, while the Gudkovs will be preparing to run in the same elections and will be abstaining from the council's second convention, they told mass media Friday.

Navalny, despite his criticism, urged the council to continue its work, saying it "legitimized staff solutions" of the political opposition, particularly by showing who was more popular.

Dmitry Gudkov, who together with his father was expelled from A Just Russia for taking part in opposition activities, said it would be a "pity" if the council ceased to exist.

But Gudkov was skeptical that the council would manage to mobilize tens of thousands of voters for a second time.

"And if only 10,000 people vote, will it still be the Coordination Council?" Gudkov asked.

Navalny said staging an election would require "a few months of hard work," and Nemtsov expressed doubt that the council would be able to find people to do that.

Navalny, Nemtsov and Chirikova called for a public vote on the necessity of staging elections for a second convention but wound up voting among council members to hold an election. The vote was held twice because the first vote was three votes short of the quorum of 21 people.

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