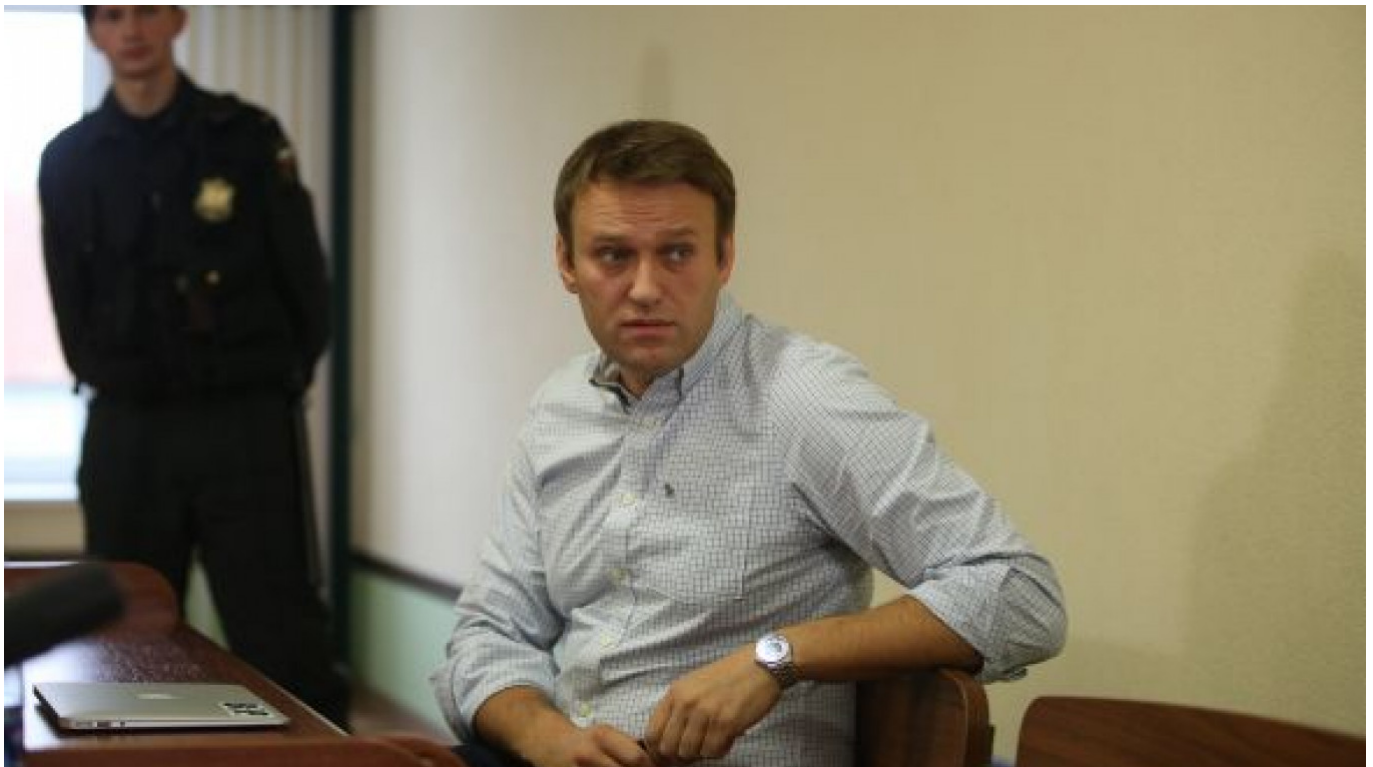


Sobyanin and Putin 'Talked Over' Navalny Election Participation

By [Delphine d'Amora](#)

October 21, 2013



Mayoral runner-up Navalny sitting in a Kirov region courtroom last week. **Evgeny Feldman**

Mayor Sergei Sobyanin has said that he conferred with President Vladimir Putin about the decision to allow opposition leader Alexei Navalny to participate in the mayoral election on Sept. 8, confirming widespread speculations at the time.

Putin and First Deputy Chief of Staff Vyacheslav Volodin "had a positive attitude toward my view that Navalny should participate in the elections," Sobyanin said in an interview with *Kommersant Vlast* published Monday, explaining that he wanted Muscovites to understand that "it was a real election, that the government of the city depends on their decision."

Monday marked three years in City Hall for Sobyanin, who was appointed in 2010 before becoming the first democratically elected Moscow mayor in the past 10 years with his victory last month.

The mayor considers September's election, which has been lauded as the fairest in recent Russian history, to be one of the major achievements of his time in office, along with changing Moscow's policy on urban development, focusing on the development of public transport, and improving the city's use of its public spaces.

As for immigration, a hot-button issue turned scorching since the riot in Moscow's Biryulyovo district earlier this month, Sobyenin said, "Basically, I think that it's necessary to introduce a visa regime." However, such a measure could "significantly undermine economic relations" and disrupt the Commonwealth of Independent States, the mayor added. Citizens of CIS countries are currently allowed to travel in Russia for up to three months without a visa.

A visa regime specific to Moscow could theoretically be a solution, provided that it is applied to the Moscow region as well, Sobyenin said. "In Moscow there are 500,000 to 600,000 immigrants, but nearby, in the region, there are around 2 million," he said.

The main problem is that employing immigrants is highly profitable for businesses, Sobyenin said, adding that the government must work to create economic incentives to encourage the hiring of Russian citizens.

Asked about the status of long-term residents from abroad, the mayor said that he "is against total integration," especially of immigrants from countries with cultural traditions that significantly diverge from those of Russia. "It is very difficult for people from Central Asia to adapt. Many of them, especially young people, don't speak Russian clearly. I don't see one reason why we should let immigrants settle down here," he added.

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Original url:

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