

Vladivostok Gets Rid of Direct Mayoral Elections

February 19, 2015



A general view of Vladivostok.

Vladivostok's municipal legislators did away with direct mayoral elections on Thursday, the Interfax news agency reported.

Previously, the mayor of Vladivostok was elected by the city's population. The city's current mayor, Igor Pushkaryov, was voted into office in 2013. His term is set to expire in 2018.

In accordance with the newly adopted legislation, local lawmakers will now select the city's top official behind closed doors.

Last spring, Russian lawmakers adopted legislation ending direct mayoral elections in several dozen major Russian cities, despite President Vladimir Putin's 2013 pledge that mayors would remain elected officials. Critics said the move was an attempt to ensure that local politicians are loyal to the Kremlin.

Russia's two largest cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, were not affected by this law because

of their special status as federal subjects.

Putin also cancelled direct gubernatorial elections in 2004, replacing them with a system of presidential appointees. The decision, made in the aftermath of the Beslan school hostage crisis, was justified on the grounds of national security.

Putin reinstated direct gubernatorial elections in 2012, a concession to the mass protest movement that led thousands to take part in nationwide anti-government protests following allegations of rigged parliamentary elections in Dec. 2011, and a politically loaded March 2012 presidential election.

Last year, Putin introduced a legal loophole to his reinstatement of gubernatorial elections, signing legislation allowing regions to choose between holding direct elections and letting regional legislators select a governor from a list of candidates approved by the Kremlin.

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