

Western Observers to Report to Russia's Central Election Commission

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Western election observers may be required to report their findings to Russia's Central Election Commission during the next Russian parliamentary election in September 2016, according to the Commission's deputy external relations director Igor Evlanov, the Vedomosti newspaper wrote Friday.

According to Evlanov, the measure, which was discussed at the meeting of the Commission's research and consultative council Thursday, will provide the state body with access to “source data on which international [monitoring] missions base their reports,” the article went on to say.

According to Vedomosti, Evlanov singled out documents produced by the Organization for

Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the security-oriented intergovernmental body whose Office for Democratic and Human Rights is best known for observing elections throughout the 57 participating states, as “too politicized.”

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Deputy director of the independent Russian election monitor Golos, Grigory Melkonyats, said in an interview with the political commentary website Polit.ru that the measure “could complicate the work of international observers.”

“Observers are not invited to solve the problems of the Election Commission for it, to fulfill its tasks,” he was quoted as saying.

“Their role is to report back to the organizations and states which sent them on whether an election was free and fair, so that they know if they can engage with the authorities elected,” he added.

In the same interview, he criticized Russia's handling of its relations with the OSCE mission, saying that the state had previously “faced the observers with requirements [so stringent] that they could not come” — a situation he dubbed an “electoral crisis.”

Igor Borisov, the head of the Russian Public Voting Rights Institute attached to the Kremlin's civil society and human rights council, said Thursday that Western election observers “were hardly likely” to give a fair appraisal of the 2016 State Duma election, “given the sanctions and the complicated global political situation,” the TASS news agency reported Thursday.

Experts and civil society activists could provide advice on “which [observers] should be invited, taking into account that the main purpose and task of international election monitoring is to help [citizens] execute their right to vote, and not to build up political pressure,” Borisov said, TASS reported.

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