

Russia: Putin is illegitimate

Friday 19 January 2024, by [Declaration Russian Democratic Forces](#) (Date first published: 21 December 2023).

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

We address you with deep concern regarding the upcoming “elections” for the President of the Russian Federation in March 2024, especially in the context of events occurring within Russia and its external aggressive, expansionist policy towards Ukraine and a number of other countries. Special attention should be paid to some problems associated with factors that can significantly affect the democratic nature of the electoral process, its objectivity, and most importantly, the legitimacy of the election results, which will result in another re-election of V. Putin to the position of President of the Russian Federation.

The key reasons why the current President of Russia, V. Putin, should not be recognized as legitimate after re-election in the 2024 elections, are outlined in [Resolution No. 2519 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe](#) dated October 13, 2023, as well as in a special report within this resolution of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights rapporteur Mr. Pieter Omtzigt (Netherlands), No. 15827 dated September 22, 2023.

We draw your attention to the following facts that may contribute to the recognition of the President of the Russian Federation, V. Putin, as illegitimate after his re-election in 2024:

- **Usurpation of power** and pressure on any political opponents to the current regime, up to repression and physical elimination of political opponents;
- Absence or **restriction of media freedom**;
- Conducting elections in the temporarily **occupied territories of independent Ukraine**, using methods of coercion to vote in illegal electoral events;
- [**Illegal, unconstitutional amendments to the Constitution**](#) of the Russian Federation, adopted to maintain the possibility of V. Putin staying in power. Recall that according to part 3 of Article 81 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation (before the 2020 amendments), the same person could not hold the position of President of the Russian Federation “for more than two terms in a row.” Thus, Putin had no right to become President of Russia in 2012 and subsequent years;
- Adoption of many **blatantly unlawful laws** that violate fundamental legal principles, democratic values, and the principle of the rule of law, which is one of the foundations of the constitutional order of Russia (Article 1 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation);
- **The war in Ukraine and war crimes**, in connection with which V. Putin is on the international wanted list by a warrant issued by the International Criminal Court.

Particular attention deserves the circumstances related to the state of the Russian electoral system and the non-compliance of Russian elections with the principles of universal, equal, free, secret, and direct suffrage, formulated by the Venice Commission[1]:

- Through the establishment of electoral censuses (convictions, “involvement” in the activities of extremist organizations, having a foreign residence permit, involvement in administrative responsibility for certain types of offenses) a significant number of Russian citizens are deprived of passive suffrage - according to estimates of the Russian “Voice” Movement, at least 10-11 million people;
- The procedure for registering candidates is completely administratively controlled: election commissions can create any grounds for refusing to register an alternative or opposition candidate or subsequent cancellation of registration, thereby completely depriving the elections of real, not artificial competitiveness, and violating the principle of political diversity, which is one of the foundations of the constitutional order of Russia (Article 13 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation);
- Conditions have been created for violating the principle of equality of candidates in favor of an administratively supported “incumbent” (active campaigning under the guise of covering current activities), candidates have deliberately unequal access to the media;
- Cases of coercion of state and municipal employees, and workers in the budget sphere to vote for pro-government candidates are regularly and massively recorded, including cases of direct control over the expression of will;
- The introduction and active use of the system of remote electronic voting significantly exacerbated the problems of coercion to vote, maintaining the secrecy of the vote, and protecting the will of voters from falsification - the remote electronic voting system is opaque for any external control, is fully managed by the organizers of the elections, and allows unlimited manipulation of voter votes;
- The introduction and use of new voting formats - for example, in the local area - and the active conduct of early and home voting also significantly reduce the possibilities for public control and create favorable conditions for falsifications;
- Electoral commissions are formed in such a way that they ultimately become completely dependent on the current authorities and form a single administratively controlled vertical;
- The possibilities for public control over elections, and observation, including international, are significantly limited: legislative obstacles have been created, the activities of observer organizations are limited (including, with the help of legislation on foreign agents and undesirable organizations), members of the observer community are persecuted;
- A stable long-term practice of mass falsifications during voting and counting of votes has been formed both at polling stations and throughout the system of electoral commissions, while effective mechanisms for challenging violations, taking into account the state of the judicial and law enforcement systems, are absent.

Altogether, this makes the Russian electoral system incapable of organizing and conducting free and fair elections that meet recognized international standards.

Summarizing our appeal, we ask you to pay attention to this extensive problem and take the necessary steps to:

1) Implement and fulfill Resolution No. 2519 of the PACE dated October 13, 2023, in its entirety, especially point 8 in part: “The Assembly calls on the member states of the Council of Europe to recognize Vladimir Putin as illegitimate after the end of his current presidential term and to cease all contacts with him, except for humanitarian contacts and to achieve peace”;

- 2) Recognize the illegitimacy of the “reset” of V. Putin’s presidential terms, carried out through the adoption of amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation;
- 3) After the re-election of V. Putin to the position of President of Russia for a new term, we urge you to recognize his status as President of the Russian Federation as illegitimate at the national and international levels and to refuse contact with the authorities of the Russian Federation, except for humanitarian contacts and to achieve peace.

Such steps will become strong levers of pressure on the Putin regime to end the war in Ukraine and will allow it to be held accountable under international law for the war crimes committed.

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1. Serguei Guriev, Sciences Po Provost
2. Mikhail Khodorkovski, Russian anti-war committee
3. Leonid Gozman, Russian anti-war committee
4. Vladimir Milov, vice president of Free Russia Foundation
5. Dimitri Goudkov, Russian anti-war committee
6. Russie-Libertés, France
7. La Asociación de Rusos Libres, Spain
8. Free Russia Foundation, USA
9. Free Russia Foundation, Belgium
10. Reforum, Lithuania
11. Lev Ponomarev, Institut Sakharov, France
12. Anastasia Shevchenko, Russian anti-war committee
13. Boeis Zimine, Russian anti-war committee
14. Freies Russland, Germany
15. Solidarus, Germany
16. Russland der Zukunft, Switzerland
17. Democratic community of Russian-speakers, Finland
18. Get lost / Go by the Forest, Russia
19. Free Russia Netherlands
20. Russians against war, Vilnius
21. Marat Guelman, Russian anti-war committee

22. Serguei Aleksachenko, Russian anti-war committee
23. Mikhail Kasianov, Russian anti-war committee
24. Evgueniy Kiselev, Russian anti-war committee
25. Maksim Reznik, co-fondour of the mouvment "European Saint-Petersbourg"
26. Elena Loukianova, Russian anti-war committee
27. Elena Kotenotchkina, member of the initiative "Peace. Progress. Human Rights" of Sakharov, Russia
28. "Open Russia" movement, Russia
29. Ksenia Maksimova, founder of Russian Democratic Society, UK
30. Port Nadziei/Cracovie for a Free Russia, Poland
31. Russian Canadian Democratic Alliance, Canada
32. Freies Russland NRW, Germany
33. Comunità dei Russi Liberi, Italy
34. Svetlana Koshkareva, volunteer alliance "Nurenberg trial 2.0", Canada
35. Demokrati-JA, Berlin, Germany
36. Associação de russos livres, Portugal
37. Russian America for Democracy in Russia, Chicago
38. Antiwar Liberal Association «Plakat», Israel
39. Marina Okhrimovskaya, online magazine «Switzerland for all»
40. Tatiana Shaderova, Russi contro la guerra, Italy
41. Youth democratic movement «Vesna»
42. Nadejda Tolokonnikova, Pussy Riot
43. Association of Deputies for a Peaceful Russia, Berlin, Germany
44. Voice of Free Russia, Chicago
45. Olega Radzinskyi, writer, director of the NGO "True Russia"
46. Movement "Voice of Reason", Russia
47. Russian America for Democracy in Russia, USA
48. Movement "Wake up !", Russia

49. Russian democratic society of Serbia

50. Vladi (Vladislav Leshkevitch), russian rap singer

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Collective

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