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Russia elections

Expected result cannot mask growing gap between Putin and Russian public

The overall outcome of this weekend's presidential election was never in doubt: Vladimir Putin is back for another term as Russia's president. The lack of democratic legitimacy of the election was also never in doubt, given the treatment of opposition politicians in Russia in advance. However, the evidence from Russian electoral observers already confirms massive manipulation, with over 5000 infringement complaints registered, and some regions in which 99% of votes were registered for Putin!

Commenting on the outcome, Green MEP and Russia expert **Werner Schulz** said:

"When Vladimir Putin claims that it was the 'cleanest' election in Russia's history, what he really means is that the machinery of electoral fraud has been perfected. These elections were not fair and were not representative of politics in Russia. Putin's main political opponents were not on the ballot paper but they will continue to be on the streets of Russia, demonstrating."

The close police protection of the victory celebrations is symbolic of the changing political situation in Russian and Putin's growing insecurity. Putin does not have the answers to the problems faced by Russia and has lost touch with the Russian public.

If Putin really wants to modernise Russia and introduce truly liberal reforms, he must immediately start dialogue with the political opposition outside the Duma. This will also mean finally freeing political prisoners, finally allowing for a fair and simplified process for the registration of political parties and calling renewed Duma elections as soon as possible thereafter, with an electoral law based on international standards.

Werner Schulz continued:

"EU leaders should tear up their congratulatory telegrams for Putin and, instead, criticise the political situation in Russia. Strategic partnership can only be possible when there are shared interests and values."

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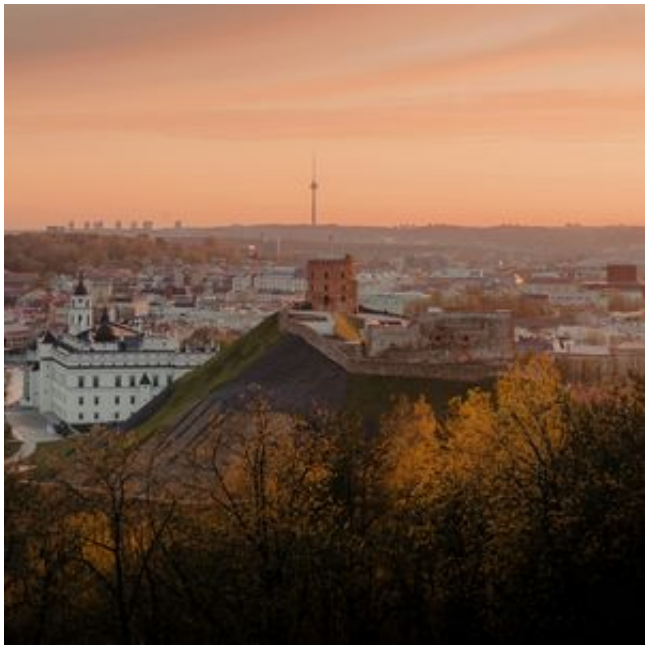
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