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First Party Backs 2nd Medvedev Term

By Nikolaus von Twickel

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Right Cause, which styles itself as a liberal opposition party, has become the first party to officially support the candidature of President Dmitry Medvedev for a second term in 2012.

Party co-founder Georgy Bovt said Wednesday that the decision, announced late Tuesday, simply reflected the country's political reality.

"Today there are really only two candidates who can win the presidency: Putin and Medvedev," he said by telephone.

"We have made our choice," he added.

Bovt said it was vital that the country continues Medvedev's policy of modernizing the political and economic systems.

"This course needs to be carried on — and only Medvedev can guarantee that. If he does not stand, his presidency will be a failure," he said.

His words were echoed by Leonid Gozman, Right Cause's other co-founder. "There may be no real political life in the country, but there is one real political choice: for modernization or against modernization," he said in a statement on the party's web site.

Both Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin have left open the question of whether they will run for re-election. Putin handed over the presidency to his close aide Medvedev in 2008 because the Constitution bars him from running for a third consecutive term.

No other party has announced a presidential candidate yet.

The announcement drew scorn from other parties, which told The Moscow Times that it only proved that Right Cause is Kremlin-sponsored.

"This exactly shows what they are. They cannot do anything but support the powers that created them," said Galina Mikhalyova, a senior Yabloko official.

Right Cause, formed about two years ago by former leaders of the pro-business Union of Right Forces, or SPS, was widely seen as a Kremlin attempt to round out the political spectrum with obedient parties.

Ilya Yashin, a leader of the Solidarity opposition group, said Right Cause was too minuscule a political force to worry about. "They still have not provided any evidence that they can act independently," he said.

Both Yashin and Mikhalyova said Right Cause's decision to support Medvedev would have zero influence on their groups' decisions on nominating a presidential candidate.

Solidarity has teamed up with opposition figures Mikhail Kasyanov, Vladimir Ryzhkov and Vladimir Milov to present a single candidate next year.

Yashin said the new movement, dubbed For a Russia Without Arbitrariness and Corruption, will also try to register for the State Duma elections in December 2011.

Sergei Markov, a State Duma deputy for United Russia, said the decision to support a presidential bid for Medvedev was good publicity for Right Cause but bad news for the president.

"This is a serious blow to Medvedev," he said, explaining that Right Cause included "radical liberals" like participants at the protests for free assembly held on the 31st of every such month.

Markov said that while it was too early to say whether the president should run for re-election, there was only one party he should be associated with.

"Medvedev's party is United Russia," he said.

A Kremlin spokeswoman refused to comment on the matter.

United Russia is headed by Putin, although he is not a member. Medvedev also is not a party member and has largely stayed clear of party politics in the past.

But prominent politicians have begun to rally around Medvedev's modernization policies. Earlier this fall, Duma deputies with the Just Russia party initiated a movement called Go Russia to support Medvedev. The cross-party organization was also supported by Right Cause leaders.

United Russia immediately followed suit, setting up a rival movement also called Go Russia. In an apparent nod to United Russia, Putin last month officially authorized United Russia's movement to use "Russia" in its name.

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