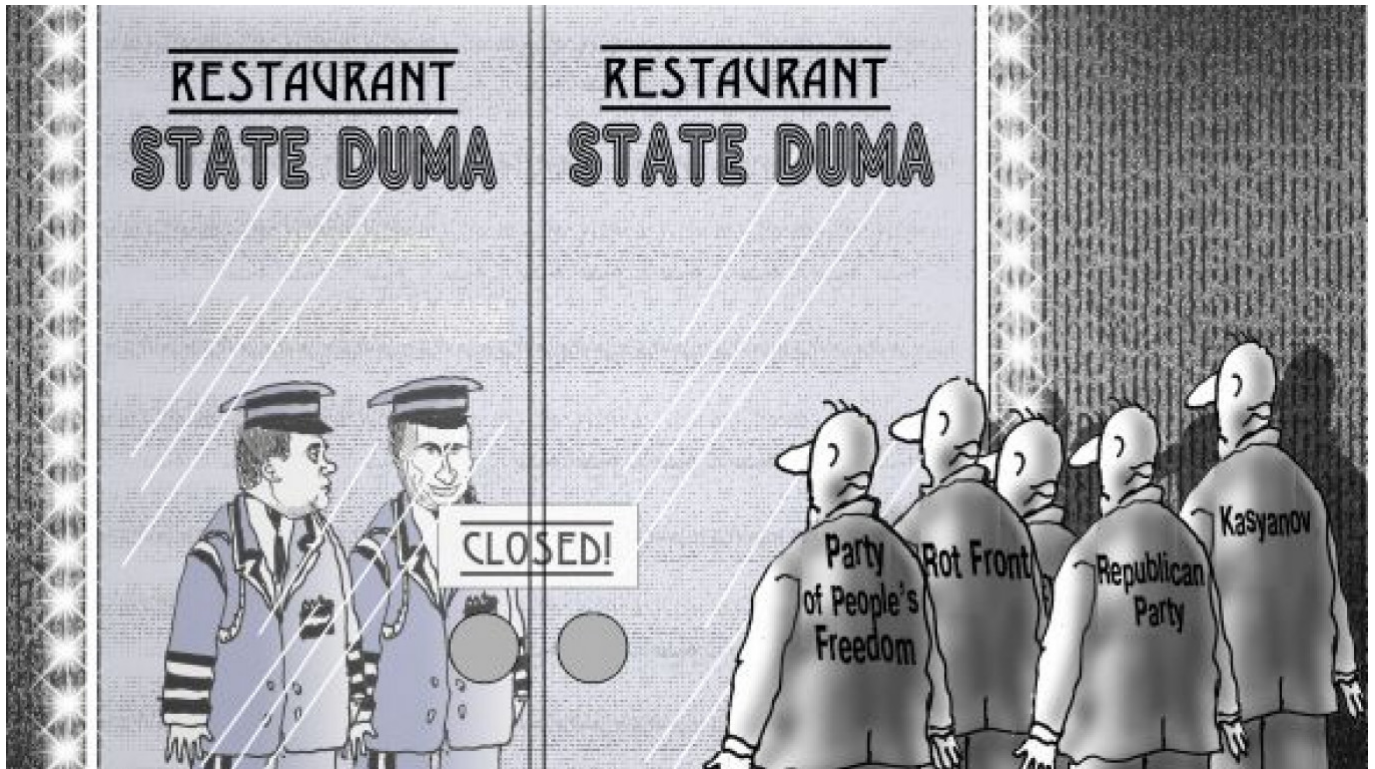


Why My Party Wasn't Registered

By [Vladimir Ryzhkov](#)

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The Justice Ministry on Wednesday refused to register the opposition Party of People's Freedom, thus denying my party its constitutional right to participate in the December State Duma elections. The ministry also denied the constitutional rights of millions of the party's supporters across the country to choose their representatives in parliament. Polls taken in late 2010 and in the first six months of 2011 show that 2 percent to 4 percent of the population outside Moscow support the Party of People's Freedom. In Moscow, 9 percent of adults 18 and older questioned in a May Levada Center poll said they would vote for the Party of People's Freedom in the Duma elections.

The official reasons for the Justice Ministry's decision do not hold water. The only violations that authorities at the Justice Ministry and Federal Security Services could drum up among our 46,000 party members were: four juveniles and 13 party members who were deceased, which could only be planted by our opponents or the authorities; 39 members whose internal registration documents did not match their city of residence, a common occurrence when someone moves to a new city in Russia and by no means constitutes a violation for registering a party; statements from 20 people on the party list who, presumably under pressure and

threats of the FSB, claimed they were not party members; and 2 members who had a past criminal record.

Even if for the sake of argument these claims were legitimate and these 82 members were removed from the party ranks, the party would still have well over the 45,000 members required by law.

In addition, the Justice Ministry claimed that the party's charter does not allow for rotation of its leadership. This is total nonsense. The charter clearly stipulates that at regularly scheduled party congresses, a vote will be held to determine the party leadership. In addition, the party's charter is identical to the charters of other parties that received registration; we did this intentionally to not give the authorities an opportunity to fish out violations.

We have seen these kinds of tricks many times over the past six years. In December 2005, the opposition Republican Party, which I headed, tried to change its address and create several new regional branches. It turned to the Justice Ministry with a request to make the necessary amendments in the ministry's register of legal entities. The ministry balked, saying the party had not provided proof that its latest congress was legitimate. Then the Justice Ministry asked the Supreme Court to disband the party, which it did in May 2007.

I sued the Russian government over this decision in the European Court of Human Rights. In April, the court ruled that the 2007 dissolution of the Republican Party was unjustified and violates the European Convention on Human Rights, which Russia ratified in 1998.

The European court also ruled in this decision that Russia's law on political parties is draconian and overly onerous. It was precisely this law that the Justice Ministry used as its legal cover to not register the Party of People's Freedom. Thus, Russia simply repeated the anti-constitutional practice that the European court ruled was illegal. This is one of the reasons why Federation Council Deputy Speaker Alexander Torshin and Constitutional Court chief justice Valery Zorkin last week called for Russia to not subject itself to decisions of the European Court of Human Rights against Russia.

Over the past four years, nine opposition political parties were not registered on trumped-up violations. For example, when Mikhail Kasyanov tried to run against then-President Vladimir Putin in the 2008 presidential election, the Central Elections Commission disqualified Kasyanov on the unfounded charges that 13.36 percent of the signatures he collected were invalid. Opposition politician Eduard Limonov's party was also not registered. The leftist Rot Front has been turned down five times since last year over technicalities. In the latest instance, in April, the Justice Ministry said the party emblem, a fist held high, could be interpreted as promoting extremism.

On Thursday, President Dmitry Medvedev said disingenuously that the Party of People's Freedom could be registered in the future. All it has to do is start from scratch and refile its registration documents to the Justice Ministry, thus mocking not only the party and its supporters but the Constitution and rule of law as well.

The motive behind the Justice Ministry decision is obvious — to remove an opposition party that the Kremlin fears months before elections. Putin and his “party of thieves and crooks” —

along with its off-shoot, the All-Russia People's Front, which is signing up entire villages, factories and the country's postal and railway workers in one fell swoop — is preparing once again for massive election rigging in parliamentary and presidential elections.

The refusal to register the party is politically motivated and illegal. The anti-constitutional exclusion of liberally minded Russians who support the Party of People's Freedom has already made the Duma and presidential elections illegitimate. We appeal to all citizens to protest against the Kremlin's corruption, arbitrary rule and gross abuse of power that time after time tramples on their constitutional rights and human dignity.

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