

At the Brink, A Just Russia Puts on a Brave Face

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August 16, 2011

The  Moscow Times

With A Just Russia facing an uncertain future, party founder Sergei Mironov has lashed out at reports that it was desperately courting the likes of liberal politicians Vladimir Ryzhkov and Boris Nemtsov and former nationalist leader Dmitry Rogozin.

Analysts said the reports appeared to be a smear campaign by the party's powerful enemies but insisted that A Just Russia's best chance at survival was to go independent now that it has fallen from the Kremlin's grace.

Mironov dismissed a [report](#) in Moskovsky Komsomolets on Tuesday that said the party has reached out to Dmitry Rogozin, Russia's envoy to NATO and the former leader of Rodina, a nationalist party that, like A Just Russia, was created shortly before a round of State Duma elections to steal votes from the Communists.

The daily said Rogozin had agreed to run in the Duma elections in December with A Just

Russia, but only if given the top slot on the party list instead of Mironov.

Mironov said that the party has asked Rogozin, still formally a party member, to run on their election list, but he did not reply and terminated his party membership. Rodina, which was created in 2003, was one of the three parties that merged in 2006 to create A Just Russia.

Mironov dismissed a report in Moskovsky Komsomolets on Tuesday that said the party has refused to put Dmitry Rogozin on its Duma ticket. Both politicians are struggling to register their own Party of People's Freedom, which was banned in June by the Justice Ministry from running in the Duma elections.

Nemtsov and Ryzhkov have also denied the story. Nemtsov, an outspoken critic of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, acknowledged to holding unspecified talks with A Just Russia, but told Interfax that the party "needs first to decide whether they're with Putin or against him."

Vedomosti also named Igor Yurgens, chief of the Kremlin's main think tank, the Institute for Contemporary Development, as a potential ally for A Just Russia, but Yurgens denied the report the same day.

Mironov said Monday that the party was in talks with several Duma deputies with United Russia, including unspecified "celebrities and household names" who might cross over to A Just Russia, Infox.ru [reported](#).

Prominent members of other parties and public activists without political affiliation are also invited to join the party, Duma Deputy Oksana Dmitriyeva of A Just Russia said by telephone Tuesday.

She only identified one person who has crossed party lines, saying outspoken St. Petersburg legislator Sergei Malkov, who quit the Communist Party in mid-July, would run on the Just Russia ticket.

The reports about A Just Russia courting big-name candidates are probably orchestrated by Kremlin first deputy chief of staff Vladislav Surkov, the person widely seen as being behind the creation of both A Just Russia and Rodina, said political analyst and former Kremlin spin doctor Stanislav Belkovsky.

"Surkov doesn't like A Just Russia ... and has waged a longtime turf war against Mironov," Belkovsky said by telephone.

He speculated that Rogozin's nomination for the party list was real and aimed at weakening Mironov.

He also called the reports about Yurgens and Nemtsov "a bluff" and said Ryzhkov, who takes a more reserved stance on the Kremlin than his allies from the Party of People's Freedom, was the only viable candidate to join A Just Russia.

Mironov's party has suffered a string of setbacks recently. Mironov himself was stripped in May of his post as Federation Council speaker by the ruling United Russia party, and four party leaders deserted to the All-Russia People's Front, also affiliated with United Russia.

Earlier this month, the leadership of the party's branch in the Krasnodar region resigned to protest Mironov's decision to appoint former federal official Konstantin Pulikovsky as branch head, Yuga.ru [reported](#).

Analysts say the main reason why authorities have withdrawn their support for A Just Russia is because the party has been chipping votes off United Russia.

A Just Russia has grown increasingly hostile recently toward United Russia, but not toward Putin or President Dmitry Medvedev. It has not indicated whether it intends to run in the Duma race as a pro-government or an opposition force.

The party's campaign chief, Oleg Mikheyev, refused to tell The Moscow Times on Tuesday anything about the party's election strategy or its possible new members.

A draft campaign platform, released on the party web site in April, repeated the party's leftist goals to fight corruption and step up social security, but did not dwell much on its relations with the government.

Mironov said Monday that he was confident the party, which holds 38 of the 450 seats in the current Duma, would clear the 7 percent threshold in the December elections.

But the party remains in the risk zone, with approval [ratings](#) stuck between 4 percent and 8 percent since April 2009, according to independent pollster Levada Center, whose surveys have a margin of error of 3.4 percentage points.

The party will only survive if it manages to marshal "protest votes" of people who are "eager to vote for none of the above or for anyone but United Russia," Belkovsky said.

Mikhail Vinogradov, an analyst with the St. Petersburg Politics Fund, a think tank, said he expected A Just Russia to sneak into the Duma because its criticism of United Russia "will most likely work to its benefit in these times of social depression."

Recruiting members of the unregistered Party of People's Freedom could also bring A Just Russia a few extra votes, Vinogradov said by telephone.

But whether Mironov will make the party independent — which is the only way to ensure its survival in the long run — remains to be seen, Vinogradov said.

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