

Right Cause Warns of a Monarchy in Kremlin

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Mikhail Prokhorov's Right Cause party has accused the presidency of becoming an all-powerful monarchy and called for more powers for the State Duma.

"During the 2000s, presidential power acquired many features of a monarchy. The Constitution places it above legislative, executive and judicial branches of power," the pro-business party wrote in a manifesto released Friday for the Duma election in December.

"What awaits us, if we do not change? In the unfolding [economic] crisis, we are suffering more than others," it said.

Right Cause proposed the introduction of a constitutional cap on the number of seats held by one party in the Duma and to elect one-quarter of deputies directly as opposed to through party lists. It also wants the Duma to have the right to impeach ministers.

"We are the citizens of Russia, and we are not happy. ... Our desire for a better life, for creative,

free work for our own good is being suppressed. We are working and feeding our families not thanks to the state but despite it," the manifesto said.

Right Cause also said promises by President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to agree between themselves whether one of them will run in the presidential election next March are flawed.

"We do not need two competent leaders deciding between themselves on how the country will live but many thousands of responsible leaders, regularly rotated in their positions," the party said.

Right Cause, which is targeting the middle class, currently has the support of only 3 percent of the electorate, according to independent polling agency Levada. Prokhorov, who is Russia's third-wealthiest person with an estimated fortune of \$18 billion according to Forbes magazine, would need to more than double that support to clear a 7 percent threshold to get his candidates elected.

Prokhorov has said he would like to become prime minister, and the manifesto criticizes changes implemented by Putin during his presidency from 2000 to 2008. Putin, who remains the country's most popular politician, abolished direct elections of regional governors and Duma deputies. Putin says he wants to revitalize his United Russia party, bring in new faces and help the party maintain the two-thirds majority in the Duma that allows it to change the Constitution.

Russian liberals lost two elections in the Duma in 2003 and 2007, and their defeat deprived the growing middle class of political representation. A May Levada poll showed that about one-third of middle-class Russians want to emigrate.

Medvedev has sought to win the support of the middle class with his agenda of modernization and fighting corruption, but many of his initiatives are seen as lacking seriousness.

Medvedev, who, unlike Putin, does not have his own political party but said he may join one in the future, met Prokhorov soon after he was elected to head Right Cause — a gesture interpreted by analysts at the time as a blessing.

(Reuters, MT)

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