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Yavlinsky to Run for Duma With Yabloko

By Alexey Eremenko

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Yabloko party co-founder Grigory Yavlinsky will come out of political retirement to head the party's list in the State Duma elections, the party announced Sunday at a Moscow congress.

Yavlinsky, 59, handed over the reins of Yabloko, which he co-founded in 1993, to Sergei Mitrokhin in 2008 but kept a seat on the party's political committee. Now the duo will occupy the top two spots on the party's federal list in the December vote, Interfax reported.

The third spot will go to Alexei Yablokov, a noted environmentalist and corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Also running on the party ticket will be Novaya Gazeta editor-in-chief Dmitry Muratov; Anatoly Leirikh, a senior member of Delovaya Rossia, a business lobby group; and Andrei Rudomakha of Environment Watch North Caucasus, a nonprofit group known for reporting about a Black Sea mansion of unclear ownership dubbed "Putin's Palace."

Yabloko members Valery Borshchyov, who headed an independent investigation into lawyer Sergei Magnitsky's death for the Kremlin's rights council, and Sergei Kovalyov, head of the Memorial rights watchdog, will also run.

The party, which has had no faction in the last two Dumas, will field 380 candidates nationwide. A quarter of them are women, two-thirds have higher education, and 15 percent hold academic titles, said party spokesman Igor Yakovlev.

Party candidates will "go to the Duma to draft legislation and clean the Augean stables that have piled up there over all these years," Mitrokhin said at the party congress.

The party electoral platform is called "Russia Wants Change" and subtitled "We're bringing back your hope." Its focal point is a crackdown on the privileges of state officials and rampant graft. The program also backs a Kremlin proposal to create a joint missile defense shield with NATO, despite the alliance's oft-expressed reluctance to accept the offer.

Yavlinsky said at the congress that the party hopes to scoop 10 to 12 percent of the vote, provided it is not overly rigged and turnout reaches 60 to 70 percent.

Meanwhile, on Saturday, the country's arguably least successful party, the Patriots of Russia, held its own congress in Moscow that also approved a program and a party list for the Duma vote, Interfax said.

The party, whose approval ratings hover around 1 percent, the same as Yabloko, decided to place its leader, Gennady Semigin, at the top of the party list. Rounding out the top three names on the list are party official Nadezhda Korneyeva and obscure actor Sergei Makhovikov, who was once awarded a prize for "playing men of courage in movies and on television."

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