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Kudrin to Create Liberal Party

By Alexander Winning

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Former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin said he is ready to take part in the creation of a liberal political party and has consulted ousted Right Cause leader Mikhail Prokhorov on the issue.

Kudrin, speaking in an interview with Vedomosti published Monday, did not specify exactly how the new party might take shape, but he expressed confidence that it would fill a niche.

"The consolidation of liberal and democratic forces will follow from now on," he said. "I'm absolutely sure of this, and I'm willing to assist in this matter."

He confirmed that President Dmitry Medvedev had asked him to lead Right Cause, saying he turned down offers in spring 2010 and March 2011 over concerns that the party was overly dependent on the Kremlin.

He also said the authorities are well aware that the political system is "incomplete" without a functioning liberal party, and this "severely limits ... citizens' opportunities to get across their preferences at the elections."

Kudrin said he had spoken about the need for a new party with Prokhorov, a billionaire who announced a bid for the Kremlin on Monday. But he and Prokhorov said separately that no coordinated decision had been made on creating the party.

Prokhorov said he would be willing to work with Kudrin as the "integrator of the liberal democratic opposition."

Alexander Shokhin, head of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, called on the two to find common language. "It is most important to elaborate a common platform that can attract liberal voters. We would like for them to come to an agreement," he told Interfax.

Kudrin also said United Russia's party program "does not correspond to the challenges of the modern age" and said calls for Central Elections Commission chief Vladimir Churov to resign were legitimate.

Medvedev demanded Kudrin's resignation during a televised meeting in September after Kudrin publicly declared that he would not serve in a Cabinet led by Medvedev.

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