

Prokhorov Sees Kudrin As Prime Minister

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Presidential hopeful Prokhorov meeting supporters last week in Moscow. **Misha Japaridze**

Billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov, who plans to challenge Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in the presidential election next March, said the government's policies may lead the country to an "economic catastrophe."

"I categorically disagree with it," Prokhorov said on a talk show late Sunday on the NTV channel when asked about Putin's economic program. "The current program will lead us to an economic catastrophe sooner or later."

Putin's United Russia party on Dec. 4 suffered its worst setback from one nationwide election to the next when it garnered 49 percent of the vote for the lower house of parliament, compared with 64 percent four years ago. Thousands of Russians took to the streets to protest the results of the contest that observers from the United States and Europe said was neither free nor fair.

Prokhorov, 46, Russia's third-richest man according to Forbes magazine and the owner of the New Jersey Nets basketball team, last week announced his plan to run for president. He re-entered politics after resigning in September as the leader of the Right Cause party, accusing President Dmitry Medvedev's administration of blocking the group's preparations for the parliamentary vote.

Some opposition leaders including Boris Nemtsov, former deputy prime minister under ex-President Boris Yeltsin, said Prokhorov, who has yet to announce his program, acted in agreement with Putin, to channel the frustration of protesters.

Prokhorov said other political parties lie when they promise to increase spending before elections instead of being honest that the country does not earn the money it spends.

Even if you strip away corruption, "there won't be enough money for all social programs that have been announced," Prokhorov said. "If oil drops to \$60 tomorrow instead of \$115, we will have a budget catastrophe."

Prokhorov said he would consider former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin, who resigned in September citing disagreements with President Dmitry Medvedev over spending, for the premiership post if elected president. He pledged to reject a proposal to become prime minister himself in a Putin administration because of differences in views on Russia's economic future. Instead, he will build a new political party from scratch, he said.

He also called for cutting the presidential term to five years from six years and reviving the direct election of regional governors. Prokhorov declined to directly criticize Putin, saying "the time hasn't come yet."

Ideas voiced at a Dec. 10 rally on Bolotnaya Ploshchad, the largest against Putin in central Moscow, were very close to his own, Prokhorov said.

"What happened there was an absolutely unique phenomenon for our country," Prokhorov said. "Successful people came out, and they came out as there is no dialogue with authorities."

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