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Prokhorov Party Sign-Up Begins

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Prokhorov's party is still nameless. **Ignat Kozlov**

Billionaire-turned-presidential candidate Mikhail Prokhorov invited supporters to join his own political party over the weekend, which he has promised to found after the March 4 election.

Prokhorov said nothing about the party's ideology, but it will face numerous competitors if it follows his liberal, pro-business stance.

One of them, Right Cause, the party Prokhorov briefly headed last year, announced Friday that it supports Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's bid to return to the Kremlin.

Prokhorov said in a statement on his campaign website Saturday that the party, which has no name yet, should be built by its members who would decide its political direction.

"You will make this party yourself. You will define its program, its aims and its actions," he wrote.

By late Sunday, more than 21,500 users had registered on the site .

When he first announced his party plans earlier this month, Prokhorov predicted that it would soon have millions of supporters nationwide.

Prokhorov also said the party would be built by his supporters in the regions.

The tycoon bitterly complained in September about the Kremlin's policy of interfering in party politics when he was ousted as leader of Right Cause in a coup led by pro-Kremlin activists.

On Friday, Right Cause elected acting party chairman Andrei Dunayev as its leader.

A party convention in Moscow also adopted a resolution saying Right Cause hopes that "the liberalization course will continue and that voters will support Putin in the presidential election," Interfax reported.

But rightist liberal convictions are widely seen as no more than a niche in the country's politics.

Right Cause finished last in the December Duma elections, winning just 0.6 percent of the vote.

A Levada poll published Friday predicted just 6 percent for Prokhorov, the second-lowest total in the field of five candidates running in Sunday's election. Putin is widely expected to win.

What's more, there is no shortage of parties or party projects with a similar ideology.

Former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin is said to be working on his own liberal party together with Igor Yurgens, a prominent adviser to President Dmitry Medvedev, who made headlines last week by saying he would prefer to see Kudrin rather than Medvedev as prime minister after the election.

Last fall's shake-up in Right Cause also made prominent liberals led by Leonid Gozman leave and resurrect the Union of Right Forces, the country's main pro-business party in the 1990s.

Other Union of Right Forces leaders had refused to join Right Cause when it was first set up in 2008, saying it was a Kremlin project.

The most prominent of them is Boris Nemtsov, who became a co-founder of the Solidarity movement and later the unregistered Party of People's Freedom, or Parnas.

Hopes by Nemtsov and his partners to overturn the Justice Ministry's refusal to register their party received a boost after they were invited for talks with Medvedev last week.

Another rightist force could reappear soon. The European Court of Human Rights ruled last month that the refusal to register Vladimir Ryzhkov's Republican Party was wrong. Ryzhkov has joined Parnas in the meantime.

Yet another competing party project is Right Turn, a movement created by Boris Titov, head

of the Delovaya Rossia business group.

Titov co-founded Right Cause in 2008 but has gradually turned toward openly supporting Putin. In May 2011, he became a founding member of Putin's All-Russia People's Front.

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