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68 New Parties Seeking Registration

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The Justice Ministry has received 68 new applications to form political parties, a State Duma deputy said, RIA-Novosti reported.

The applications come amidst deliberations on a bill that will soften the requirements for creating a political party by dropping the total number of required members from 40,000 to 500.

The bill passed a first reading in the Duma on Feb. 28, together with two other laws reforming the political system that include one on direct elections of governors and another lowering the number of signatures required for candidates to participate in elections.

During a meeting of a working group tasked with planning reforms for the political system, a decision was made to conclude discussions on the proposed law on political parties in both houses of parliament by the end of March, said chairman of the Duma Committee on Constitutional Legislation and State Building Vladimir Pligin.

The working group is composed of representatives of both registered and unregistered parties and headed by First Deputy Chief of Staff Vyacheslav Volodin.

A second reading is scheduled in the Duma on March 20, with plans for a third reading to be completed in time for the March 28 meeting of the Federation Council, Pligin said.

Co-chair of unregistered party Parnas and working group member Vladimir Ryzhkov evaluated the group's work positively and said he is optimistic that subsequent readings of the bill will go smoothly. He said the president could sign the bill into law by April 10 or 11.

That could mean the law on political parties will go into effect before the presidential inauguration on May 7 and the end of Dmitry Medvedev's term as president.

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