

Nashi Head to Launch Political Party

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Yakemenko says his party will target young “creative or middle-class” people who “have their own opinions.” **Vladimir Filonov**

Vasily Yakemenko, the founder of the pro-Kremlin youth group Nashi, announced plans Monday to create a new political party designed to attract the young, disaffected, middle-class voters who were drawn to the opposition protests.

The new party, tentatively named the Party of Power, will be formed in the next two or three months and will be ready to field candidates for municipal elections in the fall, Yakemenko announced at a news conference.

The party will target “creative or middle-class” people aged 25 to 35, who “have their own opinions” and “don’t want important decisions in the country’s life to be made without them,” he said.

“The generation whose thinking remains weighed down with ideas from Soviet times must be squeezed out of the ruling elite,” Yakemenko said on the same day that he was replaced as

head of the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs.

The new organization — which he said aims to replace the ruling United Russia party — intends to fight against “bureaucracy” and the “oligarchy” that has “ridden a financial wave” in the country.

Yakemenko said he believes that the new party can attract protest participants because opposition leaders “are not in a hurry to create political parties.”

He said it could also attract participants of pro-Putin rallies who have grown disillusioned with United Russia.

“I don’t believe United Russia will win in the [Duma] elections in 2016,” he said. “I don’t believe that it can satisfy people of the future.”

Political analysts predicted that Yakemenko’s project would fail because of his tarnished image and link to the Kremlin.

Yakemenko admitted that he “certainly coordinated” the initiative with the Kremlin and “received support there.”

Anna Lunyova, of the Center for Political Information, said Yakemenko’s initiative “shows what Putin and his circle are intending to do to channel [public] discontent.”

“People who are able to think will not be distracted by this,” she predicted. “Money will be allocated, then it will be siphoned off and another abortive organization will have been created.”

She said targeting municipal elections was telling because similar elections on March 4 brought people “unwanted” by the authorities into office — people who are “young, full of initiative, who have learned to pose questions like where does the budget money go and who want to get the answers.”

Yakemenko said his party’s platform would be drawn from proposals posted by bloggers about ideology and strategy on an Internet platform to be created.

He estimated that the party’s core following should be about 500 or 600 people with up to 10,000 more sympathizers.

Olga Mefodyeva, of the Center of Political Technologies, said Yakemenko’s track record was not impressive, as Nashi had failed as “a force that could represent the ruling regime.”

Yakemenko “has not offered a model for working with youth” and was now “trying to play toward topical issues to prove his own usefulness to the authorities,” Mefodyeva said.

But Yakemenko “has no allies in Russian society,” therefore the “prospects for his new force are not so good,” she said.

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