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Popular Actor Tapped to Revive Right Cause

By Alexander Bratersky

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Okhlobystin once worked as creative director of phone seller Yevroset. **Maxim Stulov**

A charismatic priest-turned-actor known for his eclectic political views was nominated to head the supreme council of the centrist Right Cause party in an attempt to boost its falling popularity.

Ivan Okhlobystin, 46, best known for his role on the sitcom "Interns," in which he plays a womanizing doctor, will be in charge of formulating strategy for the pro-business party, its chairman, Andrei Dunayev, wrote Tuesday on Twitter.

Last year, the Right Cause party, founded in 2008 by ex-members of the liberal-democratic Union of Right Forces party, was briefly headed by billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov, who wanted to use it as his election vehicle for the State Duma vote in December.

Party spokesman Yevgeny Yefimov said that Okhlobystin "shares party values," but that the

actor was not known to advocate center-right views.

He is a strong supporter of private gun ownership, a position supported by Right Cause.

The actor made headlines in September when he turned a performance in Moscow's Luzhniki stadium into a lecture, backing conservative values and endorsing a doctrine of "aristocratic nationalism."

"I am a very tumultuous personality, and I feel comfortable in tumult," Okhlobystin told The Moscow Times in an interview after the event.

That same month, Okhlobystin announced his intention to run for president, but he later reversed his decision, saying it was not favored by the Russian Orthodox Church.

A former Orthodox priest, Okhlobystin was defrocked in 2010 by Patriarch Kirill for pursuing an acting career. Okhlobystin also worked for a time as creative director of mobile phone retailer Yevroset.

Okhlobystin reportedly still has ties to church circles and recently authored a letter to Orthodox Church head Kirill regarding the trial of three members of punk band Pussy Riot.

He stated in the letter that the case has damaged the church's image in society and called on Kirill to facilitate a pardon for the group's members, who are accused of hooliganism for staging a performance in Christ the Savior Cathedral in February against Kirill's support of President Vladimir Putin.

Analysts noted that Okhlobystin's role in the marginal, Kremlin-connected Right Cause party might be used to divert attention from the opposition.

In the mid 1990s, Okhlobystin took part in the Duma election campaign for the Kedr green party, created with the Kremlin's blessing. He described his participation in that party as "pure business," aimed at distracting voters from the Communist Party.

"I was on the last ship of black PR," he said about his participation in the Kedr project.

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