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Prominent Opposition Figures to Skip 'March of Millions'

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Alexei Kudrin **Igor Tabakov**

One day before the first major anti-government protest since June, opposition heavyweights distanced themselves from the "March of Millions" planned for Saturday in the capital.

Billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov and former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin, two of the most prominent, though not the fiercest, critics of the government's policies, will not take part in the protest, news reports said Friday.

Leaders of the liberal Yabloko party said that they would not officially take part in the march because there were too many groups with extreme views among the organizers.

"We decided that party members will take part only as private citizens because we do not feel comfortable with the makeup of the organizing committee," Galina Mikhalyeva, a deputy head of the party's Moscow branch, told The Moscow Times.

The absence of Prokhorov, Kudrin and the Yabloko party could deal a further blow to a protest that appears unlikely to draw as many attendees as other opposition marches held since December.

Analysts said that the turnout for Saturday's protest was hard to gauge, but just over 8,000 people were signed up to attend the protest on the event's two Facebook pages as of late Friday.

Yabloko Party leader Sergei Mitrokhin said that nationalists and left-wing radicals had taken a dominant role in the run-up to the march. "We cannot partake in an event that is dominated by red flags and brown uniforms," he said in a statement on the party's website.

Mitrokhin added that this did not mean that his party does not support the protest.

"Yabloko opposes the corrupt oligarchic Putin regime," he said, adding that members are not forbidden to partake in the Moscow march and that the party even has organizer status in opposition marches in other cities.

Mikhalyeva said it was more important for Yabloko to focus on the Oct. 14 regional elections. Asked whether she would join Saturday's protest, she said that she was too busy preparing paperwork for the vote in the southern Krasnodar region.

Opposition figure Vladimir Milov agreed with Yabloko's prioritizing of vote preparation, saying earlier this week that the street protests were "senseless" and that it was better to concentrate on elections. Milov's Democratic Choice movement is cooperating with Yabloko in some regions.

Among the March of Million's official organizers are Denis Bilunov and Sergei Davidis, both leading activists of the Solidarity movement. Solidarity co-founder Boris Nemtsov and former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov are taking part in the march as co-leaders of the People's Freedom Party, or Parnas, Interfax reported. The party's third co-leader, Vladimir Ryzhkov, won't be in Moscow because he is campaigning for an election in the Altai region city of Barnaul, the report said.

Also not taking part is Prokhorov, a source close to the billionaire who requested anonymity to speak freely told The Moscow Times on Friday. The former presidential candidate is currently busy forming his new political party Civil Platform.

Earlier, Interfax quoted sources in the march's organizing committee as saying that neither Prokhorov nor Kudrin were planning to attend.

Kudrin, who was at an international forum in Yalta on Friday, did not immediately comment.

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