

Why I Want to Enter a Sham Parliament (Op-Ed)

By [Dmitry Potapenko](#)

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I have decided to stand for parliament as a candidate for the only party devoted to protecting private business.

People tell me it is an exercise in futility; that this new party will also fall under the control of the authorities; and that the State Duma itself is held on a tight leash by those in power.

I agree.

I have always said that there is only one party in Russia, and that is the presidential administration. Russians live in a feudal system, and we see on a daily basis how so-called "officials" behave toward the business community. I understand all of that perfectly well.

But I have a simple choice. I could tell myself that this whole system is dead in the water, that we are all feudal peasants, and that I should just crawl quietly back into the kitchen and mind my own business — literally.

Or I could take a second approach, and this is the one I prefer.

I am not a businessman — I am an entrepreneur, a word taken from the French "entreprendre" that means to undertake, initiate or start something. I have long taken action, and now I am trying to help create one more small mechanism of influence that would enable the business community to convey its demands and aspirations to those who make the decisions.

I sometimes ask my fellow businessmen why I am the only one raising a ruckus. After all, almost all of us have grounds for complaint. The authorities are either bulldozing our shops or seizing our businesses outright. So why aren't any of them coming forward? Folks, the authorities are chopping your legs off and you can't even muster the courage to say it hurts! I feel as if I am crying alone in the wilderness.

We constantly take abuse from the law enforcement agencies, the Federal Tax Service, local fire departments, and so on. When the Tax Service reports that it collects more taxes each year even while the number of businesses declines, it means that ever fewer businesses are paying ever higher taxes.

And what are taxes? They are payments businesses make in return for certain government services. But those services never appear and tax collectors keep demanding more. That shows the inherent flaw in the logic of how the national budget is formed.

The current dialogue between the state and the business community is like that between a butcher and a cow. I am in favor of doing something to change that, and not just fretting about it in my kitchen or on social networks.

Here is a simple example: Russian truckers have parked their vehicles outside Moscow for the last four months in protest for their rights. They have gathered at Khimki and Tyoply Stan and are going hungry. If just one out of every 10 local shop owners who sell the goods those men truck in would bring them a little food to eat or a few rubles to live on, those protestors could go on fighting for their rights and ours.

Yes, the Duma is the Kremlin's lapdog, but what good does it do to just blabber about it? Get up off your backside and do something about it!

I have a clear goal in taking part in these parliamentary elections — to promote the rights of small and medium businesses. My task is to gather the demands and aspirations of ordinary businesspeople and convey them to the power-brokers at the top.

I know that others, both in parliament and elsewhere, are also trying to do something to effect change.

I am also well aware that even if our party wins five Duma seats, we can't put an immediate end to this problem.

But, at least, if we do win something, our voice will be louder than it was before.

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