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Exiled Oligarch Khodorkovsky Starts Search for Putin Replacement

By Katie Marie Davies

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Mikhail Khodorkovsky

Exiled Russian oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky has announced his search to find Russia's next president.

The former Yukos chief is asking Russians to nominate potential Russian leaders via his project "Vmesto Putina" or "Instead of Putin."

Khodorkovsky confirmed that he would

financially⊠support
a⊠candidate
chosen⊠through the project
to⊠rival
Russia's⊠current
president,⊠Vladimir Putin,
in⊠the country's 2018 presidential elections.

He also confirmed that he would not run for president himself.

“For⊠many years,
Kremlin⊠spin doctors
have⊠told the people of
⊠Russia
that⊠there
⊠is no
alternative to Putin,” the⊠project states on its website.
⊠“
We⊠want to show that
⊠among 145
million Russians, we⊠have
⊠people
who⊠are
⊠able to take up the post.”

A⊠panel of political experts
have⊠already
put⊠forward
13
notable⊠figures
⊠who they would like to see receive
Khodorkovsky's⊠support
.⊠
Russians⊠
will⊠be able
⊠to back their favorite
nominee⊠via the
project's website.

Candidates⊠include former Finance Minister
Alexei⊠Kudrin, leader of Parnas
opposition
party Mikhail Kasyanov, and⊠
former⊠judge Tatyana Morschakova.

The⊠nominations were made without
⊠prior consultation,
and⊠those put forward to take

part in the project only heard of their own involvement on Monday morning.

One candidate, the deputy head of Transparency International Russia, Yelena Panfilova, "fell off her chair" when she heard the news, Russia's RBC newspaper reported.

Others were less enthusiastic about their surprise nominations.

"I am asking the creators of this little game to remove my name and photo from their site," journalist Elena Rykovtseva wrote on her Facebook page. "I'm ready to follow this project from the sidelines, but no more!"

Other candidates, such as activist Alexei Navalny, are legally unable to hold office within Russia due to past criminal convictions.

Speaking to reporters on Monday, presidential spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that the Kremlin had "no interest in the project."

"We have already read about this project in the media," said Peskov. "It is a project which is being developed by people who are already irrevocably cut off from Russia, what's going on here, and from the Russian agenda. We do not see anything of interest in this project at all."

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