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Russian Businessman Says He's Running for President to Prove Youth Supports Putin

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Rakhman Yansukov (Artem Korotaev / TASS)

The head of a pro-Kremlin business association has announced he will run for president, following bids from two celebrity journalists and amid criticism that the upcoming vote is likely to be more show than substance.

Rakhman Yansukov, president of the Avanti Association of Entrepreneurs for the Development of Patriotic Business, says he is running to prove to opposition leader Alexei Navalny that Russia's youth supports President Vladimir Putin.

Navalny has led a series of nationwide anti-corruption rallies that drew a significant number of young Russians to the streets in what some have dubbed a "youth revolution."

Yansukov is the former assistant to Chechen businessman Umar Dzhabrailov, the founder of Avanti, currently awaiting trial over a shooting at a five-star Moscow hotel last summer.

He was also a boss to Yelizaveta Peskova, the daughter of Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, who served as Yansukov's adviser at Avanti in summer.

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In a letter to the business outlet RBC on Wednesday, Yansukov described young Russians as patriotic "no matter how much Alexei Navalny tries to prove the opposite by rocking the boat at a difficult time."

Foreign states are trying to destabilize Russia "under the guise of spreading and establishing democratic values," Yansukov wrote to RBC.

"[I am against] passing off the fight against officials and commercial entities as work to eradicate corruption, and unauthorized protests as the will of citizens and democratic freedoms."

Yansukov says his platform will "improve the current national idea" and promote "business-patriotism."

His announcement follows those of journalist Yekaterina Gordon and celebrity and journalist Ksenia Sobchak. Putin, who has not yet announced his candidacy, is expected to participate and win.

Navalny, Russia's most active opposition politician, is barred from registering as a candidate due to criminal fraud convictions that critics say are politically motivated.

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