

Revamped Nationalist Group Goes Legal

By [Alexander Bratersky](#)

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A notorious nationalist group has unexpectedly won a five-year battle for registration with the Justice Ministry, in line with what analysts said was a Kremlin plan to create a controllable right-wing movement.

It remains to be seen, however, whether nationalists, most of whom distrust and resent the authorities, will flock to the banners of the Congress of Russian Communities.

The group was established as a political party in 1992 and merged into the Rodina party after failing to make it into the State Duma in 2003 elections. It was resurrected in 2006 but only managed to register as a public movement with the Justice Ministry on Wednesday, the legal news service RAPSI [said](#).

The group, headed by Alexei Zhuravlyov, a member since the mid-1990s, will focus on defending the rights of ethnic Russians, including abroad, its founding father Dmitry Rogozin [told](#) Nezavisimaya Gazeta.

Rogozin said the group has "no serious political ambitions." Nevertheless, senior member Andrei Savelyev told the newspaper that it might consider some way of participating in State Duma elections in December — in which it is barred from running unless it is registered as a political party. Savelyev did not elaborate.

Rogozin also said that while he supports the group, he currently has no plans to quit his day job as Russia's envoy to NATO, Kommersant [reported](#).

The Congress of Russian Communities may unite disjointed patriotic groups, nationalist-minded political analyst Viktor Militaryov said Thursday.

"Most nationalist organizations are weak and small, and many would be willing to take advantage of the opportunity to join the group," Militaryov said by telephone.

Nationalism is on the rise in the country, as evidenced by December violent rioting on Manezh Square near the Kremlin, where some 5,500 protesters clashed with police, shouting racist chants.

But the sole prominent nationalist group, the Movement Against Illegal Immigration, was banned for extremism in April. Nationalists announced last week that they planned to create a new umbrella group called Russkiye (Russians), but it remained doubtful whether they would be able to register with the Justice Ministry, which has rejected most requests by independent political groups in recent years.

Nevertheless, radical nationalists will likely be put off by the Congress of Russian Communities' continued ties with Rogozin, a noted political chameleon who traded an anti-Kremlin position with Rodina for a government job at NATO in the mid-2000s, said independent political analyst Stanislav Belkovsky.

Rogozin may actually return to the group and lead it to join the All-Russia People's Front, the new movement created by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin for the Duma elections, Belkovsky said by telephone.

A source within the Congress of Russian Communities said the overhauled group had been tailor-made for Rogozin. The group is now "but a wrapper for a single person," the source said by telephone.

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