

Opposition Party Parnas to Leave Political Reforms Working Group

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The unregistered Party of People's Freedom, or Parnas, said Thursday that it sees no reason to continue participation in the activity of a working group initiated by President Dmitry Medvedev to design political reform legislation.

The package of proposed political reforms, which include easing registration rules for political parties and returning the direct election of governors, has been viewed as a concession to opposition groups in the wake of mass public protests against election fraud in recent months.

Parnas member Konstantin Merzlikin said in a statement Thursday that the working group is not taking the opposition's interests into account, saying changes recommended by Parnas and opposition parties Russian People's Democratic Union, also known as RNDS, and Left Front were not accepted for examination by legislators.

"I was told [by someone] in the presidential administration that not a single one of the fundamental changes to the party legislation proposed together by Parnas, RNDS and Left Front that were approved at a meeting of the working group will be examined at a committee

meeting," Merzlikov said.

He said the main adjustment the opposition parties were pushing for was a simplified procedure for registering new parties and measures to ensure parties' "independence."

"It's becoming obvious that the so-called Medvedev political reform and the announced ambition to take the opposition's interests into consideration is nothing more than a profanation," Merzlikov said.

A State Duma committee meeting to discuss changes to the draft laws is scheduled for Friday, he said in the statement.

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