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# Police No Longer Feel the Need to Deny Use of Torture

By Paul Goble

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It is bad enough when officials violate the laws of their country but try to hide what they are doing from public view, but it is far worse when they conclude that they can act with impunity and therefore no longer deny what they are doing. And that is exactly what some Interior Ministry officials have concluded regarding the police's use of torture.

In an article in the Russian edition of Newsweek released Monday, Elizaveta Mayetnaya and Pavel Sedakov note that while some policemen have been charged with using torture, most of those suspected of doing so have escaped responsibility because of the interconnectedness of the police and investigators.

About The Columnist

Paul Goble is a longtime specialist on ethnic and religious questions in Eurasia. Most recently, he was director of research and publications at the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy. Earlier, he served as vice dean for the social sciences and humanities at Audentes University in Tallinn

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This pattern was highlighted this past weekend when Russian anti-torture activists marked the International Day for the Support of Victims of Torture, a day Mayetnaya and Sedakov say presents special difficulties for Russia, which "consistently ranks in the top five countries where torture is most often employed."

At one commemoration, Oleg Khabibrakhmanov of the Nizhny Novgorod Committee Against Torture told the journalists that "earlier when [the militia] beat subjects, [the officers] tried not to leave traces." Now, he continued, "no one makes that effort," confident that prosecutors will not bring charges against them.

Natalya Taubina, director of the Public Verdict Foundation, agrees and points to research that anti-torture activists have conducted showing that "only eight percent of tortures were effectively investigated." The majority were treated "superficially, not objectively" and in ways that allows prosecutors not to bring charges.

An analysis of Russian cases before the European Court on Human Rights shows that inadequate investigation of charges of torture is "a systemic problem of Russia," said Olga Shepelyeva of the Public Interest Law Institute. The Strasbourg court has ordered the payment of compensation, "but no one draws any conclusions" about this pattern.

In addition to the complicity of investigators and prosecutors, anti-torture activists say, Russian policemen have another method of avoiding responsibility. They often threaten those they are torturing with even worse if they report it, and on occasion, the police have fabricated cases against those who nonetheless do.

"Despite the formal independence of the investigators from the police," Taubina says, the links between the two are "very strong." The investigators depend on the police for gathering information, and consequently, the procuracy's investigators are reluctant to bring charges against the police. Those links must be cut or at least reduced, activists argue.

That will be very difficult given the Russian criminal justice system, and consequently, the only hope is that prosecutors will take reports of torture by the police more seriously. But that doesn't appear to be happening, and this is one of the reasons why "70 percent of Russia's citizens don't trust the police and doubt that those in the force structures will defend them."

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