The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Traffic Cop Job Costs $50,000, Report Says

August 18, 2010

Police officers and prosecutors top the black market list of jobs that can be bought freely in a country where crime and law enforcement have become increasingly entangled, a human rights group said in a report.

Clean Hands, an independent human rights group monitoring corruption cases, said there was a trend among politicians to blame corruption on Russia's cultural traditions.

"Such an interpretation is pretty widespread, but it is nothing else than a means of manipulating public opinion in a bid to justify the growth of corruption in Russia," the group said in a 46-page report posted on its web site, Rusadvocat.com, late Tuesday.

Clean Hands made its conclusions after analyzing 6,589 complaints from ordinary people received between July 2, 2009, and July 30, 2010.

In the report, Clean Hands said those wanting to secure jobs in the prosecutor's office or in the police force often had to pay.

Citing information provided by ordinary citizens and workers for security organizations, the group said the job of an aide to a district prosecutor could cost $10,000.

The job of a traffic police officer is the most popular position, carrying a $50,000 price tag, it said.

Some senior Federal Security Service officers are involved in protecting entrepreneurs or seizing businesses in the interest of others, the report said.

The Investigative Committee and the FSB declined immediate comment on the report.

Russia is ranked 146th out of 180 nations in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index.

U.S. anti-bribery group TRACE International said this year that extortion by corrupt officials has become so widespread that some Western companies considered pulling out altogether.

Citing Interior Ministry data, Clean Hands said a standard bribe in Russia averaged 44,000 rubles ($1,450) in mid-2010, almost double the average of 23,000 rubles at the start of the year.

President Dmitry Medvedev, halfway through his four-year term, has made eradicating corruption, building a law-abiding society and reforming the police force his top priorities.

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