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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Police Chief Slams Liberties, Migrants

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Moscow's police chief questioned on Wednesday whether civil liberties are even practical when authorities need to keep law and order and blamed non-Muscovites for up to 70 percent of all crimes committed in the city.

Vladimir Kolokoltsev's remarks supported Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's comments a day earlier on introducing possible restrictions on movement into big cities like Moscow or St. Petersburg, a move that seems to target dark-skinned people in the Caucasus.

The death this month of a young Slavic football fan in a fight with people from the Caucasus has led to a nationalist backlash that has spilled into racist violence on the streets. A protest outside the Kremlin saw thousands of Slavic hooligans chanting "Russia for Russians!" and beating nonwhites. Police have since arrested thousands to head off further disturbances.

On Wednesday, Kolokoltsev said he would create a police department to combat “ethnic crime,” and he asked whether Russians' freedom of movement around the country was partly to blame for the violence.

"All these problems are more difficult to solve compared with a time when a much tougher

registration system was in place," he said. "We really need to have a look at how far our liberal democratic principles correspond to the demands and desires of the city population."

President Dmitry Medvedev, in contrast, has suggested that participants in unauthorized rallies get a mandatory prison sentence rather than a fine and a warning.

Kremlin critics say ethnic tensions are being fanned deliberately as a pretext to introduce repressive legislation ahead of the 2012 presidential election. They say the measures floated by authorities could cripple attempts to hold peaceful anti-government demonstrations. Vladislav Surkov, Medvedev's first deputy chief of staff, even laid the blame for the violence squarely with Kremlin critics, saying the racist hooligans followed their example of taking to the streets.

On a related issue, Kolokoltsev said the number of crimes registered by Moscow police this year fell by 12 percent, with non-Muscovites to blame for at least a half of them, Interfax reported.

Russian and foreign migrants were perpetrators in 49 percent of solved crimes, and the figure may stand at 70 percent if unsolved crimes are also included, Kolokoltsev said.

He said he would not provide statistics for non-Muscovite criminals based on ethnicity, warning about the danger of fueling nationalist hatred. But then he specified that a “huge percentage” of rapes were committed by Central Asian natives.

He said the number of rapes soared by 79 percent year on year between January and October.

Nevertheless, the number of crimes is down, with only thefts not changing from 2009, and the number of murders, robberies and violent attacks falling by 11 percent to 23 percent, he said.

(AP, MT)

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