

Russia Faces Pressure After Report on Graft

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Russia may face international embarrassment if it fails to fulfill its obligations to the Council of Europe's Group of States Against Corruption, or GRECO, in fighting graft and other unscrupulous practices.

A report made public in December said Russia carried out just over a third of the group's 26 recommendations.

The nine obligations that Russia fulfilled include establishing an anti-corruption strategy, improving law enforcement coordination and the recruitment of prosecutors, ethics training and establishing guidelines for tax authorities.

Comprehensively criminalizing corruption and creating effective punishments for offenders are the two recommendations that were not at all implemented.

The rest of the proposals are considered partially implemented.

Yelena Panfilova, head of Transparency International, said that while failure to stamp out corruption will not lead to conflict between Russia and Europe, it could result in international disgrace if the country has to explain to the Council of Europe why the obligations were not met.

“The arrow will pierce the heart of the great empire,” Panfilova said.

GRECO said Russia should implement all the recommendations it has partially fulfilled or hasn't fulfilled at all.

“We expect further progress to be reported within 18 months,” said Bjorn Janson, deputy executive secretary of GRECO.

Russia, which is a GRECO member, is obliged to report how the recommendations are being implemented, but “GRECO isn't telling [the country's officials] what they should do,” he said by telephone from Strasbourg.

Janson added, however, that if any country refused to fulfill the organization's recommendations it could be theoretically expelled.

Russia is working in close cooperation with the international agencies to fight against corruption, said Alexei Volkov, head of the State Duma's commission on anti-corruption legislation.

Russia has ratified two international conventions to fight corruption, including the United Nations Convention against Corruption and the Council of Europe Criminal Law Convention on Corruption, and has amended the domestic legislation in line with these conventions, Volkov told The Moscow Times.

He said, however, that the country still should “deeply analyze” some proposed measures and “see how they will work in Russia taking into account our culture and traditions.”

“It's a matter of the future. We'll be discussing it. The work is underway, because the level of corruption is high,” Volkov said.

Georgy Satarov, president of Indem Foundation, said the country faces problems enforcing not only international obligations, but even domestic laws, including the Constitution.

Panfilova of Transparency International said Russia has a long way to go before corruption can be effectively stamped out.

She cites the court system that mostly serves the state and the lack of a concept of conflict of interest, among other things.

“It might take years,” Panfilova said.

The Justice Ministry, which is in charge of fighting corruption, didn't respond to the request sent by The Moscow Times on Tuesday.

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