

Moscow Seeks End to PACE Reviews

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The  Moscow Times

Russia wants the Council of Europe to end its practice of regularly monitoring the country's compliance with democratic standards and has proposed a 25-item road map toward this end.

Andreas Gross, a Swiss lawmaker and one of two country rapporteurs for Russia in the council's Parliamentary Assembly, confirmed Thursday that the Russian delegation had submitted the list but expressed doubt that it would be adopted.

"It is more of an overview of the main obligations plus a claim that practically all have been fulfilled," Gross said by e-mail.

"This is a judgment which we can hardly share," said Gross, who just completed a monitoring mission in Russia last week.

But members of the Russian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly, also known as PACE, said the document should pave the way to finally end the monitoring.

"In it we will list the obligations whose fulfillment allows Russia to leave the PACE monitoring," an unidentified delegation member told Kommersant.

PACE is currently holding its winter session in Strasbourg.

The Russian road map contains the 25 obligations Moscow assumed after becoming a member of the organization in 1996, the newspaper said.

Among those obligations are some recently honored by Moscow, like the ratification of a key protocol of the European Human Rights Convention that the State Duma passed a year ago.

Others, like the abolition of capital punishment, have not been met. While the Constitutional Court in 2009 indefinitely extended a moratorium on the death penalty, its formal abolishment has been hindered amid stiff opposition in parliament.

State Duma and Federation Council lawmakers want the 25 items set in stone now because they fear that Russia might be asked to meet new and possibly uncomfortable resolutions from PACE, Kommersant said. "We need to get the road map approved to avoid an exorbitant inflation of obligations," Duma Deputy Leonid Slutsky was quoted as saying.

Past resolutions by the 47-member organization have included a call for Moscow to renounce its recognition of the independence of Georgia's breakaway republics South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

But Gross said it was simply too early to say what the road map might contain.

"We agreed with our Russian colleagues to work out such a road map. ... But we cannot say today what it will contain and where it will lead to," he said.

The Council of Europe, which includes every European state except Belarus and the Vatican, requires all new members to be monitored by two rapporteurs who regularly draw up reports on how the country is honoring its obligations.

Currently, 10 members, ranging from Armenia to Serbia, are subject to monitoring, while Bulgaria, Montenegro and Turkey have recently been declared compliant. PACE members are currently debating whether to slap monitoring on Hungary after it passed controversial media legislation.

Gross and his Hungarian co-rapporteur Gyorgy Frunda completed a monitoring mission last week that took them to Moscow and Kazan. The two also visited oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky in prison. They plan to publish their next report by early 2012.

PACE's last report on Russia was published in 2005.

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