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Prosecutors: 1.7M Rights Violations in 1H 2012

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The Prosecutor General's Office said Monday that it had discovered more than 1.7 million human rights violations over the first half of 2012, as European lawmakers continue to criticize Russia for its human rights record.

On average, the number of violations discovered is up this year: In the first 10 months of 2011, prosecutors discovered more than 2.3 million violations of citizens' rights and freedoms, the office said last December. That makes an average of 230,000 violations per month, as compared with an average of 280,000 violations per month in the first half of this year.

The Prosecutor General's Office said it could not provide commentary in time for this article.

Over the first half of 2012, the office filed 130,000 protests against unlawful legislative and regulatory acts and brought 475,000 lawsuits, it said in a release on its website. As a result of its discoveries, disciplinary action was taken against 154,000 people and entities,

91,000 people and entities were held liable for civil offenses, and 7,700 criminal cases were opened, it said.

However, human rights activist Andrei Babushkin told The Moscow Times that out of thousands of human rights complaints has filed with the prosecutor, it has taken action on only a few hundred. He estimated that about five percent of his complaints had results.

"I don't think they work very effectively," said Babushkin, chairman of the Committee For Civil Rights organization. "They work poorly with complaints from citizens."

The prosecutor examined 1.8 million requests from citizens in the first half of the year, it said in the report.

At the end of November, the United Nations Committee Against Torture criticized Russia in a report for failing to take effective action against widespread reports of torture and other abuses, Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty reported. The committee also said authorities had failed to investigate and prosecute "numerous and consistent reports" of intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders and journalists in Russia.

In September, the European Parliament adopted a resolution criticizing the enforcement of human rights and judiciary independence in Russia, citing the prosecution of the punk band Pussy Riot, lawyer Sergei Magnitsky and opposition party member Gennady Gudkov as examples of politically motivated intimidation.

In the latest development in the growing PR war with the West, the Foreign Ministry said Wednesday that respect for human rights was declining in the European Union.

The prosecutor's announcement comes on the internationally observed Human Rights Day.

In his first post to a new blog on his personal website on Monday, State Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin noted Human Rights Day and said the chapter of the Russian constitution dealing with citizen rights and freedoms "works directly and immediately and is a unique achievement of the constitution."

"Naryshkin has started a blog. He's writing something laughable about the constitution and human rights," Ridus news service tweeted in response to the post.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Friday that Russia would bar entry into the country for Americans guilty of human rights violations. The announcement came on the heels of the U.S. Senate's passage of the Magnitsky Act, which places visa bans and asset freezes on Russians suspected of involvement in human rights violations.

The State Duma plans to take up legislation this week on visa and economic sanctions against Americans who have violated the human rights of Russians, RIA-Novosti reported Monday.

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