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European Court Asks Russia to Give Convicts the Vote

By The Moscow Times

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The European Court of Human Rights wants Russia to amend the part of its Constitution that restricts the voting rights of prisoners serving jail terms, a report said Friday.

The restriction violates the European Convention on Human Rights, which stipulates that people have an equal right to vote, the Strasbourg-based court said Thursday, Kommersant reported.

The court ruled in favor of two Russians who had claimed that they couldn't participate in the parliamentary elections while serving their prison terms between 2000 and 2008. Sergei Anchugov was sentenced to 15 years in for murder, theft and fraud, while Vladimir Gladkov received the same punishment for committing the first two of those crimes but got parole later.

Dmitry Dedov, the judge representing Russia in the ECHR, said the court's decision was

unanimous. He added that amending the legislation shouldn't be a problem.

The Justice Ministry said that it will decide whether to appeal the ECHR's ruling after examining it thoroughly and getting to know the position of "the competent government agencies."

The ECHR's decision is likely to face resistance in Russia's Constitutional Court, the report said. "I vowed to adhere to the Constitution, not the convention," one of its judges, whose name was not disclosed told Kommersant.

According to the Russia's Constitution, imprisoned citizens have no right to vote or be elected.

There are currently about 700,000 convicts in the Russian prison system, according to the International Center of Prison Studies.

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