The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Amnesty Sought for Officials Who Fabricated Criminal Cases

By Oleg Sukhov

October 03, 2013



Kremlin human rights council head Mikhail Fedotov on Thursday proposed an unusual provision for an upcoming amnesty marking the 20th anniversary of the Constitution: extending it not only to victims of fabricated criminal cases but also to officials who initiated the false charges.

Human rights activists and opposition politicians have suggested applying the amnesty scheduled for Dec. 12 to alleged political prisoners, among others, but Fedotov is the first to suggest extending it to those responsible for trumping up charges against innocent people.

"The amnesty could apply not only to those put behind bars as a result of fabricated cases but also to the organizers of such cases, investigators and all those who helped to fabricate them," he said ahead of a meeting of the human rights council devoted to the amnesty.

Last month, President Vladimir Putin instructed the council to submit proposals for the

amnesty, and much of the attention has been on whether it will apply to prominent prisoners such as former billionaire oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky or Pussy Riot members Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina.

Putin said last month that he did not rule out freeing suspects in the Bolotonoye case, which the opposition believe to be politically motivated, and State Duma Deputy Pavel Krasheninnikov said the suspects could be included in the Dec. 12 amnesty. The case stems from an opposition rally in May 2012 that ended in violent clashes between protesters and police.

The plans for the Dec. 12 amnesty come as a similar measure for white-collar criminals is being implemented. Business ombudsman Boris Titov, who led efforts to carry out the amnesty for businessmen, has also proposed granting legal status to certain undocumented migrants in the country.

Human rights council member Tamara Morshchakova said Thursday that thousands of people could be pardoned as part of the Dec. 12 amnesty.

With regard to Fedotov's unorthodox proposal to pardon fabricators of criminal cases, veteran human rights activist Lev Ponomaryov said the measure could mitigate civil strife by offering "guarantees" for some officials in case of a power transition and thereby prevent bloodshed.

"I believe this would be useful," Ponomaryov, head of the For Human Rights group, told The Moscow Times.

If such officials are not treated with leniency, "there will be a bloody revolution," he said.

But Krasheninnikov, head of the Duma's Legislation Committee, said his committee was unlikely to support the proposal to grant amnesty to fabricators of criminal cases.

Fedotov said that, in general, the amnesty should be broad.

"It should draw a symbolic line after the 20-year revolutionary and post-revolutionary era. A reset button should be pushed," he said. "The amnesty should be worthy of the Constitution, the anniversary of which it is supposed to mark. It could become a historic milestone."

Ponomaryov argued that the amnesty should apply to hundreds of thousands of people, noting that these would include only a few dozen political prisoners. A large percentage of nonviolent offenders were convicted on trumped-up drug-related charges, he alleged.

He also said he supported an amnesty for those who have served at least three-fourths of their jail terms for nonviolent crimes, which would apply to Khodorkovsky. The businessman has been in prison since 2003 for alleged tax evasion and embezzlement in two cases that many analysts believe to be Putin's retaliation for challenging his authority.

Vladimir Osechkin, an expert at the Kremlin human rights council, said last month the measure could be applied to Khodorkovsky and the two Pussy Riot members, Izvestia reported. But he said the amnesty was unlikely to be granted to the Bolotnoye case suspects.

Fedotov said he supported granting amnesty to pregnant women, women with children, physically impaired convicts and veterans of World War II.

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