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Ethnic Relations Ombudsman Post 'to Be Discussed' With Putin

By The Moscow Times

October 18, 2013

The Kremlin's ethnic relations council will discuss the possibility of appointing an ombudsman responsible for migration policy at a meeting with President Vladimir Putin in Ufa next week, a news report said Friday.

Interethnic relations in Russia has been a thorny issue in recent times, particularly since the outbreak of nationalist riots in southern Moscow last week that erupted following the killing of a Russia, supposedly by an Azeri.

The new post's incumbent would answer directly to the president and have authority to coordinate the work of government agencies in the field of migration policy, the council's member and State Duma deputy Alexei Zhuravlev told Izvestia.

He added that the ombudsman should also have the authority to deport illegal migrants from Russia.

The other council members support the initiative, the report said.

Council member Aslambek Paskachev said that the body has been considering the idea of monitoring interethnic relations for a long time. "The temperature of interethnic relations in the country should be measured regularly," he said.

Another council member and deputy, Viktor Vodolatsky, believes that creating the new position should only be the first step and that a ministry responsible for interethnic policy should be established.

Mikhail Denisenko, dean of the Department of Demographics at the Higher School of Economics, has suggested introducing two ombudsmen to fulfill the role, instead of just one. The latter would need to be a person with a strong personality, who would monitor and provide unbiased reporting of the current state of interethnic relations in the regions, Denisenko said.

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