

Protest Crackdowns Illegal, Human Rights Ombudsman Says

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Police detaining a demonstrator at an unsanctioned rally in Moscow to protest sentencing of opposition activists.

Russian human rights ombudsman Vladimir Lukin called crackdowns on unsanctioned opposition protests illegal.

According to Russia's Supreme Court decisions, unauthorized protests were not necessarily illegal, Lukin said, Interfax reported. He added that often the protests pose no disturbance to citizens and that violations should only be pursued when the actions "create a real threat to public safety, the life and health of participants and others."

Recent unauthorized demonstrations protesting Russia's military presence in Crimea have led to what monitoring services say were hundreds of detentions for "attempts to violate public order." Lukin mentioned a protest held on Sunday at Manezh Square in central Moscow that was fenced off and "created no obstacle to ordinary citizens." The ombudsman said that

police often detain people at random, including bystanders.

Another march on Sunday in support of intervention in Ukraine was held along major Moscow streets without any incidents.

Lukin accused police of using pre-written reports of the detention situation and just filling in the details of individuals. The ombudsman also criticized the court system for lacking any sort of adversarial system to contest allegations, saying the practice was not consistent with the rule of law.

Opposition politicians such as Alexei Navalny and Boris Nemtsov were detained at a late February protest in support of the "Bolotnaya" defendants, seven of whom were sentenced to between 2 1/2 and four years in prison for participation in alleged riots at a May 2012 protest. Navalny was sentenced to one week's arrest for disobeying police despite claiming that video evidence showed he did not resist arrest.

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