

Putin Moves to Slash Penalties for Bribery

December 17, 2014



Russia ranked 136th out of 175 countries in Transparency International's latest annual Corruption Perceptions Index, which was unveiled earlier this month.

Scaling down another anti-corruption measure, the Kremlin has introduced a bill to decrease fines for small-scale graft — because nobody pays them anyway, a presidential envoy said.

A bribe under 25,000 rubles (\$366 as of midday Wednesday) is currently punishable with fines of between 25 and 50 times its size. But a bill drafted by the office of President Vladimir Putin now proposes to bring the fine's lower threshold to 10 times the bribe's size.

The minimum fine for bribe-givers in such cases will be brought down from 15 to five times the bribe's size, according to the bill, which passed the first of three readings on Tuesday.

For corrupt officials taking bribes of up to 150,000 rubles (\$2,200), the fine's lower threshold is to be slashed from 20 to 10 times a bribe's size. The time frame for paying will also be extended from 30 to 60 days, and from three to five years for those whom the court has allowed to pay in installments.

Graft can also be punished with set fines, community service and jail time, all of which would also be reduced in accordance with the bill. The bill does not affect bribes that are larger than 150,000 rubles.

The initiative apparently stems from the lackluster performance of the anti-corruption measure. Only between 15 and 20 percent of fines imposed over lesser bribes are actually paid, presidential envoy Garri Minkh said earlier in comments carried by the TASS news agency.

The Prosecutor General's Office listed 5,100 cases opened against bribe-givers and 5,400 against bribe-takers between January and October of this year.

Prosecutors' online statistics did not provide a breakdown of the bribes' sizes or specify the fines imposed.

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