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Police Will Guard Hermitage, Tretyakov and Pushkin Museums Despite Staff Cuts

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Police officers will remain stationed only at sites deemed "critically important" by the government.

Police officers will continue to guard Russia's most famous art museums, but will be pulled from smaller venues beginning this fall, Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokoltsev was quoted as saying by the Interfax news agency last week.

The Interior Ministry last month announced that funding cuts would force the ministry to remove officers from guard duties at Russian museums beginning in November, sparking outrage from museum directors such as Mikhail Piotrovsky of the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg.

However, on Thursday, Kolokoltsev said "the largest museums ... will remain under police protection," only pointing specifically to the Hermitage, as well as the Tretyakov Gallery and the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow, according to the report.

Following the Interior Ministry's announcement last month, Piotrovsky told the Ekho Moskvy radio station that he was seeking answers from authorities about whether the Hermitage would lose its police protection, or would be included in a small group of exceptions where officers would remain.

The Interior Ministry currently deploys 3,500 cops to guard Russian state institutions, banks and cultural venues. Beginning on Nov. 1, the number of officers posted to guard duties will be reduced to a mere 262, the government's Rossiiskaya Gazeta daily reported Thursday.

Police officers will remain stationed only at sites deemed "critically important" by the government, the report said, while other venues will have to rely on private security firms for their own security needs.

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