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Putin Uses Federal Guards to Monitor Public Mood

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Russian President Vladimir Putin is concerned about a possible erosion of his support amid the country's deep economic recession, and has his secretive Federal Guard Service (FSO) monitor and try to assuage protest moods in the country, Bloomberg reported Wednesday.

The drop in Russians' living standards has been the subject of several meetings Putin held with aides over the past few months, the report said, citing unidentified people familiar with the discussions. So far, the president is counting on the nation's much-lauded willingness to endure hardships — especially if they are perceived as the price of Russia's glory and security — and hopes the economy will begin recovering next year, the sources were quoted as saying.

But the FSO has been ordered to monitor the levels of public discontent in regions hit especially hard by the recession, Bloomberg reported. A government task force responds by doling out subsidies when polls show discontent, the report said.

“We conduct constant monitoring, especially in the problem cities,” the state-bank executive in charge of the task force, Irina Makiyeva, was quoted by Bloomberg as saying. “The FSO is an integral part of our working group.”

The ruble has lost about half of its value against the U.S. dollar over the past year, pushing millions of Russians below the poverty line, while millions of others dropped out of the middle class ranks.

The recession has made holidays in Europe no longer attainable for the majority of Russians, while traveling to popular resorts in Turkey and Egypt — for those in Russia who could still afford it — has been restricted by the government over the downing of a Russian passenger plane over Egypt, and the shooting down of an Su-24 bomber by Turkey.

So far, Russia has been suppressing political protest, prosecuting demonstrators with increasing severity. Moscow activist Ildar Dadin was sentenced to three years in prison this month for “repeatedly” breaking Russian protest laws, despite the prosecution calling for a two-year sentence, according to media reports.

Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the exiled former oil tycoon turned political opposition figure, predicted at a news conference Wednesday that “revolution in Russia is inevitable.”

He held the news conference in response to the Investigative Committee's announcement it was bringing new criminal charges against him.

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