The Moscow Times
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Russian Authorities Cannot Prohibit Rallies Over Security, Top Court Rules

June 18, 2019



Rally in defense of freedom of speech and journalism in Moscow **Mikhail Tereshchenko / TASS**

Russia's Constitutional Court has ruled that the authorities cannot refuse authorization for rallies over their inability to provide security, the state-run TASS news agency has reported.

Authorities in the Siberian city of Irkutsk rejected activist Valery Teterin's request to hold a rally last fall, citing Teterin's inability to define how organizers would ensure public order and security. Teterin appealed the decision, saying that Russia's laws on rallies don't clearly define requirements for ensuring public order.

The Constitutional Court ruled on Tuesday that although rally organizers should participate in ensuring order and participants' safety, the authorities are ultimately responsible for ensuring safety and security at protests.

Teterin's lawyer, Sergey Golubok, was cited as saying by the Fontanka news website that the vague wording of Russia's protest law has allowed the authorities to prohibit protests that clash with their agendas.

“I don’t like what the [rally] organizer has written, so let’s not consider their application. If we don’t consider the application, there will be no rally,” Golubok said.

“We only know that this is the tip of the iceberg,” Golubok told the BBC Russian service when asked if the Constitutional Court’s decision will affect the process of authorizing rallies throughout the country. “No one can say for sure how many public events are refused in Russia, since local authorities are involved. But there is no basis for this [refusal],” Golubok added.

A 2014 Russian law regulating protests, which critics say is unconstitutional, requires all protests and rallies consisting of more than one person to obtain prior approval from the authorities.

Original url:
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