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Top Russian Official Predicts Protest 'Explosion' if Economy Doesn't Improve

June 19, 2019



World Economic Forum / Flickr

Russia is at risk of nationwide social upheaval if the country's economy does not improve, the head of Russia's auditing agency has said.

During a Monday interview on state-run television, Audit Chamber head Alexei Kudrin described an upcoming "explosion" of protests caused by falling living standards and widespread poverty. The only way to prevent this is by transforming the country's economic system, he added.

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"For the past six years, the country has not taken advantage of the opportunities, and our share in the global economy has fallen. We have not become more competitive and efficient. We are in a state of economic stagnation that doesn't lend itself to optimism," he said.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Kudrin's comments had been an "emotional expression," adding that while poverty is a real problem that shouldn't be ignored, it also shouldn't be exaggerated, the state-run RIA Novosti news agency quoted him as saying.

Kudrin clarified his comments during a television appearance on Tuesday, saying he hadn't intended to encourage any protests.

"I simply meant that yes, there is a basis [for this argument], and it is associated with the decline in real incomes," RIA quoted him as saying. "And when so many people live below the poverty line in 2019, this worries me, and many citizens could begin expressing their concerns."

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