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Russia Could Re-Criminalize Domestic Violence After European Court Ruling, Senator Says

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Protest against the bill reclassifying domestic violence in Moscow's Hyde Park Sokolniki, February 2017
Sergei Fadeichev / TASS

Russia could make domestic violence a crime two years after lawmakers decriminalized some forms of domestic abuse, a top senator has said after a ruling by Europe's top human rights court put a spotlight on the issue.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) this month ruled for the first time that Russia failed to protect a woman who was assaulted, kidnapped and stalked by her former partner. The court said it had received around 100 domestic abuse complaints from Russian women between 2010 and 2018, while Russia's Justice Ministry placed the figure at six.

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“Yes, it’s possible,” senator Andrei Klishas said Tuesday when asked if Russia could criminalize domestic abuse.

Klishas, who chairs the upper-house Federation Council’s constitutional legislation committee, said the ECHR decision “could lead to legislative changes” in Russia.

“It would be difficult to comply with similar ECHR rulings” without such changes, he told the state-run TASS news agency.

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Klishas added that “it’s not a given” that lawmakers will restore the law they had abolished in 2017, but noted that new measures would move domestic abuse cases “to a criminal plane.”

A series of recent high-profile abuse cases has spurred activists to launch an online selfie campaign to push for a domestic violence law. Federation Council speaker Valentina Matviyenko said later that lawmakers would look at ways to strengthen protections for victims.

About one in five Russian women has experienced violence at the hands of a partner, according to official estimates, and activists say the absence of a dedicated law leaves many vulnerable.

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