

Russian Senator Slams Police Crackdown on Moscow Protests as 'Illegal'

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Violetta Nadbitova / MT

An ex-special forces commander and current Russian senator has called a recent police crackdown on protests in Moscow “illegal and incompetent” while the Kremlin has voiced support for the tough response.

Russian authorities detained hundreds of people and launched criminal cases against dozens at a series of election protests in Moscow over the past month. Video footage of violent arrests has stirred [anger](#) among critics who say the authorities used excessive force.

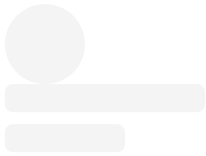
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“As a former special forces commander, I believe the actions of those forces involved in

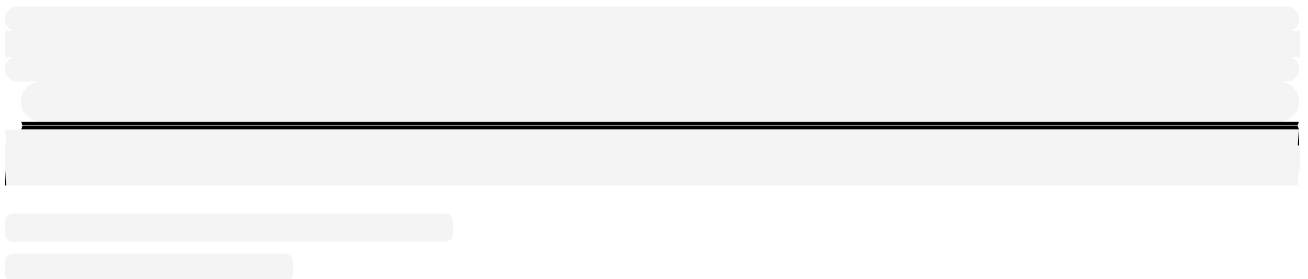
maintaining public order were illegal and professionally incompetent,” Vyacheslav Markhayev, Irkutsk region senator, said Monday.

Markhayev [wrote](#) on Instagram that the turnout of 50,000 at last Saturday’s rally, as well as that at previous rallies, “speaks to the fact there’s no other way [for protesters] to be heard by the authorities.”

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Публикация от Вячеслав Мархаев (@markhaev_v.m) 12 Авг 2019 в 7:01 PDT

"It's terrible that our country's citizens have fewer opportunities to express their opinions," said the Communist Party lawmaker.

"Bad authorities fight those who are discontent while good authorities fight the causes of the discontent."

Markhayev's criticism stands in stark contrast with the rest of Russia's political establishment and his own [party leadership](#). When asked why he decided to break ranks, he told the Meduza news website that "silence might lead us to unpredictable consequences."

Markhayev was tasked with setting up an anti-riot police unit in his native region in the mid-1990s and served at its helm until his promotion in 2000.

Meanwhile, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Tuesday said the tough police action at the rallies had been justified. Individual cases of police excess as well as alleged violence by protesters against police were being looked into, he said.

"We believe firm action by law enforcement to curb public unrest was absolutely justified," said Peskov, adding that he believed the police were fulfilling their duty to uphold law and order.

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