

Kremlin Council Offers Police Reforms

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The Kremlin's human rights council has sent amendments to a controversial police bill to President Dmitry Medvedev that call for a leaner police force, higher salaries for officers and regular meetings where the public can vent frustrations to the police, council members said Wednesday.

Also, a long-awaited replacement for Ella Pamfilova, who quit as council head in July, may be appointed within weeks, council member Alexander Auzan told a news conference.

Another council member, Valentin Gafter, said the police-drafted reform bill, ordered by Medvedev and much-criticized by the public after being posted online for review over the summer, was missing some key ingredients.

"We see uncoordinated efforts, not an in-depth reform," Gafter said.

One proposed amendment envisions regular meetings with local police officials where local authorities and ordinary citizens can criticize police work and interview candidates applying

to work on the police force, Gefter said.

“These meetings must not be held just for the sake of appearances,” he said.

Other proposals include conducting opinion polls through agencies not linked to the Interior Ministry and replacing the Interior Ministry’s public council with a “system” subordinate to Medvedev and not linked to the ministry, Gefter said.

The council also promotes downsizing the police force and allocating more money to raise the salaries of every rank-and-file police official.

“If he is paid 33,000 rubles, this will not be enough by 2012,” Gefter said. “Inflation will eat away this money.”

He said the council’s amendments should be included in the bill before it is sent to the State Duma, which is expected to happen this fall.

Medvedev promised in August to revise the 11–chapter bill, published on Zakonoproekt2010.ru, to take the public’s opinions into consideration before submitting it to the Duma.

The pledge was reiterated Monday by Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev.

Medvedev made police reform a priority after a series of embarrassing, high–profile incidents involving police violence and corruption. But he has been criticized for assigning the task of drafting the reform to the Interior Ministry, the very agency that analysts say is rotten to the core.

Meanwhile, Auzan said the council’s new head might be appointed within weeks.

“I believe that it will be a current member of the council, and this is very significant because it will show that the president treats the council as an important part of civil society,” Auzan said, refusing to elaborate on the names of possible candidates.

The council’s strategy will not change under the new head, he said.

The council will meet with Medvedev in November to discuss child rights, judicial reform and “the de–Stalinization of the public mind,” Auzan said.

Part of the de–Stalinization should be “restoring the memory of victims of Stalin’s repressions,” Auzan said, without elaborating.

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