

Interpol Warns of Rise in Marriage Scams

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December 22, 2010

The  **Moscow Times**

The head of Interpol's Russia office warned on Wednesday of a surge in marriage scams in which Russian women posing as potential brides trick Western men out of money.

Timur Lakhonin also blamed Europe's "policy of double standards" for Moscow's failure to secure the extradition of wanted suspects.

The number of marriage scams has jumped in recent years, with at least 50 women involved in one criminal scheme in the Marii-El republic, a hotbed of marriage scams, Lakhonin said at an end-of-the-year news conference in Moscow.

"More than 200 foreign citizens have fallen victims of such crimes," he said.

He said the scam involves women posing as husband-hunters but acting under the control of criminal gangs to swindle "potential foreign fiances" of money.

Seven criminal cases were opened so far, Lakhonin said, without elaborating.

Speaking of extradition issues, Lakhonin listed Britain, Austria and Sweden as countries that often deny Russian requests for suspects, and he complained that many of the suspects were actually criminals who deserved no sympathy.

“Unfortunately, these are not just isolated cases when wanted criminals are granted political asylum, citizenship or refugee status ... even individuals charged with murder, terrorism, banditry and illegal arms trafficking,” Lakhonin said.

“Sometimes refusal to extradite wanted persons is linked to a policy of double standards practiced in some countries,” he said.

Lakhonin declined to identify any suspects. But at least one of them is well known: Akhmed Zakayev, the Chechen insurgent wanted on murder, terrorism and other charges but granted asylum in Britain. Moscow also wants to extradite tycoon Boris Berezovsky and Yevroset founder Yevgeny Chichvarkin from Britain.

At least 37 extraditions were made to Russia this year and two more are expected next week, while 15 requests were denied, Lakhonin said, without elaborating.

Russia has extradited 19 suspects to 11 countries this year, most of them to other former Soviet republics, Lakhonin said.

A total of 1,542 suspects and convicted criminals who are currently on Interpol's wanted list were put on it by Russia, Lakhonin said. The figure includes 108 suspects and convicts in corruption cases, almost double from last year's 56.

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