

Children's Ombudsman Wants Probe Into U.S. Adoptions of Russian Orphans

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Pavel Astakhov

Russia's children's ombudsman has appealed to the Prosecutor General's Office to investigate the apparent adoptions of 11 Russian orphans by U.S. parents last year, despite Moscow's ban, a news report said.

Commenting on a recent report by the U.S. State Department that showed that 11 adopted children arrived in the U.S. from Russia in 2014, Pavel Astakhov blamed marriages where one of the spouses is a Russian citizen, the *Izvestia* newspaper reported Tuesday.

"Adoptive parents use that loophole and take children out of the country that way, circumventing the law," Astakhov was quoted as saying.

Russia passed a law banning U.S. adoptions in 2012, in retaliation for the U.S. Magnitsky Act — a law sanctioning Russians whom Washington deems involved in human rights violations.

The ban took effect on Jan. 1, 2013, but some adopted children were allowed to leave Russia after that date if their adoption by American parents had been finalized earlier, according to Izvestia.

The State Department report only specifies the time when adoptive children arrived in the U.S., not when the adoption might have taken place.

Astakhov said he was familiar with at least one case when a Russian-U.S. couple "took away" a boy, identified as Konstantin L., from St. Petersburg, Izvestia reported.

"Finding those children will be very difficult because currently the U.S. has effectively officially refused to cooperate with Russia by providing information about adopted children, they no longer have any intention to send us reports, and have even revoked a previously made decision about creating a unified registry of adopted Russian children in the U.S.," he was quoted as saying.

U.S.-Russian relations are at their lowest since the Cold War, over Moscow's annexation of Crimea and alleged meddling in east Ukraine.

"We believe that the Prosecutor General's Office should get to the bottom of this and find out how such a number of children could have gone for U.S. adoptions in 2014, bypassing all laws," Astakhov said, Izvestia reported.

The 11 adopted children who arrived in the United States from Russia last year mark a decline from 251 in 2013, and 752 in 2012, according to State Department figures. The number has gradually declined over the past decade, after standing at 4,639 in 2005.

The total number of adoptions from foreign countries in the United States has also shrunk during the same period, falling to 6,408 last year from 22,739 in 2005, according to the State Department report.

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