

Lawyers File Complaint Over Putin's Decree on Military Deaths

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A group of Russian lawyers filed a formal complaint with the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation in response to a presidential decree on military losses in peacetime, the Interfax news agency reported on Tuesday.

The decree, signed earlier in May by President Vladimir Putin, introduced a series of amendments to the Russian law on state secrets, banning information on all casualties sustained during peacetime special operations. According to observers — including a group of legal and military experts interviewed by The Moscow Times earlier in May — it provides confirmation of Russia's direct involvement in the conflict in Ukraine, which the Russian government denies.

Ivan Pavlov chairman of the Freedom of Information Fund, is part of the group filing the complaint. "We think that the president didn't have the right to classify such information as state secret because it's beyond his responsibilities," Pavlov was quoted saying by the news agency.

Pavlov told Interfax that a presidential decree is a regulatory act and as such cannot limit access to the information. He added that such a restriction can be put in place only by a federal law.

The issue of losses among the Russian military first gained prominence last summer, following reports of Russian paratroopers killed in Ukraine. The NGO Committee of Soldiers Mothers requested information on Russian soldiers killed in Ukraine in August 2014, but received no response from military investigators. State Duma Deputy Dmitry Gudkov filed an inquiry with the Defense Ministry in September, but his request for information was dismissed and the claims denounced as rumors.

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