

Russian Deputy Warns About Mosques Replacing Churches, 'Like in Switzerland'

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Gregory Postnikov / archive 66.RU / RBC

A Russian local deputy has warned about the threat of mosques replacing Orthodox cathedrals, weeks after thousands protested against the building of a new cathedral in central Russia.

Mass protests rocked Russia's fourth-largest city of Yekaterinburg last month as citizens clashed with vigilantes over the planned construction of a new cathedral in a popular central park.

Related article: [Why Are Russians Clashing Over a New Cathedral in Yekaterinburg?](#)

"If there is no cathedral, there will be mosques, and you will get another Switzerland," Yekaterinburg city deputy Alexander Kolesnikov said while commenting on the church controversy. "The government will work better if church bells are ringing."

Arthur Mukhutdinov, the head of the Muslim spiritual administration in the Sverdlovsk region where Yekaterinburg is located, said that the regions' Muslims were “deeply offended by such a provocative, inadmissible interpretation of the issue.”

“It is an attempt to present mosques as something obviously undesirable and negative, despite the fact that a significant part of Russia’s population is Muslim,” Mukhutdinov [said](#) in an open letter to Kolesnikov.

Adding that Kolesnikov’s statement may have been misinterpreted, Mukhutdinov asked the deputy to give a public statement to clarify his views.

This isn’t the first time Kolesnikov has landed in hot water over his public comments. During a February Duma session, he [said](#) that pedophiles “are not maniacs, but are usually drunk when these terrible crimes occur.”

Update: In comments to the Govorit Moskva radio station, Kolesnikov [said](#) that his words had been taken out of context.

He clarified that he had referred to Switzerland because he is an opponent of that country's 2009 ban on minarets and doesn't want for a similar conflict around religion to happen in Russia.

"No one can accuse me of religious intolerance," he said, adding that he had nothing to apologize for.

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