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By Nikolaus von Twickel

Senior United Russia Deputy Endorses Critical Report on Caucasus

In a rare show of unanimity, human rights activists and a senior United Russia lawmaker Monday endorsed a critical report on the North Caucasus.

The report by the Human Rights Committee of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly says the North Caucasus constitutes the most serious situation in the entire geographical area covered by the organization.

The Strasbourg-based Council of Europe combines all 48 European countries except Belarus.

The 318-member assembly will debate a resolution and policy recommendations on the report Tuesday.

The document accuses authorities in Chechnya of maintaining a climate of fear while government opponents and human rights activists have disappeared. It also points to worrying killings of journalists in Ingushetia and warns that rising extremist violence jeopardizes stability in Dagestan.

The three Muslim republics have seen a resurgence of violence over the past two years, and the report says perpetrators of human rights violations continue to enjoy impunity there.

Konstantin Kosachyov, head of the Russian delegation to the assembly and a senior member of United Russia, said the report was fairly objective.

"It was prepared in cooperation with us. There was no attempt to morally lecture or to impose an outside view on us," he said Monday, Voice of Russia radio reported on its web site.

Kosachyov, who chairs the Duma's International Relations Committee, added that there might be last-minute changes to its content.

Alison Gill, head of Human Rights Watch's Moscow office, said that even if the resolution were weakened, Kosachyov's reaction was very positive.

"It is unprecedented that this report is endorsed by the Russian delegation," she said by telephone from Strasbourg.

Gill said it was important to keep the assembly's monitoring mandate and the draft resolution's call for action to end impunity in the region.

Alexander Cherkasov of the Memorial human rights group said Kosachyov's statement probably reflected a feeling of powerlessness. "He did what any bureaucrat would do when he sees that he cannot change the course of events — say something positive," Cherkasov told The Moscow Times.

The report was prepared by Swiss lawmaker Dick Marty, the assembly's rapporteur on human rights in the North Caucasus, after a trip to the region in March.

Memorial chairman Oleg Orlov will address the assembly Tuesday.

Another guest will be Ingush President Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, who will take the platform exactly one year after he survived an assassination attempt.

The Russian endorsement is all the more notable because much of the report discusses abductions and killings of opponents of Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov.

It gives room to a theory proposed by Austrian investigators that the murder of Chechen refugee [Umar Israilov](#) in Vienna last year was ordered by Kadyrov or his immediate entourage.

When Marty visited Kadyrov in March, the Chechen president rejected all accusations "before we could even put the question to him," the report says.