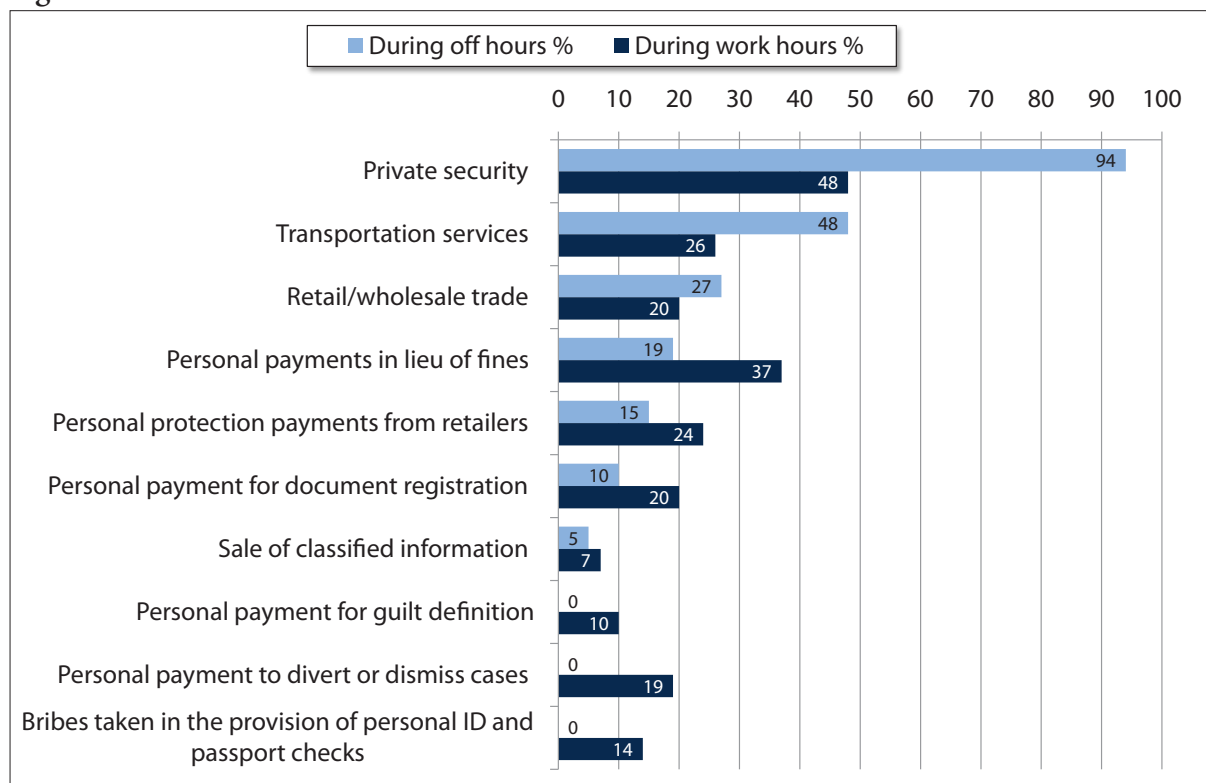


**Figure 2: Economic Activities of the Russian Militia**

Source: O. Kolennikova, L. Kosals, R. Ryvkina, Yu. Simagin, D. G. Wilson: "The 'economic activities' of Russian police," *International Journal of Police Science and Management*, Volume 10, No. 1, 2008.

## ANALYSIS

## Is Police Reform Taking Place in Russia? A View from the Regions

By Sergei Poduzov, Marii El

### Abstract

At the end of 2009, President Dmitry Medvedev initiated a process of police reform in Russia. His concept largely calls on the police to design and implement the reform themselves. At the federal level, however, the authorities do not have a clear conception of what the police force should look like once the reform is complete. At the regional level, the police have refused to engage in a discussion with citizen groups on how to proceed. Changes in Russian law now make it harder for rank-and-file police officers to criticize their superiors. Police reform can only take place if the president displays political will at the top and civil society exerts pressure from below.

### A New Initiative

At the end of 2009, President Dmitry Medvedev manifested sufficient political will to announce the beginning of police reform in Russia. According to the president, the first steps of the reform were to overhaul the police force since, in its present form, it did not meet contemporary demands.

Behind this announcement stood the growing number of conflicts between policemen and members of the public. Many police officers violate human rights because they do not feel accountable to the population. Recently, there have been several examples of such problems. In April 2009, the intoxicated police Major Denis

Yevsyukov killed two shoppers and wounded seven others in a Moscow supermarket during a drunken shooting spree. Subsequently, there was the case of Sergei Magnitsky, the lawyer who apparently uncovered extensive corruption among public officials, and who was then himself arrested, and ultimately died in prison after being held for almost one year in pre-trial detention. Russia was also rocked by the Youtube videos of police Major Aleksey Dymovsky and several other officers who jeopardized their careers to appeal directly to the Russian president to end the lawlessness inside the police system.

According to Medvedev's design, the police should reform themselves. He ordered them to develop a plan for reducing the number of policemen by 20 percent and to prepare the text of a draft law on the police. As part of this process, the police are supposed to identify which functions they currently perform are superfluous, so that the system can be streamlined and focused more effectively on core activities.

Nine months have now passed and it is possible to draw some initial conclusions. Is the reform actually being implemented or is it merely a virtual exercise designed to win higher ratings for the government leaders?

### Police Reform on the Federal Level

For the reform to be implemented in society, it is necessary to lay out a clearly defined conception of what should take place. So far, neither the president who announced the reform, nor the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) has a clear conception of what kind of police Russia should have as a result of these reforms. Accordingly, the reform has not proved satisfactory to either Russia's leaders or its population. It is clear that the authorities are simply trying to give the impression that they are making progress and are actually in control of events. Accordingly, they claim that what is taking place is in fact what they desire.

From my point of view, what is happening is an optimization of the MVD, through a process of cutting unnecessary staff and functions. Simultaneously, there is a process of redistributing the freed-up budgetary funds within the system. The authorities are trying to convince society that these processes count for police reform.

After the president announced the police reform at the end of 2009, members of society began to discuss what kind of police force Russia should have once the reform process is complete. Several non-governmental groups drew up their recommendations for reform. However, the authorities only put forward one set of suggestions for public discussion. These proposals had

been prepared by a working group to support police reform that consisted of 14 non-governmental human rights organizations which work in the area of rights violations by the police (<http://www.publicverdict.org/topics/reform/8104.html>). Today this is the reform plan that can be discussed in various arenas. It is clear that the authorities, including the president himself, are taking many ideas from this concept and presenting them as their own reform proposals. Thus, for example, the roadmap for reform presented here suggests that the police should no longer be in charge of drunk tanks, where inebriated citizens are taken to sober up overnight. Shortly after this proposal appeared, the president suggested that the drunk tanks be transferred from the MVD to the health ministry.

In the absence of a clear concept of reform, the authorities are trying to start, or more precisely, wrap up the incipient reform with the help of the draft federal law on the police. The bill is badly written and has numerous references to directives that simply have not been developed yet. The bill does not define a police structure and many other important features that would allow future legislation to turn the police into an organization that effectively served the population.

The bill devotes considerable discussion to the level of popular trust in the police, but does not include a mechanism that can be used to evaluate how much trust the police are actually winning. However in an interview with *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, MVD State Secretary Sergei Bulavin said that the level of popular trust is one of the most important ways to evaluate the activity of the police.

Since many experts have criticized the bill and demanded that it be rewritten, it is clear that it will not come into force as law on January 1, 2011. Even though the authorities did not have a clear conception of how to reform the police when they launched this project, there is clearly a process taking place in which active civil society groups are pushing to be sure that the reform does not simply result in the modernization of the police, but that the police start to live up to the standards which the Russian Federation has committed itself to in the field of protecting human rights.

### Police Reform in the Russian Regions

While on the federal level the president has the political will, backed by powerful institutional resources and media access, to periodically speak about the topic of police reform, the situation is completely different in the regions. As soon as the reforms were announced, the police at all levels tensed up and refused to engage in dialogue at the local level. There was an unwritten internal directive prohibiting discussion of police reform

with members of the public. They essentially avoid any dialogue on this topic.

Confirmation of this situation is clearly visible in the way the Working Group to Conduct Police Reform organized round table discussions to solicit advice on how to carry out the reform. The Working Group conducted approximately 20 round table discussions in 20 regions. Only in Perm Krai did the city police chief personally participate in discussing the proposals presented by the human rights groups. In the other regions, the participants were either former policemen or representatives of the MVD who refused to make any comments or participated only as supernumeraries.

Despite the minimal police participation, the round table discussions in the regions made clear how the police reacted to the reform proposals. In all regions but two (Chuvashia and Zabaikal Krai), there was strong opposition to the idea of dividing the police into federal and regional components and decentralizing much of the power in the currently unitary agency. Even the president does not support this idea.

Accordingly, until August 9, 2010, the rank-and-file members of the MVD were practically excluded both from the actual reform process and the discussion of the draft police law. On August 9, President Medvedev visited the Republic of Marii El and met with policemen in the capital city of Ioshkar-Ola to discuss the draft law. Through his personal intervention, the president made clear to the officers that they should participate in both the reform and the discussion of the new law. Only such an intervention could change the situation in the regions.

In regions where the MVD has Societal Councils, meetings were held to discuss the draft law and gather recommendations for amending it. However, even these discussions did not change the fact that until now the entire discussion has been within the system. Most members of the public are not participating in discussions of police reform and they do not have any idea of what reforms are being discussed, as recent data from the independent Levada Center polling firm demonstrate (<http://www.levada.ru/press/2010091303.html>). According to

this research, 52 percent of the population think that the process will lead to only decorative reforms, while just 19 percent think the reform will be successful. Of those who think that reforms will not take place, a majority thinks that the government measures are just an effort to release steam and reduce public anger about police abuses.

Additionally, it is important to note that since the reforms were announced, amendments to the Russian Criminal Code (article 286.1 as amended on July 22, 2010) now make it a criminal offence for policemen to criticize the decisions of their superiors. Undoubtedly, this norm appeared in response to Dymovsky's Youtube video and the widespread public reaction to it. However, the effect is to paralyze any public discussion about the police by policemen because they will always be under the threat of criminal prosecution.

Despite the difficulties in implementing the reform and the greater centralization of the MVD, the regional police have some room to assert their independence. Each region now has the responsibility of developing its own system for training personnel. In some cases, the instructors are using western experience derived from their participation in exchange programs organized by non-governmental organizations. However, this is only a small opportunity for aid to local policemen who sincerely are interested in changing the system so that it observes human rights and provides useful services to the population.

## Conclusion

Today there are many obstacles to organizing and conducting real police reform in Russia. Most important are corruption and the continuing presence of many cops who want to preserve their jobs.

The reform can only be implemented if two conditions are met. First there must be political will in the county's leadership. Second, civil society must pressure the bureaucracy and police leadership to change the system. What the actual results will be depend heavily on the 2012 presidential elections.

### *About the Author*

Sergei Poduzov is the co-chairman of the Man and Law organization in Marii El.