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CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 24.11.2010 www.osw.waw.pl

Russia versus the European Court of Human Rights

On 18 November at the international Forum of Constitutional Justice in St. Petersburg the Chairman of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation Valery Zorkin criticised several decisions made by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) as “political” and threatened that Russia would denounce the European Convention of Human Rights. Zorkin's reaction is supposed to demonstrate the tough stance of the Russian government on decisions deemed unfavourable to Russia and to put the ECHR under pressure, among other issues in the context of the verdict reached in the case of Yukos.

Valery Zorkin protested against the Court in Strasbourg, accepting the complaint made by the Russian opposition about the course of the parliamentary election held in 2003 (criticised by OSCE observers) and the Court's decision in favour of the Russian military who were striving for three years' paid childcare leave for a single parent (in Russia only women are granted this right).

The Chairman of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, who has acted as a conservative defender of the Russian justice system, deemed the decision regarding the opposition's complaint “political” and announced that the Court's verdict that “involves issues of sovereignty” do not have to be binding for Russia. Zorkin even threatened that Russia would denounce the European Convention of Human Rights. A declaration was also made at the forum about the introduction of “a mechanism for defending national sovereignty” which would allow the Russian government to not respect verdicts issued by the ECHR that are contrary to verdicts reached by the Russian Constitutional Court. Such a strong reaction can be seen both as a protest by the Russian government against criticisms of the country's political situation and as a warning against issuing verdicts unfavourable for Russia in much-talked-about and prestigious cases (in the coming months verdicts in the cases of Yukos and the Katyn massacre are expected). <JR>