

Legislation Criminalizing Blasphemy Frozen Until Spring

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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President Vladimir Putin has decided to postpone the adoption of legislation criminalizing blasphemy and acts that offend religious believers until spring, a news report said Wednesday.

In the meantime, authorities hope to engage the public in a serious discussion on the contentious legislation, which would impose maximum penalties of three years' imprisonment, a 300,000 ruble (\$10,000) fine or 200 hours' community work for publicly offending believers' feelings, a Kremlin source told Vedomosti.

At a meeting of Putin's human rights council earlier this month, prominent activists criticized the blasphemy bill for its vague wording, which they said could result in miscarriages of justice. "'Feeling' is vague term, not a legal one," liberal politician Irina Khakamada told Putin at the meeting.

Her words were echoed by the Supreme Court, which said in a written assessment of the legislation that its implementation would be difficult unless phrases like "worship" and "religious traditions and ceremonies" were clarified, according to Vedomosti.

Those in favor of the bill argue that raising penalties for blasphemy is necessary to stamp out growing conflict in the sphere of religion.

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