

Amendments to Civil Code to Reduce Freedom of Press

By [The Moscow Times](#)

October 01, 2013

The  **Moscow Times**

Amendments to the Civil Code prohibiting the collection, possession, and distribution of personal information went into force Tuesday, drawing immediate criticism from journalists and human rights defenders.

The Public Chamber and the head of the presidential human rights council have both criticized the legislation, Ekho Moskvyy reported, with experts saying that it could open the door to legalized censorship.

Pavel Gusev, chief editor and owner of the newspaper Moskovsky Komsomolets, said that the amendments "violated the essence of investigative journalism, which exposes those officials who are carried away not by their work, but by corruption," BFM.ru news website reported.

The State Duma, meanwhile, says that the law will primarily protect show business stars

from less conscientious yellow press journalists who will do anything to dig up a scandal.

Responding to criticism that the amendments will enable government officials to conceal their misdeeds, defenders have pointed to an exception which permits the use of personal information when it is "in state, social, or other public interests."

The legal changes are centered around two amendments: Chapter 150 and 152 of the Civil Code, which passed their final reading in the State Duma on July 2.

Chapter 150 expands the definition of legally protected "immaterial goods" to include a plethora of elevated but somewhat vague terms, including "honor and a good name," "business reputation," and "personal and family privacy," while Chapter 152 directly bans the distribution of personal information, "in particular information about [a citizen's] origins, location or living place, and personal or family life."

In case of infringements, judges are authorized to order the removal of information from publications, including online articles, and to require the individual or organization who disseminated the information to publish a retraction.

Dmitry Gudkov, State Duma deputy and author of a well-known series of exposes, has already proposed a temporary solution to continue the publication of compromising information about public officials.

"I recommend everyone to send this kind of information to Dmitry Gudkov, who still has immunity," Gudkov said. In Russia, State Duma deputies are immune to criminal prosecution.

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