

# Cosmo Isn't the West's Trojan Horse Into Russia

By [Ksenia Boletskaya](#)

September 28, 2014



State Duma deputies passed a law on Friday limiting foreign ownership in domestic media assets to 20 percent. According to the law's authors — deputies Vadim Dengin, Vladimir Parakhin and Denis Voronenkov — the measure aims to secure Russia's "information sovereignty."

Vedomosti newspaper sources claim that the presidential administration initiated the bill. At first, the bill's authors cited international precedent, claiming that the United States, Australia, Canada, Spain and other countries limit foreign ownership in domestic media to between 20 percent and 25 percent.

What offense have these magazines committed, other than telling women how to seduce men, or men how

to build up "six-pack" abs?

But it later turned out they had used outdated or incorrect information when formulating the bill. Those countries long ago began permitting greater shares of foreign ownership or else abandoned such restrictions altogether. The new regulation more closely resembles media laws in South Korea and China than in the West.

Such factual discrepancies do not worry Duma deputies. They are convinced that the basic situation remains unchanged: Russia is at war and cannot adopt the same policies used in Germany or Canada, countries not at war. According to their logic, foreign companies are obliged to engage in subversive activities on behalf of their respective governments and intelligence agencies. However, deputies have yet to provide examples of how the surreptitious influence of foreigners creates anti-Russian attitudes in society.

Strangely enough, this law will also affect the many Russian companies and individuals that own media through offshore shell companies. That is why Duma deputies have labeled Kommersant newspaper and the RBC group of publications as "foreign media." Does that mean oligarchs Alisher Usmanov, Mikhail Prokhorov and Roman Abramovich — who is part owner of Channel One through an offshore company — have suddenly become agents of foreign influence?

But all joking aside, Russian media owners can simply take their assets out of Cyprus in order to comply with the law, although their tax burden will increase as a result. However, many media companies in Russia really do have full or part foreign capital. They include everything from women's glossy magazines to television channels — many of which are focused on providing entertainment. The overwhelming majority of glossy magazines are produced by publishing houses that are subsidiaries of foreign media corporations. For example, Cosmopolitan is produced by Sanoma Independent Media, a division of the Finnish parent media company Sanoma.

What offense have these magazines committed, other than telling women how to seduce men, or men how to build up "six-pack" abs? Duma deputies explain that these publications actually have hidden agendas as part of a "fifth column" of traitors willing to sabotage Russia. And without offering any concrete evidence, Duma deputy Vadim Dengin claims that foreign publishing houses are quietly buying up websites and newspapers in Russia's regions.

The implication is that foreigners are earning money in Russia on glossy magazines and advertising revenues and using those resources to fund subversive political activities. Of course, this subversion would appear to be funded in an extremely complex manner and yet spectacularly ineffective, given that President Vladimir Putin currently enjoys astronomically high approval ratings.

Ironically, the federal authorities only recently encouraged the regions to attract foreign investment, without expressing any concern over possible anti-Russian activities. Representatives of Disney and MTG, which respectively own the eponymous television channel and CTC Media, were recently invited to a reception with Putin. Those days are over now.

All of the deputies' arguments are based not on economic or business considerations, but on the demands of war. They claim that Russia is engaged in an information war with the West and that Moscow must halt the twisted messages and imported ideology that Washington uses to mislead the Russian people.

Media outlets with foreign capital are likened to a squadron of saboteurs stabbing Russia in the back, entertainment channels become a formation of enemy jet fighters, and every glossy magazine a tank division rolling over the "traditional values" and patriotic sentiments of Russia's innocent and unsuspecting readers.

Ksenia Boletskaya is a journalist at Vedomosti who specializes in the consumer market. This comment originally appeared in Vedomosti.

*The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.*

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/09/28/cosmo-isnt-the-west-trojan-horse-into-russia-a39838>