

Russian Lawmakers Send 'Fake News' Bill to Putin for Approval

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Kremlin.ru

Russian lawmakers passed a controversial set of bills that would make it a crime to “disrespect” the state and spread “fake news” on Wednesday, setting the legislation up for President Vladimir Putin’s signature.

The bills amending existing information laws overwhelmingly [passed](#) both chambers of Russian parliament in less than two months. Observers and some lawmakers have criticized the legislation for stifling free speech and its vague terminology, which critics say could lead to mass arrests.

Related article: [Russia Passes Legislation Banning 'Disrespect' of Authorities and 'Fake News'](#)

The Federation Council, Russian parliament’s upper house, passed the legislation in its first and only reading on Wednesday.

If passed and signed by the president, the legislation will establish punishments for spreading information that “exhibits blatant disrespect for the society, government, official government symbols, constitution or governmental bodies of Russia.”

Online news outlets and users that spread “fake news” will [face](#) fines of up to 1.5 million rubles (\$22,900) for repeat offenses.

Insulting state symbols and the authorities, including Putin, will carry a fine of up to 300,000 rubles and 15 days in jail for repeat offenses.

As is the case with other Russian laws, the fines are calculated based on whether the offender is a citizen, an official or a legal entity.

More than 100 journalists and public figures, including human rights activist Zoya Svetova and popular writer Lyudmila Ulitskaya, have [signed](#) a petition opposing the laws, which they labeled "direct censorship.”

The Kremlin, however, denied the legislation amounts to censorship.

"What's more, this sphere of fake news, insulting and so on, is regulated fairly harshly in many countries of the world including Europe. It is therefore of course necessary to do it in our country too," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Tougher Internet laws introduced over the past five years require search engines to delete some search results, messaging services to share encryption keys with security services and social networks to store users' personal data on servers within the country.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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