

# Russian Academics Protest State Permits for Public Outreach

February 16, 2021



Anton Novoderezhkin / TASS

Russian academics are warning that lawmakers seek to curb their freedoms with a new law that would require state permission for public outreach, the weekly journal *Nature* [reported](#) Monday.

Amendments to Russia's education law advancing through the lower house of parliament, the State Duma, seek to [stamp out](#) "anti-Russian" influence in educational activities outside formal settings. Observers caution that government control could expand to online courses on YouTube, podcasts and popular lectures.

Nearly 220,000 people have [signed](#) a Change.org petition calling for the repeal of what it describes as restrictive amendments, while almost 1,700 Russian academics have signed on to a declaration [defying](#) them. Prominent educators and the presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences have [urged](#) lawmakers to repeal the measures they described as "[prior restraint](#)."

"The proposed amendments are intolerably repressive," *Nature* quoted Mikhail Gelfand,

biology lecturer at Moscow's Skoltech Center of Life Sciences and member of London's Academia Europaea, as saying.

Scientists also decried a potential requirement to get government permission to sign a foreign partnership agreement. Similar restrictions on state scientists' contacts with foreign colleagues have been [scrapped](#) amid heavy criticism last year.

"This is ridiculous, and I will not obey," said Sergei Popov, a Moscow State University astrophysicist and author of the petition.

Alexandra Borisova, co-founder of the Russian Association of Science Communication, predicted that the amendments would have a chilling effect on scientists and academics' public outreach activities out of fear of violating the law.

Kirill Dmitriyev, the head of Russia's sovereign wealth fund, defended the bill, saying it would have "limited use" and "would not preclude typical collaboration that is part of regular scientific discourse and regular scientific operation."

The second of three State Duma readings of the proposed amendments to Russia's law on education has been postponed until later this month.

Once passed by the Duma, the amendments require upper-house approval and President Vladimir Putin's signature to become law.

An string of Russian scientists and academics have faced charges of [treason and espionage](#) in recent years.

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