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Duma Passes Watered-Down FSB Bill

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Riot police officers detaining a Yabloko activist who rallied against an FSB bill outside the State Duma on Friday. **Sergey Ponomarev**

The State Duma passed in a key second reading Friday a weakened bill that allows the Federal Security Service to warn people about crimes it thinks they might commit but doesn't carry punishments for those who do not comply.

The much-assailed initial draft proposed fines and short-term detentions for people who ignore FSB warnings, but the revised version introduces no sanctions for such conduct.

The warnings — dubbed "special prophylactics" in the bill — will also not be published in the media, and people will not be obliged to come to FSB offices to be issued a warning, as the earlier draft proposed.

"The legislation measures up to the highest and most humanistic standards of a state governed by the rule of law," said Vladimir Vasilyev, the United Russia chairman of the Duma's Security Committee, Interfax reported.

Only United Russia deputies supported the watered-down version of the bill. The Communist and Just Russia factions criticized it as a "crackdown on dissenters," and the Liberal Democratic Party considered it too soft, Kommersant reported Saturday.

Gennady Gudkov, a senior member of A Just Russia, warned that the regulations might be toughened in the future to make sure people could be penalized for ignoring FSB warnings.

"Some responsibility will be introduced," he said, Kommersant reported.

The liberal Yabloko party said the bill aimed to suppress public protests. "People don't understand that the secret services are trying to get a foothold to pursue a further offensive against society," Yabloko head Sergei Mitrokhin said. "And the opposition parties will feel it in the next regional elections in October."

Six Yabloko activists tried to stage a protest against the bill by chaining themselves to the fence of the Duma building, but they were swiftly detained by OMON riot police. They face 15-day jail sentences on charges of "defying a lawful police order," Mitrokhin told Interfax.

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