

Duma Cracks Down on Ads By Psychics, Faith Healers

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Advertising by psychics, fortunetellers and others who promise medical cures and to bring back loved ones from the dead will be banned under legislation approved by the State Duma in a first reading Tuesday.

Duma deputies voted to amend the law on advertising to ban the ads on the grounds that con artists often mislead people by offering services that they cannot deliver.

"Their activity is often not controlled, and as a result, many people are suffering," said Tatyana Yakovleva, a co-author of the bill and a United Russia deputy, in comments published on United Russia's web site last month. "The problem became very widespread in recent months, so legislation is needed to protect people from obtrusive ads from all kinds of specialists."

Yakovleva said the industry generated \$2 billion last year, with 300,000 Russians contacting

psychics and fortunetellers through ads in tabloid newspapers.

The amendments will also ban advertising for homemade medicines that have not been licensed by the authorities, RIA-Novosti reported.

Astrologists will not be affected by the bill.

The Russian Orthodox Church welcomed the amendments and called for a campaign to educate the public about the danger of turning to psychics. "Many destroyed lives are on their conscience," senior church official Vsevolod Chaplin told RIA-Novosti.

But a spokeswoman for a Moscow-based psychic, Ilya German, dismissed the notion that the bill might hurt her boss' work. "All of the specialists will continue to do business as usual," the spokeswoman, who introduced herself only as Maria, said by telephone. "Maybe just a plaque will be changed. These services are in high demand."

All kinds of psychics emerged during perestroika in the late 1980s, boosted by national television broadcasts that promoted Anatoly Kashpirovsky and Alan Chumak, who promised to cure people who put newspaper photos of either of them on the diseased parts of their bodies.

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