The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
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Duma Backs Warning On Ads for Abortions

July 03, 2011



State Duma deputies, worried about a falling birthrate, passed in a third and final reading Friday a bill that says abortion advertisements must carry a health warning.

The amendment to the law on advertising says 10 percent of the space used in abortion ads must carry a list of possible negative consequences for women, including infertility, news reports said.

"Advertising of medical services for abortion should not contain a statement about the safety of such medical services," the bill said.

Speaking of current advertisements, Deputy Viktor Zvagelsky, a United Russia member of Duma's Economic Policy and Entrepreneurship Committee, said, "These ads make young girls believe they won't have any problems interrupting a pregnancy," RIA-Novosti reported.

He said the bill was drawn up because "the situation with abortions in Russia was depressing."

Russia has one of the world's highest abortion rates, and cutting this could help it stem a demographic disaster that is looming as its population shrinks.

A total of 1.5 million abortions were carried out in Russia in 2007 — almost on a par with the number of children born that year, according to the Duma's web site.

Though the Soviet Union was the first country in the world to legalize abortion on request in 1920, dictator Josef Stalin outlawed it again, from 1936 until he died in 1954, to try to boost the birth rate.

The Communists later encouraged new births with prizes and money, but since they were ousted two decades ago Russia's population has steadily dropped. It shrunk by more than 12 million between 1992 and 2008, to about 143 million.

The United Nations predicts that by 2050 Russia's population will have dropped by almost a fifth from today to 116 million. It has said overcoming racism and taking in more migrants could help Russia boost its population.

Health experts say key factors in the decline are poor diet leading to heart disease, heavy drinking by men, an HIV/AIDS epidemic spurred by heroin abuse and a high number of violent deaths.

The bill is expected to pass the Federation Council and be signed into law by President Dmitry Medvedev without problem.

(Reuters, MT)

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