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Duma Committee Lowers Fines for Protest Violations

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The State Duma is set to vote in a second reading on a bill increasing fines for participants in illegal protests on June 5. **Sergei Porter**

A State Duma committee has introduced changes that would drastically cut the maximum fines in a proposed bill boosting the penalties for illegal rallies.

After its first reading, the bill mandated an increase in fines on people who take part in illegal demonstrations from 2,000 rubles to 1 million rubles ($65 to $32,400), with penalties on organizers to climb from 5,000 rubles to 1.5 million rubles.

The bill, viewed as aimed squarely at the opposition protesters who have taken to the streets in recent months, barely passed in its first reading. The vote was 226-207 with one abstention.

But the Duma's Committee on Constitutional Law and State Building introduced changes ahead of the second reading that would lower the fines to 300,000 rubles for individuals and 600,000 rubles for legal entities, RIA-Novosti reported Wednesday.

Those penalties would be exceptions, while the current fines of 5,000 rubles for individual violators and 50,000 rubles for legal entities would remain the norm, the new changes stipulate.

In discussing the bill in the Duma on Wednesday, the political party A Just Russia introduced 357 amendments, 60 of which were reviewed within 10 minutes, Gazeta.ru reported. The second reading of the bill is slated for June 5.

Meanwhile, a city district court on Wednesday sanctioned the arrest of two more opposition protesters charged with attacking police during the May 6 rally against President Vladimir Putin's inauguration.

Andrei Barabanov, 22, and Maxim Luzyanin, 18, will remain behind bars until at least July 6, the Rapsi news agency reported.

In all, police have arrested three people in connection with the rally. On Tuesday, the same court ordered Alexandra Dukhanina, 18, to remain under home arrest until July 6.

Barabanov said after Wednesday's hearing that he would go on hunger strike, because as a vegan he cannot eat the prison food.

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