

Protest Bill on Its Way to Putin's Desk

June 06, 2012



A protester is detained outside the State Duma building during a debate on the protest bill Tuesday.

Vasily Maximov

The Federation Council on Wednesday approved a bill to increase fines for violations at rallies, clearing the way for the new rules to take effect before next week's planned opposition rally.

The vote passed the upper house of parliament Wednesday with 126 senators voting for, one against, and one abstaining.

But powerful players have already spoken out against the bill, which now only requires President Vladimir Putin's signature to become law.

Presidential human rights council head Mikhail Fedotov said he would ask the president to veto the bill, Interfax reported. Fedotov also said he had sent a letter to Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matvienko requesting that senators reject the bill, in order to “correct the mistake of the Duma that is fraught with serious violations of human rights and a deepening of social conflict.”

During a Federation Council session Wednesday, Matvienko said she had not received a letter

from Fedotov and called his statement claiming that he had sent one “improper.”

Political party A Just Russia also spoke out against the law, saying it would demand that the Constitutional Court review and strike the law down. “We created an important precedent and forced the Duma to accept this law with procedural violations,” party member and State Duma deputy Ilya Ponamaryev said, Interfax reported.

“Now we have the basis of a case for the Constitutional Court to demand the law be repealed,” he said.

Federation Council first deputy speaker Alexander Torshin lauded the bill, saying responsibility for violations at rallies must be felt. He noted that the bill's punishment had been softened from its original version, which had called for fines of up to 1.5 million rubles (\$45,000), a figure dropped to 300,000 rubles in the version approved Wednesday.

"Approving this bill does not do anything new. In countries with developed democracies such as the U.K., the U.S. and Germany, this practice has been around for a long time, and fines there are much more tangible than those provided for in our legislation," Torshin said.

☒ Torshin said the Federation Council also supports a ban on wearing masks in public places and or at public events. He said such a prohibition operates in Poland, where masked people at public events can be detained.

The bill approved by the Federation Council on Wednesday was passed through the State Duma in a marathon session Tuesday lasting nearly 12 hours, as deputies from the Just Russia party attempted to delay the vote by bombarding the bill with hundreds of amendments. The Duma cut review of each amendment from one minute to 30 seconds in order to finish before midnight, Kommersant reported.

Under the bill's new rules, groups could be fined up to 1 million rubles (\$30,000) if protests injure people or damage property, while individuals face a maximum 300,000 ruble fine or 200 hours of community service.

Current fines range from 1,000 to 5,000 rubles.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/06/06/protest-bill-on-its-way-to-putins-desk-a15276>