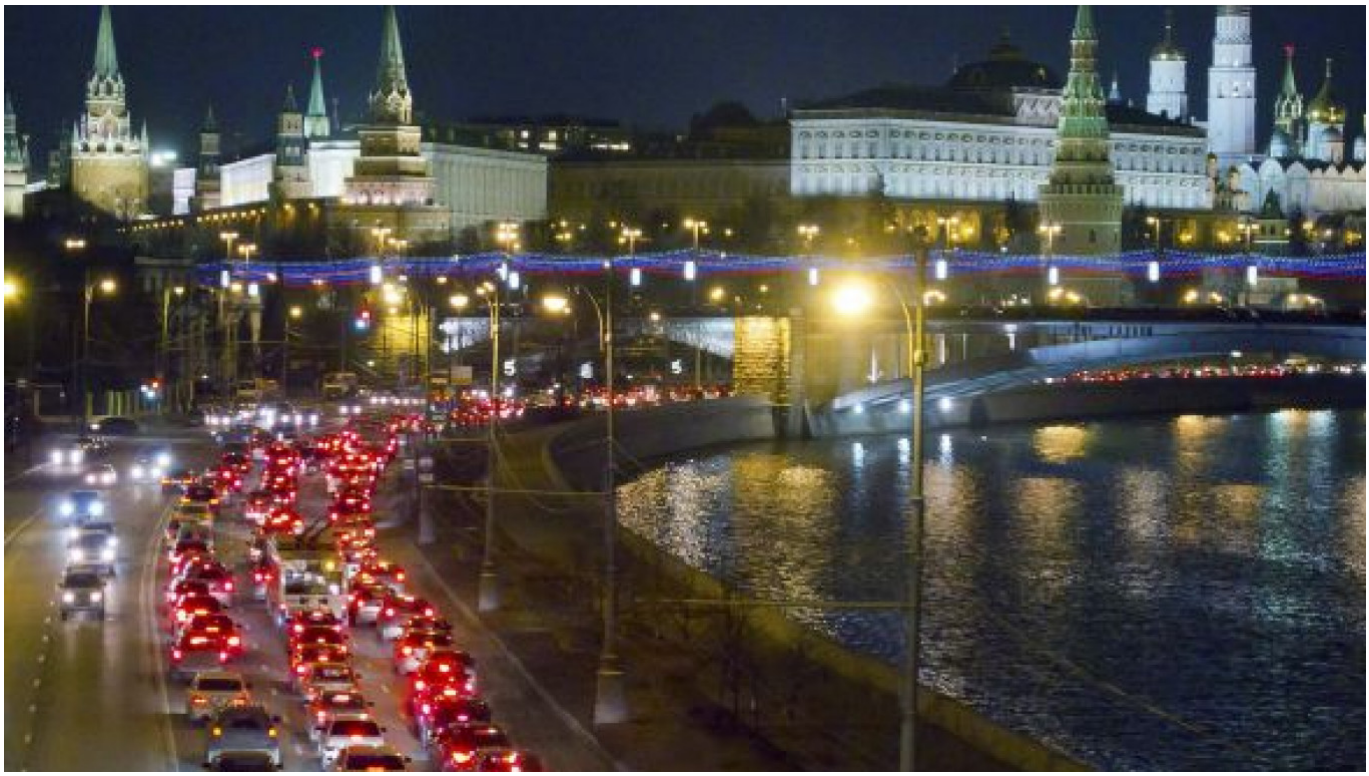
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Bill on Remote Work Falls Short

By Lena Smirnova

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Remote workers don’t have to deal with the problem of traffic jams, like this one in the vicinity of the Kremlin. **Vladimir Filonov**

People who want to perform their job from home came one step closer to getting some legal protection this week, when the State Duma approved the first draft of a bill that would officially recognize the increasingly popular practice of remote work.

But businesses say it is only small progress toward making the format easy for both employers and employees.

"This bill takes a step forward, but then it stops," said Anatoly Kharlamov, a member of the labor committee at the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs. "It gives only a legal meaning to the terms but doesn't address the key points."

Remote work is already common in Russia among engineers, lawyers, translators, journalists, editors, designers and programmers. Despite its popularity, the country's labor code currently does not offer separate regulations for those who don't sit in an office all day.

Remote workers have to follow the general standards set out in the labor code, but some of these points, such as those about working hours and office location, don't fit the unconventional practice.

As a result, employers may have to pay fines for breaking the Labor Code. The situation can also be bad for the remote workers because their formal absence from the workplace can lead to forfeiture of sick days or pensions.

"The danger for remote workers is an employer that may not pay all the salary or bonuses," said Tatyana Dolyakova, general director of the recruitment company Penny Lane Personnel.

The new bill proposes allowing remote workers to use electronic signatures to conclude a labor contract.

These changes to the Labor Code are expected to shrink employers' office costs, reduce pollution caused by commuters and increase productivity, the bill's explanatory note states.

Dmitry Shamansky, deputy director at the St. Petersburg-based advertising firm Avtorskaya Tvorcheskaya Masterskaya, said the bill would widen the company's pool of potential employees. The firm already has designers who work remotely, but they still have to come to the office to fill out contracts or receive their pay.

The Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, which was the original initiator of the bill, is not happy with the current draft. Kharlamov said the current version does not provide the necessary details on working hours or work location for remote workers.

Kharlamov added that the bill in its current version won't lead to remote employment becoming more popular.

"There is no sense that tomorrow more people will turn to remote work, because the main problems remain unsolved," he said.

A third of Russian employees will work outside their company's office by 2020, according to a study by consulting company Vanson Bourne. Already, 20 percent of Russian IT companies have staff members who work remotely. Yandex, one of the country's largest IT companies, said it has about 1,000 remote workers, and that number is growing.

The bill on remote employment is expected to pass by the end of the year, said Andrei Isayev, chairman of the Duma's Labor Committee, Vedomosti reported.

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