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Deputies Shelve Bill Targeting Foreigners on State TV

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Pozner, pictured in 2008, apologized for insulting the State Duma on TV. **Vladimir Filonov**

Lawmakers on Monday said they would shelve a bill blocking foreigners from working in state television if they made remarks "discrediting" Russia or its government.

Critics of the bill — which was designed to target popular Channel One television host Vladimir Pozner after he called the State Duma a "silly woman" on air last month — said it would enforce a form of media censorship. That criticism of the bill was apparently shared by Kremlin officials, who came out against it in comments published Monday.

Pozner used the expression on air Dec. 23 in criticizing the Duma for passing the ban on U.S. adoptions of Russian orphans. Opposition politicians and the U.S. government have also slammed that measure, saying it uses children as political pawns.

Pozner apologized for the phrase on a program Sunday, calling it a slip-up. But he

emphasized that he only regretted having used the expression and not having criticized the Duma for passing the adoption ban.

In response, Duma deputies said Monday that they would not introduce the bill for consideration by lawmakers.

Along with a Russian passport, Pozner also has American and French citizenship. He was born in France and worked in New York between 1991 and 1997, after which he received a U.S. passport.

The bill was initiated by United Russia's Mikhail Starshinov, Liberal Democrat Andrei Lugovoi, Communist Oleg Denisenko and former Just Russia member Igor Zotov.

"We understand that an apology was a desperate measure in response to consistent and rather tough actions taken by the Duma," Starshinov told Interfax.

Pozner's apology was a planned compromise between him and the deputies, an unidentified presidential administration official told Vedomosti in an article published Monday. The official said the Kremlin did not like the idea of the bill from the beginning, since it could be seen as a form of censorship.

President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told the daily that the Kremlin was aware of the situation and said that insults directed at legislative bodies were unacceptable but that it was improper to intervene in the hiring policy of TV channels.

Starshinov said the bill could be submitted to the Duma for consideration in the future if other attempts to tarnish Russian authorities were made by journalists.

Some of Pozner's supporters said they were disappointed that he had apologized but pleased that parliamentarians had delayed the bill.

"In a normal country, the State Duma would have had to apologize to Pozner. But things turned out differently." tweeted Ksenia Sobchak, the opposition TV personality.

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