

United Russia Warns Media Over Abusing Free Speech

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Days after the Moskovsky Komsomolets newspaper published an article describing three female United Russia deputies as "political prostitutes," the party's State Duma faction issued a statement warning media over abusing the right to free speech.

"The publication in one of our oldest newspapers of an article going beyond all conceivable limits of cynicism, subjectivity and pure boorishness provoked the justified resentment of society," the statement said, adding that the fact that the article targeted "mothers and wives" made the criticism all the more abhorrent.

In the statement, United Russia lawmakers railed at the newspaper's editor-in-chief, Pavel Gusev, for sanctioning the publication of the article, which appeared Friday and was titled "Political Prostitution Changes Its Gender," and refusing to apologize for the claims made by its author, Moskovsky Komsomolets columnist Georgy Yans.

Gusev, who heads the Moscow Union of Journalists and the Public Chamber's media committee, should be fired from the influential positions as a result of the article, the lawmakers said, ending their statement by painting United Russia's Duma faction as defending "civilized norms of public behavior based on moral values."

Tuesday's statement comes amid a war of words between senior United Russia officials and Moskovsky Komsomolets editors.

Andrei Isayev, a prominent lawmaker with the ruling party, cast the first stone, terming the article "insulting to women" and warranting "harsh retaliation" in an angry Twitter message on Saturday.

His colleague, Sergei Zheleznyak, later appealed to the Federal Consumer Protection Service to check whether the article violated media laws against defamation based on gender.

But Aider Muzhdabayev, the newspaper's deputy editor-in-chief, wrote on Facebook that he wasn't afraid of "Isayev and his party henchmen" even though he personally chose to run the story.

Gusev then retaliated by asking investigators to open a criminal case into Isayev's comments on charges of obstructing the lawful activity of a journalist. The charges carry a maximum prison sentence of six years.

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