The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Amnesty Bill Passes 2nd Duma Reading

By Anna Dolgov

December 18, 2013

If the current version of the amnesty bill passes, members of the Arctic 30 would also be included.
Dmitri Sharomov

The State Duma gave preliminary approval on Wednesday to an amnesty that could set free members of the feminist punk collective Pussy Riot among other high-profile inmates, and was expected to pass the bill in its final reading later in the day.

Hopes and expectations still vary as to how far — or how little — the final version of the amnesty would depart from President Vladimir Putin's original bill, which critics said was much too narrow.

In its second reading, the Duma introduced amendments that extend the amnesty to people who are accused of participating in "riots" at the Bolotnaya opposition rally in May, 2012, in addition to those who have already been convicted. The amendment, however, still does not cover the supposed organizers of the "riots."

Dmitry Agranovsky, a lawyer for two Bolotnaya defendants, approved of the amendments but

added, "These are only amendments, let's wait until the evening,"

Opposition lawmakers Dmitry Gudkov and Ilya Ponomaryov had proposed extending the amnesty to the Bolotnaya "riot" organizers, as well as to the mothers of disabled adults and to people with severe illnesses, but the Duma voted down the proposal.

The second reading bill's pardon of those convicted of hooliganism is thought to apply to charges against the environmentalists activists aboard the Greenpeace ship "Arctic Sunrise," who were originally charged with piracy for attempting to hang a banner on a Gazprom oil rig off Russia's northern coast.

It remained unclear whether the amnesty, which covers non-violent first-time offenders, would extend to former Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov. He faces negligence charges for the use of 56 million rubles ($1.7 million), but has been thought to be a candidate for the amnesty.

Besides mentioning first-time non-violent offenders, the amnesty bill also states that it would apply to the mothers of young children, war veterans, police officers and elderly people

"There might be some pregnant women and the mothers of small children among Serdyukov's acquaintances, but these categories probably don't refer to this individual himself," Pavel Krasheninnikov, head of the Duma's Legislation Committee, said.

The wording of the bill appeared to suggest different interpretations as to whether being a first-time non-violent offender would be sufficient, or whether meeting one of the second set of conditions — such as being a pregnant woman or a war veteran — was also required.

Pussy Riot members Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina, who both have young children and were convicted of hooliganism in 2012, may be eligible for release, but the pair is already set to get out of prison in March.

Implementation of the bill would begin before the year is over, and is likely to take six months to complete, officials have said.

Other amendments to the bill included adding language that would explicitly rule out pardoning those convicted of coercing minors into sexual acts or for involvement in terrorist organizations, which was proposed by the Liberal Democratic Party during the second reading on Wednesday.

Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the leader of the LDPR, had also proposed pardoning those convicted of inciting nationalist enmity, which was not included into the legislation.

Contact the authors at newsreporter@imedia.ru and c.brennan@imedia.ru

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/12/18/amnesty-bill-passes-2nd-duma-reading-a30615