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State Duma Stiffens Punishments for Extremism

By The Moscow Times

January 22, 2014



The State Duma on Wednesday passed legislation strengthening punishments for participants in extremist groups amid continuing concerns about terrorist threats to the Winter Olympics in Sochi next month.

The legislation, which passed both its second and third readings on Wednesday, lengthens the maximum prison terms for setting up an extremist society from four years to six years and the punishment for participating in extremist activities from two to four years in prison, Interfax reported.

The maximum punishment for organizing the activities of an extremist society has gone up from three to six years.

The maximum sentence for inciting hatred toward religious or ethnic groups has increased from two to four years, while publicly calling for extremism is now punishable by four years

in prison instead of three, Lenta.ru reported.

The law was initially submitted to the Duma in June 2013 and may have been pushed through due to recent suicide bombings in the southern city of Volgograd and terrorist threats to the Winter Olympics. An Islamic extremist group from Dagestan recently claimed responsibility for December's attacks in the city, which killed at least 33, and said ominously that there was a "present" waiting for the Games in Sochi.

An explanatory note to the legislation said that fighting against extremism was "one of the priorities of the Russian state at the present stage."

Notes to the bill also said that it was aimed at tackling "the threat to national security connected with the destructive activities of religious organizations in Russia."

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