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Media Foreign Agents Bill Brought to Russian Duma

By The Moscow Times

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A bill widening the "foreign agent" net to include any news outlet that receives more than 25 percent of its funding from abroad and engages in political activities was registered in the Duma.

A bill registered with the Russian State Duma aims to force media outlets with funding from abroad to register as foreign agents.

The proposed law follows similar legislation aimed at non-government organizations enacted in 2012. That law has been widely condemned by human rights organizations, with Amnesty International describing it as "the Russian government's assault on independent civil society."

A bill widening the "foreign agent" net to include any news outlet that receives more than 25 percent of its funding from abroad and engages in political activities was registered in the Duma on Thursday by a group of lawmakers that includes the Liberal Democrat Mikhail Degtaryov and United Russia's Yevgeny Fyodorov.

A similar measure was previously submitted in late 2012 with a threshold of 50 percent foreign funding. The bills authors' withdrew that project in January 2014, however, and said they would lower the figure in response to Ukraine's political crisis, which they blamed on foreign-funded media.

Following the introduction of the foreign agent law for NGOs in 2012, many organizations receiving foreign funding have refused to register with the Justice Ministry as foreign agents, a term often used during the Cold War to target dissenters, and fought the classification in court.

On Wednesday, Russia's upper house of parliament approved amendments to the law that would allow the Justice Ministry to include organizations on the foreign agents register without a court order.

A date for the media foreign agent bill's first reading has not yet been set.

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