

Russia Plans New Fines That Could Bankrupt Mass Media

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Media outlets that are deemed to promote extremism, violence, terrorism or pornography could soon be hit with heavy fines in line with a draft bill that journalists fear may bankrupt many Russian publications.

The bill, which was penned by the Communications and Mass Media Ministry, would see media outlets fined between 400,000 rubles (\$11,000) to 1 million rubles (\$27,000) for breaching regulations over content.

The draft was posted online Thursday for public discussion, and Russian citizens will be able to contribute their opinions up until Sept. 19.

While media outlets are already prohibited from promoting the above vices, the government has yet to determine punishment for the transgressions. However, it is allowed to blacklist without a court order websites that promote suicide, child porn, illegal drugs, extremism,

terrorism and breach of public order.

Prominent liberal opposition websites Grani.ru, Kasparov.ru and Ej.ru, as well as the Livejournal blog of anti-corruption champion Alexei Navalny were banned earlier this year over the supposed promotion of public unrest.

And Dmitry Muratov, editor-in-chief of the oppositional Novaya Gazeta, fears the new bill could drive many media outlets into bankruptcy, RBK news site reported Thursday.

Vladimir Sungorkin, the editor-in-chief of Komsomolskaya Pravda, Russia's most popular tabloid, added that 1 million rubles would be "a significant sum" for his paper, RBK reported.

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The Communications and Mass Media Ministry has been among the trailblazers of the restrictions campaign: In addition to website blacklisting, it has also co-lobbied a law banning expletives in arts and media.

The ministry's media watchdog said earlier this year that it was planning to spend about 50 million rubles (\$1.4 million) on software to automatically monitor and censor extremism and swear words on the internet.

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