

Russian Lawmakers Want to Limit Foreign Ownership of Media

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russian lawmakers proposed cutting foreign ownership in Russian media assets to 20 percent in an attempt to limit outside influences and protect Russia's "information sovereignty," a copy of a draft law showed Wednesday.

The law will consolidate President Vladimir Putin's control over media, which have largely rallied behind the Kremlin's policies in Ukraine, running scathing coverage of the Kiev government since the fall of Moscow-backed ex-president.

Putin's government speaks openly of an "information war" in which Moscow is being attacked by Western reports of Russian weapons or soldiers reinforcing the rebels in eastern Ukraine, where Kiev accuses the Kremlin of fanning separatist violence.

"The proposed law will determine the structure of media ownership," said Sergei Zheleznyak, a senior lawmaker of the ruling United Russia party loyal to Putin.

"[It] is directed first of all at guaranteeing Russia's information sovereignty and decreasing the influence from abroad on events in the country which is an information war launched against our country."

The bill was introduced by deputies from Russia's Communist Party as well as Just Russia and the nationalist LDPR. They were not available for comment.

If passed, the bill would go into force on Jan. 1, 2016, but stake holders will have until Feb. 1, 2017 to bring ownership into line with regulations.

The bill would still need to be passed in three readings in the lower house of parliament before being passed by the parliament's upper house and signed into law by Putin.

Russia's media sector has attracted the likes of German-listed Axel Springer and U.S. firm Hearst Media, both of whom have bought into the magazine market. Foreign firms have much less exposure in Russia's television sector, where Russians receive the majority of their news.

Media analyst at VTB Capital Research Anastasia Obukhova said foreign ownership is overall small in Russia's media sector, adding there were few foreign companies that have a stake higher than 20 percent.

"Few of them are public, and if they are owned by a Russian businessman it would be hard to say if their assets are owned in Russia or offshore, it's a very difficult topic to clarify," she said.

Journalists have said Putin is tightening his grip over print and Internet media where the last traces of dissent still remain and point to the sacking of an editor at one of Russia's most popular online news organizations earlier this year.

Independent online news outlet Dozhd that made its name covering street protests against Putin in 2011-12 was also taken off the air in a move its general director called censorship over its sometimes critical views of the Kremlin.

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