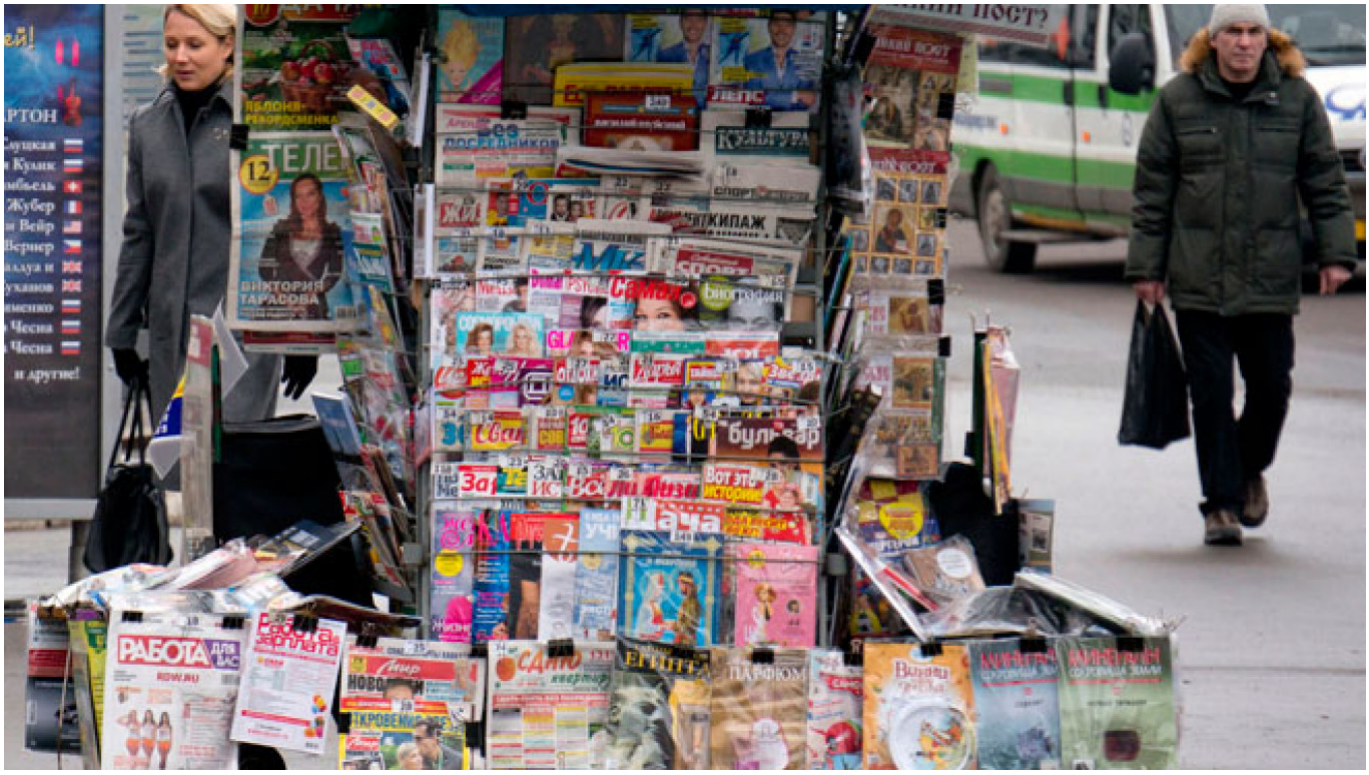
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Kremlin Human Rights Council Slams Russia's New Foreign Media Bill

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If the law passes in its current form despite warnings, Russia’s media landscape faces sweeping changes.

Citing gaping loopholes and legislative inconsistencies, the Presidential Council on Civil Society and Human Rights lambasted a recently passed bill that threatens to strictly curtail foreign ownership of Russian media assets.

The State Duma swiftly passed in its second and third readings Friday a draft law limiting foreign ownership of Russian media outlets to 20 percent. The law was first introduced just over a week prior — on Sept. 17.

Following its triumph in the State Duma, the bill is slated for consideration by the Federation Council, Russia's upper house of parliament, before being sent on to President Vladimir Putin for his signature.

The hasty passage of a bill capable of fundamentally reshaping Russia's media landscape has courted sharp criticism from industry leaders.

An analysis released Tuesday by the human rights council has likewise been less than favorable. The council released an analysis of the draft law highlighting several irregularities, including overlap and contradictions with pre-existing Russian legislation.

Under current Russian investment legislation, foreign entities are limited to holding a minority stake in Russian television and radio stations whose broadcasts are available to more than half the country's population, and in print publications that boast circulations of more than a million, the council noted in a summary of its analysis released Tuesday.

Russian legislation also forbids foreigners from founding new publications in Russia, the council's analysis says.

Contradictions aside, the current law leaves gaping loopholes that would enable crafty foreigners to circumvent the ownership threshold.

According to the council's analysis, a foreign owner could use a Russian entity effectively under his control to purchase a Russian news outlet, thus enabling him to manage the publication through indirect ownership.

Alternatively, a foreigner could simply purchase the property housing a given publication, allowing him to control strategic decisions, according to the council's findings.

The council also noted concern with the fate of workers employed by publications likely to be impacted by the law, noting that journalists shouldn't suffer the consequences of issues pertaining to a given media outlet's ownership. "If an investor in an oil company has broken a law, this does not mean that the oil company must halt its operations," the summary says.

The council recommended a reworking of the law "to eliminate numerous legal inaccuracies, mistakes and the clauses that can certainly not be applied in reality."

Notably, while the council has often been critical of the government initiatives, its recommendations have rarely been successful in making an impact.

For instance, it said in 2012 that the bill prohibiting the adoption of Russian children by U.S. citizens was unconstitutional, but alas, the bill became a law.

The council also unsuccessfully proposed a repeal of a 2012 law that mires "politically active" NGOs that receive funding from abroad in red tape, and relegates them to a special "foreign agent" registry.

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