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Russian Communists Want Prison Terms for Comparing Soviets to Nazis

By Anna Dolgov

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A man waering a Red Army uniform holds a Soviet flag during celebrations to mark Victory Day at the Soviet War Memorial near the Reichstag building, in Tiergarten district of Berlin, Germany.

Lawmakers from the Communist Party faction in the State Duma, Russia's lower house of parliament, have drafted a bill that would introduce a 10-year prison sentence for comparing the Soviet regime to Nazi Germany, the state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported Monday.

The bill was a response to the "clearly emerging international tendency to change the post-war world order and rewrite the results of World War II," a note accompanying the bill said, RIA Novosti reported.

Accusations of foreign or domestic foes' attempts to "change world order" by seeking to rob Russia of its supposedly rightful sphere of influence have become a common theme in Moscow's anti-Western rhetoric amid the Ukrainian crisis.

Meanwhile, praise for Russia's Soviet past has enjoyed a revival.

The latest bill — proposed by Duma deputies Valery Rashkin and Sergei Obukhov of the Communist Party — would add amendments to another law adopted last year that introduced five-year prison terms for "rehabilitating" Nazism, RIA Novosti reported.

The bill would add a "ban on equating the political regimes of the U.S.S.R. and Nazi Germany, and also on asserting the superiority of the latter," the explanatory note was quoted as saying.

Violations would be punishable by up to 10 years in prison, followed by a three-year period in which those convicted would be unable to hold certain types of employment, the report said.

The bill followed bans in some former Soviet nations, including Ukraine and Estonia, to ban the use of both Soviet and Nazi symbols, and the toppling of scores of monuments to Bolshevik founder Vladimir Lenin across Ukraine during the past year.

See also: Estonia's Justice Ministry Wants Ban on Communist, Nazi Symbols

The authors of the bill said their measure was also a response to a 2006 resolution by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, or PACE, that called for denouncing totalitarian communist regimes, RIA Novosti reported.

"Documents like that consistently lay the groundwork for blaming the U.S.S.R. for unleashing World War II," the note to the bill said, RIA Novosti reported.

Moscow's defensiveness about the Soviet Union's role in the war — including the country's Molotov-Ribbentrop pact with the Nazis that called for carving up Europe — has increased sharply after Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine last year.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who in 2009 denounced the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact as "unacceptable from the moral point of view," "harmful" and "dangerous," last month defended it as Moscow's response to being isolated by the West.

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