

A Ban on Offending Russia's Veterans

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Russian lawmakers from the Communist Party have followed through with plans first unveiled this May, formally introducing legislation that would make it a crime to offend veterans of the Great Patriotic War (as the Soviet front of the Second World War is known in Russia).

The draft law proposes punishing those who commit “public acts that express clear disrespect for society and insult the feelings of Great Patriotic War veterans by way of deliberately distorted information” about the war, as well as acts intended to “humiliate or belittle the victory accomplished by the armed forces of the USSR.”

Those who violate the proposed law would face fines as high as 300,000 rubles (\$4,650) or forced labor.

The legislation establishes even more significant penalties for destroying or damaging monuments dedicated to the Great Patriotic War: fines as high as 1 million rubles (\$15,500) or forced labor up to a year.

Offending veterans on May 9, the anniversary of the USSR's victory in World War II, would be the most serious crime of all, carrying a punishment of up to 3 million rubles (\$46,500) or up to three years of forced labor.

The legislation's [explanatory note](#) says the need to impose these strict punishments has been "especially clear" since 2013, when lawmakers criminalized behavior that offends religious people's feelings. The Communist deputies sponsoring the new draft law argue that "belief in the goodness, justice, and ideals" for which WWII veterans fought deserves the same protections as those now bestowed on religious beliefs.

Communist deputies first proposed criminalizing behavior that offends WWII veterans in May, when the legislation's sponsors announced consultations with the Kremlin and the Supreme Court. One of the bill's authors, Sergei Obukhov, was a coauthor of the 2013 legislation that criminalized offending religious people's feelings. That law was passed in the wake of the infamous Pussy Riot trial.

Earlier this month, Ruslan Sokolovsky was [arrested](#) in Yekaterinburg for publishing videos on YouTube that local investigators say incite extremism and insult the feelings of religious people. He has been denied bail and faces as many as five years in prison.

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