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Kremlin Hints at Suicide Censorship U-Turn

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Russia could see a censorship U-turn on strict laws which ban the media from discussing suicide.

Speaking in an interview with Russia's Znak news site, Alexey Volin, Minister of Telecom and Mass Communications, hinted that guidelines which control reports on suicide cases could be relaxed. A number of journalists have claimed that current Kremlin guidelines act to cover-up the social problems which drive Russians to take their own lives.

Some news outlets refuse to write the word "suicide" due to fears that they could be accused of promoting self-harm.

"Several changes in the law severely restrict journalists and their work," Volin told Znak. "There is a problem with describing the act of suicide, driving reporters to write riddles such

as, “in the N region, a young woman committed something due to something else,” he said.

“Suicide is an extremely controversial issue. We often have disputes [with Russian media watchdog Rospotrebnadzor], but now that both parties have a real dialogue, fewer cases end up in court,” Volin said.

“It's understood that a report on a terminally ill man taking his own life, is not promoting suicide, but shows the failings of our healthcare system,” he said.

The issue of suicide has been under scrutiny in Russia after a number of terminally-ill cancer patients took their own lives in February 2015. Notes left by some of the deceased indicated that they were distressed by a lack of pain medication.

In July, Rospotrebnadzor released new guidelines for media outlets, asking them not to link suicides to external factors such as living conditions.

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