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Bill Decriminalizing Domestic Violence Passes Second Reading in Russian Parliament

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New legistlation decriminalizing domestic violence has passed its second reading in Russia's lower chamber of parliament, the State Duma. Some 385 deputies voted in favor of the bill, with just two lawmakers voting against and only one abstaining.

The bill would remove the charge of "battery within families" — assaults which don't result in "substantial bodily harm" — from Russia's Criminal Code, downgrading it to an administrative offense. Criminal charges would only be brought against offenders if beatings took place more than once a year.

The initiative was put forward by ultra-conservative Russian lawmakers Olga Batalina and Yelena Mizulina, who is already notorious for successfully lobbying Russia's controversial "gay propaganda" law.

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Two weeks ago, when the bill passed the first reading, Council of Europe Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland expressed concern about decriminalizing domestic violence in Russia in a letter to the Russian parliament. Speaker of the Russian Duma Vyacheslav Volodin, however, assured that the lawmakers cared about keeping the families "solid" and based their decisions on polls that showed more than half of Russians are against government interfering into "insignificant" family matters.

"We looked at sociological studies and saw that the majority of the society – 59 percent – are against strict regulation [outlining punishment for] insignificant conflicts that didn't result in bodily harm," Volodin told reporters on Tuesday.

"It is important for us not to interfere with family matters," he added. "At the same time there must be measures to protect people against domestic violence, and in regard to that there needs to be dialogue. We've had this dialogue."

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Commenting on the bill Wednesday, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that family conflicts did "not necessarily constitute domestic violence," and dismissed "calls to punish various expressions of family relations" as unreasonable.

According to Russian government statistics, 40 percent of all violent crimes are committed within the family. The figures correlate to 36,000 women being beaten by their partners every day, and 26,000 children being assaulted by their parents every year.

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