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United Russia Tries to Fight 'Fake News' (In Its Own Way)

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Two State Duma deputies have introduced a proposal calling for multi-million ruble fines for publishing "false information" on social media.

The amendment by two members of the majority party United Russia proposes a fine of up to five million rubles ($83,000) for individuals and up to 50 million rubles ($830,000) for large corporations, the RBC news outlet reported Wednesday, citing a copy of the text.

In an explanatory note to the proposal seen by RBC, the authors said they were following in the footsteps of Germany.

They were likely referring to Germany's Network Enforcement Act, which calls for hefty fines against social media companies that violate hate speech and false information rules.

Sergei Boyarsky, one of the authors of the Russian amendment, told RBC the law would target social media companies, not individual users.

“It will be up to the organizers of information dissemination to delete illegal information,” he said on Twitter.

Although still in a preliminary stage, Russian social media companies have reacted negatively to the proposed bill.

“The proposed measures are completely redundant and they are impossible to implement,” a spokesperson for the VKontakte social media platform, Yevgeny Krasnikov, told RBC.

Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki, Russia’s most popular social media websites, have argued there are already ways for users to flag disturbing or false content.

The RBC report did not specify who would be the judge of whether social media posts contain fake news, but it would likely be Russia’s communications watchdog, Roskomnadzor.

Recently, Roskomnadzor threatened to block the encrypted messaging service Telegram, arguing it was being used by terrorists.

Attempts to regulate the Internet in Russia are widely seen by critics as a way to encroach on freedom of speech and stifle online activity that is critical of the Kremlin.

Related article: Like, Share, Convict: Russian Authorities Target Social Media Users

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