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Senators Look to Cut U.S. Media Numbers in Russia

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Zurab Dzhavakhadze / ITAR-TASS

Russian senators want to cut the number of U.S. media outlets in the country in response to Washington's request that the RT America news channel registers as a foreign agent.

The U.S. Justice Department has asked that the Kremlin-backed RT adhere to a 1930s foreign agent registration law amid concerns over Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential elections.

Reports on Friday indicated that Russian prosecutors could label U.S. outlets "undesirable" in tit-for-tat measures, and Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova threatened "analogous" legal steps against state-funded and private U.S. media over the weekend.

Russia's upper house of parliament, the Federation Council, is proposing to cut the number of U.S. media organizations so it equals the number of Russian outlets in the United States, the Izvestia newspaper reported Monday, citing parliamentary and diplomatic sources.

The retaliatory measures could target state-funded Radio Liberty and Voice of America, privately-run CNN, as well as a number of news agencies and newspapers, according to the unidentified sources.

Andrei Klimov, the head of the Federation Council's committee on state sovereignty, confirmed the proposal. He added that the committee had requested proposals on response measures from the Prosecutor General's Office, the Foreign Ministry, the Justice Ministry, and state media watchdog Roskomnadzor — to be submitted by Oct. 20.

"This is needed to understand what we can do and how to give a tit-for-tat response according to Russian legislation," Klimov told Izvestia. The senator said existing laws could also be amended to respond to what Russia sees as U.S. "administrative measures and propaganda" against state-funded RT.

The authors of Moscow's retaliatory steps are focusing on U.S. outlets with an active presence in the Russian regions, according to Izvestia's sources. These include Radio Liberty's Krym.Realii project, as well as The Washington Post, The New York Times, and The Wall Street Journal.

Another proposed step was for the watchdog Roskomnadzor to ask CNN to label itself a foreign agent. Late in September, Roskomnadzor warned CNN International over alleged media law violations.

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