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Russian Ministry Urges Heavy Prison Sentences For Importing Western Produce

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Russia's Finance Ministry has proposed a law to make importing sanctioned products a criminal offense punishable by up to 12 years behind bars.

Russia imposed sanctions on products from the U.S., EU and other Western countries in 2014 in response to their sanctions over Moscow's role in Ukraine. Sanctioned goods, however, continue to appear in the Russian market.

The proposed law would only apply to corporations and sole proprietors, not to individuals.

The illegal import of goods would be punishable by a prison term of 3 to 7 years with a fine of up to a million rubles ($17,000). Prison terms for organized groups importing Western produce would be as high as 7 to 12 years.

Currently, fines for illegal imports range from 2,500 rubles ($42) for individuals to 20,000 ($335) for officials and 300,000 ($5,030) for corporations.

In February of this year, a draft law proposing fines for storage and transport of such goods failed to pass in parliament, The Bell reports.

A source told The Bell that to get a truckload of illegal apples through Russian customs costs around $2,500 in bribes.

That figure — and the cost of imported food — will only go up if prison terms are imposed for such smuggling, the source said.

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