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Putin Signs Anti-Corruption Plan, With Loopholes

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Kremlin

Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a two-year plan to combat corruption, but included in the bill is a loophole exempting some corrupt officials from liability.

Russia ranks among the world's most corrupt countries in international ratings, with corruption-related crimes costing an estimated $2.5 billion in damages between 2014 and 2017. Anti-graft campaigns under Putin's rule have lead to little progress, while protests against corruption shook the country last year.

The two-year national plan gives the Cabinet a 2019 deadline to devise laws to punish corrupt officials. Legislators are also charged with deciding which acts of corruption constitute a fireable offense and expanding the list of illicitly obtained goods subject to seizure.

Related article: Russia Ranks 135th in Transparency International's World Corruption Index

Lawmakers are asked to submit draft bills by Nov. 1 tightening anti-corruption rules for federal and regional officials, as well as for state company employees.

One of the draft bills, according to the plan, could exempt corrupt officials from criminal liability under “force majeure," or exceptional, circumstances.

Critics of corruption in Russia say the government’s approach to fighting the scourge is flawed.

The government’s responsibility in both researching corruption across Russia while simultaneously tracking the success of anti-corruption efforts creates a conflict of interest argues Maxim Bouev, professor of applied finances at the European University in St. Petersburg.

“Even if we assume that politicians won’t intentionally abuse their position,” writes Bouev in a column for Vedomosti newspaper, “the existence of any anti-corruption loophole” offers an opportunity for manipulation.

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