

Russian Lawmaker Faces Extremism Probe for Criticizing Pension Reform

July 12, 2018



Nikolai Bondarenko, Russian lawmaker [VKontakte](#)

A deputy in southwestern Russia faces a hate speech investigation for criticizing unpopular government plans to raise the retirement age.

Russian lawmakers are [reportedly](#) scheduled to debate the [legislation](#) to progressively raise the pension age next Thursday. A whistleblower said members of the ruling United Russia party were told to [sign](#) a pledge not to criticize the reform, which the government argues would ease pressure on the budget.

A regional Duma deputy from Saratov said he was approached by police about a complaint related to his criticism of the retirement age hike, the MBKh Media website reported Wednesday.

“They informed me that there is a complaint demanding to investigate extremist content in my statements,” deputy Nikolai Bondarenko [told](#) the news outlet, which is owned by

opposition figure Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

In a recent Duma session where members were expected to vote in favor of the pension reform, security officials briefly [refused](#) entry to Bondarenko and members of non-ruling parties.

Related article: [Russian Media Launch Boycott of State Duma Over Sexual Harassment Claims](#)

When they were able to enter the chambers, Bondarenko made an impassioned [speech](#) decrying the human costs of pension reform while criticizing attempts to use the World Cup to distract from [pressing](#) local issues.

“This law does not entitle people to work, it forces them to work, to the grave,” said Bondarenko, who is a member of the Communist Party. “If we had beat Croatia, I can assure you the government would introduce serfdom.”

The Communist Party is seeking a nationwide referendum on the pension reform.

Bondarenko had received [warnings](#) to be careful when criticizing pension reform. The speaker of the regional Duma in Saratov, a member of the United Russia ruling party, told him that “authorities are monitoring your statements.”

Saratov’s Governor Valery Radayev, meanwhile, [called on Bondarenko to “be careful, just in case.”](#)

In his speech, Bondarenko also demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, who announced the retirement age hike on June 14, and his cabinet.

“You are crooks, you need to be brought to account,” he said.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/07/12/russian-lawmaker-faces-extremism-probe-criticizing-pension-reform-a62223>