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Restricting Foreign Ownership of Media Is Legal, Russia's Top Court Rules

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A law limiting foreign ownership of media in Russia to 20 percent is legal, the country's Constitutional Court ruled on Thursday.

Major foreign media holdings left Russia in wake of the 2016 law as the Kremlin moved to tighten control over the country's already heavily regulated media sector. Media companies owned by foreigners had until early 2017 to change their ownership structure in line with the legislation that President Vladimir Putin signed in 2014.

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On Thursday, Russia's Constitutional Court said the 20-percent foreign ownership threshold is "designed to prevent the strategic influence and control of the media."

“Since such influence may threaten the state’s information security, the contested restrictions are constitutionally permissible,” the court said in a judgment on its website.

However, the court ordered Russian lawmakers to clarify certain legal discrepancies in the bill that did not correspond with the constitution, including between the terms “founder” and “party” of a media outlet.

Moreover, the court said that it was unclear if Russians with dual citizenship could fully exercise their rights with the 20-percent limitation on ownership in place.

“On these points, the contested norm does not comply with the Russian Constitution,” it said.

The Constitutional Court heard the case after arbitration courts declared a dual Russian-Dutch citizen’s 49-percent stake in a radio station illegal.

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