Russian Lawmakers Move to Criminalize 'Disrespecting' the Government and Fake News

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Sergei Kiselyov / Moskva News Agency

Russian lawmakers passed highly contentious legislation Thursday that seeks to enact punishments for disrespecting the Russian government or spreading fake news.

Deputies [submitted](#) legislation last month to impose fines for "blatantly disrespecting" Russian institutions or posting "untruthful socially significant information." Commentators have suggested that the loose wording of the law could lead to mass arrests, joking that there wouldn't be enough space in Russian prisons for the number of violators.

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The State Duma passed the legislation in its first of three hearings on Thursday.

If passed and signed by the president, the legislation will establish punishments for spreading information that "exhibits blatant disrespect for the society, government, official government symbols, constitution or governmental bodies of the Russian Federation."

The law will also fine legal entities up to 1 million rubles ($15,100) for spreading information "disguised as authentic reports," while websites will be at risk of being blocked by prosecutors without the need for a court decision and individuals will be fined up to 50,000 rubles for violations.

On the eve of the bills' hearing Thursday, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's government voiced [backing](#) for the package.

Meanwhile, federal prosecutors and the Communications Ministry have expressed opposition to the legislation in its current wording.

Political analyst Yekaterina Schulmann [said](#) this week that the legislation was likely to stall ahead of its second hearing.

"The question is how soon the second reading comes and what version of these drafts will survive," she told the Ekho Moskvy radio station Monday.

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