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Putin Signs Constitutional Reforms on State Council, Secession, Russian Law

December 08, 2020



The new laws elevate the State Council, criminalize secession and prioritize the Russian Constitution over international law. **Kremlin.ru**

President Vladimir Putin has signed bills into law elevating a low-profile advisory body known as the State Council, criminalizing secession and prioritizing the Russian Constitution over international law.

Putin approved the set of laws on Tuesday, 160 days after Russian voters overwhelmingly approved constitutional reforms that pave the way for him to extend his 20-year rule until 2036.

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The new law defines the State Council as a constitutional state body formed by the head of state to ensure the coordinated work of government, determine key domestic and foreign policy areas, as well as social and economic development priorities. The State Council is

composed of regional governors and top federal officials.

Before a last-minute proposal this spring that allows him to ignore current constitutional limits and run for two more six-year presidential terms, analysts had predicted that Putin could remain at the helm as head of the State Council after his current term limit expires in 2024.

Another high-profile law Putin signed Tuesday gives prison terms of up to 10 years for giving away parts of Russian territory and fines for public calls toward territorial concessions.

The so-called "territorial integrity" law is widely seen as a warning to those in Russia who question its 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine and Russia's sovereignty over a chain of Pacific islands it seized after World War II and is also claimed by Japan.

Finally, Putin signed a law formally giving precedence to Russian law over international treaties that contradict the new Russian Constitution. Rights advocates have raised concerns that the law could erode rights and freedoms in Russia, whose citizens have for years sought justice they say they are denied at home in Europe's human rights court.

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