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Russia Wants to Exempt State Media From 'Foreign Agent' Scrutiny

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Moskva News Agency

The Russian government wants to exempt state media from financial scrutiny to avoid being labeled "foreign agents" because they are not prone to foreign influence.

The proposal comes after Russia labeled the independent news sites Meduza and VTimes "foreign agents," jeopardizing their futures by discouraging advertisers and levying steep fines for auditing violations.

Related article: Russia Declares Independent VTimes News Site a 'Foreign Agent'

Russia's Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media submitted a draft bill for discussion Monday requiring only commercial, and not state media, to be subjected to financial audits.

"Attempts to influence Russian information space from the outside with the aim of biased

informing and creating a distorted picture of political reality can only take place in relation to commercial media," it said.

State media, the ministry added, "are of strategic importance for ensuring the defense and security of the state [and] are aimed at achieving state, social and other public interests."

Public debate of the proposed bill is scheduled by June 7 before it is submitted to parliament.

Current law requires every Russian media outlet to report on foreign funding once every three months to alert consumers about "foreign-funded materials that endanger the interests of Russian society."

Russian law allows any individual or group that receives any amount from abroad to be labeled a "foreign agent."

Labeled individuals and groups are required to report their activities and finances in rigorous audits and face steep fines for violations. Other media outlets are also required to clearly label the designated entities as "foreign agents" and face fines if they don't.

Rights groups and Western institutions have criticized Russia's "foreign agent" law for stifling free speech and independent media.

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