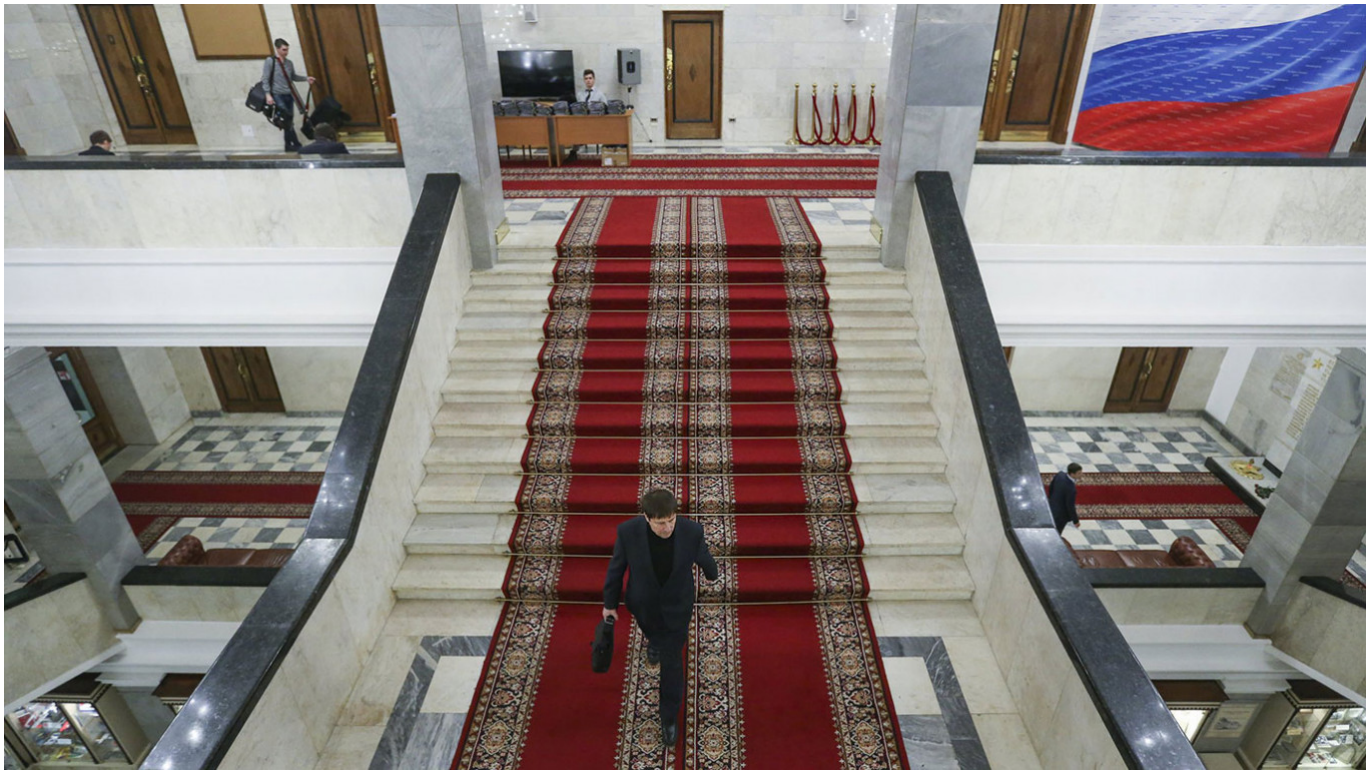
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Russia Moves to Abolish Regional 'Presidency'

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duma.gov.ru

Russian lawmakers passed legislation Tuesday abolishing regional presidencies in a move analysts described as the end of Russia as a "federation."

The move, which needs President Vladimir Putin's signature to become law, directly affects the republic of Tatarstan east of Moscow, where the regional leader holds the formal title of "president."

The State Duma, Russia's lower House of Parliament, passed the sweeping bill regulating regional executive and legislative authorities in a 330-89 vote. The upper-house Federation Council approved the bill in a single reading Wednesday.

The bill also abolishes term limits for governors and sets other rules putting regional leaders under Kremlin control.

Tatarstan's regional assembly rejected the bill in October on the grounds that it would violate

the Russian Constitution.

U.S.-based analyst Paul Goble said Putin is "attacking the few remaining symbols" of the 1993 Constitution by "gutt[ing] the few provisions that remained."

"Russia should not be called a federation" now, the U.S.-funded news organization RFE/RL quoted Goble as saying. "The reality has already been changed."

Putin "is doing so in such a clumsy and heavy-handed way that the Kremlin leader is going to produce exactly what he doesn't want — more resistance in the regions and republics and even a revival of talk about separatism," he added.

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