

Duma Votes to Expand Russia's Military Discreditation Law

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Russian lawmakers on Thursday [voted in favor](#) of a bill that would make it a criminal offense to “discredit” anyone fighting on Russia's side in the war in Ukraine, not just the Russian military.

The legislation aims to expand current laws criminalizing the discrediting of the Russian Armed Forces to include mercenaries serving in the ranks of Russia’s growing number of private military companies, such as the Wagner Group.

The bill was unexpectedly introduced by State Duma deputies Wednesday in the form of amendments to two largely unrelated bills that were already due to be voted on in the lower chamber of the Russian parliament.

If signed into law, the amendments would introduce sentences of up to seven years in prison for “public acts aimed at discrediting volunteer formations, organizations or individuals” that are aiding the work of the Russian Armed Forces.

Related article: [How Russia's New Law Against 'Fakes' is Being Applied](#)

The proposed amendments also increase the maximum punishment for violating the existing law against spreading "false" information about the army.

Those found guilty of “spreading fake information” about the army or a volunteer military formation would then face up to five years in prison instead of the three years outlined in the current law.

The new law would also raise the maximum fine from 700,000 rubles (\$9,250) to 1.5 million rubles (\$19,830).

In cases in which the dissemination of “false information” is deemed to have had “grave consequences,” violators could face up to 15 years in prison, under the new legislation.

The bill must now pass its third reading in the State Duma on March 14 before going to the upper house of parliament for approval and then finally to the president for his signature.

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