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Russia Eyes 5-Year Jail Terms for 'Russophobia'

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Moskva News Agency

Russian lawmakers are drafting legislation that would punish anti-Russian words and actions deemed as "Russophobia" with up to five years imprisonment, the independent news outlet Vyorstka reported Thursday.

The bill is expected to amend Russia's Criminal Code by adding clauses on "Russophobia" to articles criminalizing public calls for extremism and violating equal rights.

Russia's State Duma, the lower house of parliament, defines "Russophobia" as actions and statements directed against Russian citizens, Vyorstka cited an unnamed lawmaker as saying.

Analysts say the Kremlin co-opted the term "Russophobia" to advance its idea of Moscow as a besieged fortress amid rapidly deteriorating relations with the West.

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The presidential administration “conceptually” supports jail terms for Russophobia, Vyorstka cited an administration source as saying. The bill's authors are said to be members of the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party, the Duma's fourth-largest party by representation.

The International Criminal Court’s (ICC) decision in March to issue an arrest warrant for war crimes against President Vladimir Putin and his children’s rights commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova falls under the new legislation, Vyorstka said.

It added that the Russophobia bill will also target statements by people on Russia's “foreign agents” registry who openly support Ukraine, which Russia invaded in early 2022.

An unnamed lawmaker said the “timely” Russophobia bill will apply primarily to punish violations of the rights of Russian nationals abroad.

“The terms will be vague enough to apply [punishments] against whoever needed,” another source close to the Kremlin was quoted as saying.

“As you can see, this wording can be used very conveniently without falling into heresy.”

Irina Yarovaya, a senior lawmaker from the ruling United Russia party who has authored some of the country’s more restrictive laws, suggested last week that Russophobia should be defined as a “misanthropic ideology.”

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