

[RU] Bill on a “High Council for Ethics and Morals in the Field of the Film, Television and Radio” Passes First Reading

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On 11 February 1998 a Bill on a "High Council for Ethics and Morals in the field of Film, Television and Radio" passed its first reading in the Russian Duma.

The Bill contains 3 sections and 9 articles. It was compiled and tabled by 15 Deputies. Its main purpose is to set up a new State body to supervise all cinematographic organisations, television companies and radio stations (called "operators").

The High Council would have 9 members, 3 appointed by the President, 3 by the Duma and 3 by the Federal Soviet (Upper house of the Russian Parliament), with a 6-year term of office. It would be virtually impossible for members of the High Council to be removed from office.

The High Council would have considerable powers. Thus for example, it would be able to impose fines on operators (up to a maximum of approximately USD 15,000), reduce authorised television and radio broadcasting times by up to 50%, reduce the period of validity of a licence by one year, cancel a licence, etc. The Bill stands a good chance of going through a second and third reading in the Duma. More than 55% of all Deputies approved its first reading (only 14 were against; 180 Deputies were absent). The Bill also has support in the Upper House (46 regions of the Russian Federation have expressed their support, with only 2 against; the other 41 expressed no opinion).

It is nevertheless likely that President Yeltsin will use his right to veto the Bill. The Bill received a negative opinion from the Federal Government. The first deputy prime minister Anatoly Chubais recently referred to the High Council as a "censorship body". According to Chubais the Bill is counter to Russia's Basic Law, which guarantees the freedom of the mass media.

