Law on Mass Media Foreign Agents adopted in Russia

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On 21 November, 2019, at the third and final reading, the State Duma of the Russian Federation adopted the draft law providing the possibility of applying the status of mass media foreign agent to individuals. On 25 November, the law was signed by the President of the Russian Federation.

The amendments suggest that the individuals can be recognised as "performing the functions of a foreign agent" on a par with legal entities if they create or distribute (including online) the information of the mass media foreign agent and at the same time receive money or material assets of foreign origins.

According to the amendments, all media that already have the status of "foreign agents" will have to establish a Russian legal entity before February 1, 2020 to be able to work in the Russian Federation. In addition, all their publications must bear the indication that they were created by a "foreign agent". Henceforth, foreign media recognised as foreign agents will be obliged to establish the appropriate legal entities within one month after inclusion in the register of the Ministry of Justice.

The Chairman of the Information Policy Committee of the State Duma, Leonid Levin, assured the public that the law would not be used against bloggers and publicists.

He stated, "This legislation is in no way directed against freedom of speech and freedom of dissemination of information in our country, but is a response to a number of unfriendly actions of the United States against the Russian TV channel RT (previously Russia Today), Sputnik and the journalists who work with them. It will complete the formation of a system of reciprocal measures against foreign media working with the Russian audience. It is important that the bill establishes a possibility, but not an obligation. Each case will be assessed by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, which will guarantee against making unreasonable decisions."

In July 2012, the State Duma adopted the amendments to a number of Russian laws that regulate the activities of non-profit organisations (NGOs). The law obliges NGOs that engage in political activities and receive foreign funding to register as " foreign agents." NGOs should indicate their status, for example on their websites, and report regularly on their financial situation. To date, more than

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70 organisations have been included in the "foreign agents" register.

Later, in 2017, the "foreign media agents" legislation was adopted, shortly after the US Justice Department required RT America (part of the RT network) to register as a foreign agent in the United States.

On 5 December, 2017, the Ministry of justice officially recognised nine media outlets as foreign agents: Voice of America; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL); the TV channel "Present time"; the Tatar-Bashkir service "Radio Liberty" (Azatliq Radiosi); Siberia. Realities; Idel. Realities; Factograph; Caucasus. Realities; and Crimea. Realities. The list has not changed since then.

Пресс-релиз Комитета по культуре Госдумы РФ

http://komitet5.km.duma.gov.ru/Novosti-Komiteta/item/20517363/

Culture Committee of the Russian State Duma's press release

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