

# Bosnian Serbs pass law limiting freedom of speech

February 5 2015, by Irena Knezevic

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(AP)—Lawmakers in the Serb part of Bosnia passed a controversial law Thursday that allows authorities to fine people who post offensive content on social networks—a move rights activists have labeled as limiting freedom of expression.

The [law](#) was passed by a vote of 46-0 after opposition lawmakers left the session in protest. One lawmaker said the region, Republika Srpska, can now change its name to "North Republika Srpska," drawing a parallel to the harsh censorship in North Korea.

The regional parliament extended the definition of public space in the existing public order law to include social networks. What would constitute "offensive content" is open to government interpretation.

Under public pressure, lawmakers agreed to exclude criticism of the government from the bill.

But activists fear the government could still prevent protesters from using social media to organize demonstrations, by labeling the events violations of public order.

Prior to the vote, journalists associations, civil society groups, foreign embassies and the Organization for Security and Cooperation all urged the parliament not to adopt such a law.

"Officials may be left to interpret what is considered disturbing or

offensive, possibly leading to arbitrary or abusive charges," said Dunja Mijatovic, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of Media.

The EU delegation to Bosnia said freedom of expression must be upheld without reservation, especially in a country aspiring to become an EU member.

Sinisa Vukelic, from the journalists union told the AP Thursday that the union will ask the president of the Bosnian Serb region not to sign the law.

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