

Russia adopts controversial counter-terrorism amendments

June 24 2016, by Nataliya Vasilyeva

The Russian parliament on Friday adopted a set of controversial counter-terrorism amendments which have sparked alarm among rights activists.

The amendments that the Duma voted on Friday include introducing prison sentences for failure to report a grave crime and doubling the number of crimes that Russians as young as 14 years old can be prosecuted. Another forces telecommunications companies to store logs and data for months, a measure which threatens to eat almost all of the companies' profits.

A brainchild of the hawkish pro-Kremlin lawmaker Irina Yarovaya, the bill was rammed through the parliament by the ruling United Russia party and voted on in the Duma's final session before the summer recess and the September election. Widespread rigging at the December 2011 vote which elected the current Duma led to large-scale opposition protests.

In a throwback to the Soviet time, the amendments introduced prison sentences for failing to report a crime.

"How successful we are in fighting terrorism depends not only on authorities and how law enforcement works but also on the public," the bill's co-author Ernest Valeyev said in defense of the amendment. "That's why we think this amendment will encourage the public to counter terrorism."

The bill which rattled Russian business most will make it obligatory for telecommunications companies to store call logs for 12 months and call and message data for six months. Businesses have said this is 100,000 times as much data and they store already and will take more than \$33 billion in investment to organize and run, eating up all of their profits. The original bill, however, would have the companies store data for several years.

Communist deputy Yuri Sinelshchikov was among the bill's critics, worrying that storing data and call logs would open the door to official abuse. He said law enforcement can petition the court and then phone companies to trace calls if they need to investigate the crime, and giving them six months to do so is too much.

Opposition lawmaker Dmitry Gudkov said the amendment will be a heavy burden for the businesses. "Instead of competing and entering new markets and improve connection quality, our [telecommunications companies](#) will have to deal with this stupidity," he said.

The most draconian amendments, including the right to strip Russians of their citizenship, were hastily taken out of the bill before the debate. Some lawmakers complained that they never got the final draft before the vote.

Human Rights Watch said in an opinion piece published on Thursday that even without the most alarming amendments, the bill is cause for concern.

"It is hard to avoid the impression that the alleged removal of the bill's most scandalous provisions may have been specially designed to have the public breathe a sigh of relief and skim over the fact that even with some improvements the Yarovaya Law will still severely curb people's right to exercise free expression and other fundamental freedoms in Russia,"

HRW's Tanya Lokshina said.

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