

# Russia preparing law to ‘pressure’ American journalists

Russian officials are coordinating to establish “a legal base” for increasing pressure on American media in the country, according to a senior Russian diplomat.

“We shall jointly with other federal authorities, with our lawmakers continue this work,” deputy foreign minister Sergey Ryabkov told state-run media.

Russia has threatened various forms of retaliation against the United States in the context of a diplomatic tit-for-tat that has unfolded over the last year; that dispute stemmed from Russia’s cyberattacks against the Democratic party and former President Barack Obama’s expulsion of Russian officials in response. But Ryabkov’s comments focused on another area of tension related to the election interference: the role of media in each country.

“We as representatives of the Foreign Ministry also said more than once that with the ongoing attempts of pressing the Russian media, perhaps, we shall have to make certain changes to our legislative and regulative bases in order to have opportunities of mirror response to the US pressure against our media,” Ryabkov said.

Russian officials have been protective of Kremlin-funded media outlets operating in the United States. They came under fire after American intelligence officials identified RT (formerly known as Russia Today) as a key cog in a “state-run propaganda machine” that amplified disinformation designed to undermine 2016 Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton’s campaign.

“[RT’s nonprofit] structure was set up to avoid the Foreign Agents Registration Act and to facilitate licensing abroad,” according to a January report from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

RT’s American affiliate missed an Oct. 17 deadline to register as a foreign agent pursuant to Justice Department instructions. “Our legal team has been doing everything possible for RT to avoid having to register under FARA and the dialogue is ongoing. On their advice we are not discussing further details at this

time," RT head of communications Anna Belkina told CNN on Friday.

Ryabkov's comment may be intended to discourage the Justice Department from taking more aggressive steps to enforce RT's registration. But it's also part of a long-standing Russian concern about U.S. influence in the country. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed into law a measure that allowed his team to shut down pro-democracy organizations operating in the country. Other Russian officials seem to conflate the non-profits with the work of the State Department, as well.

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