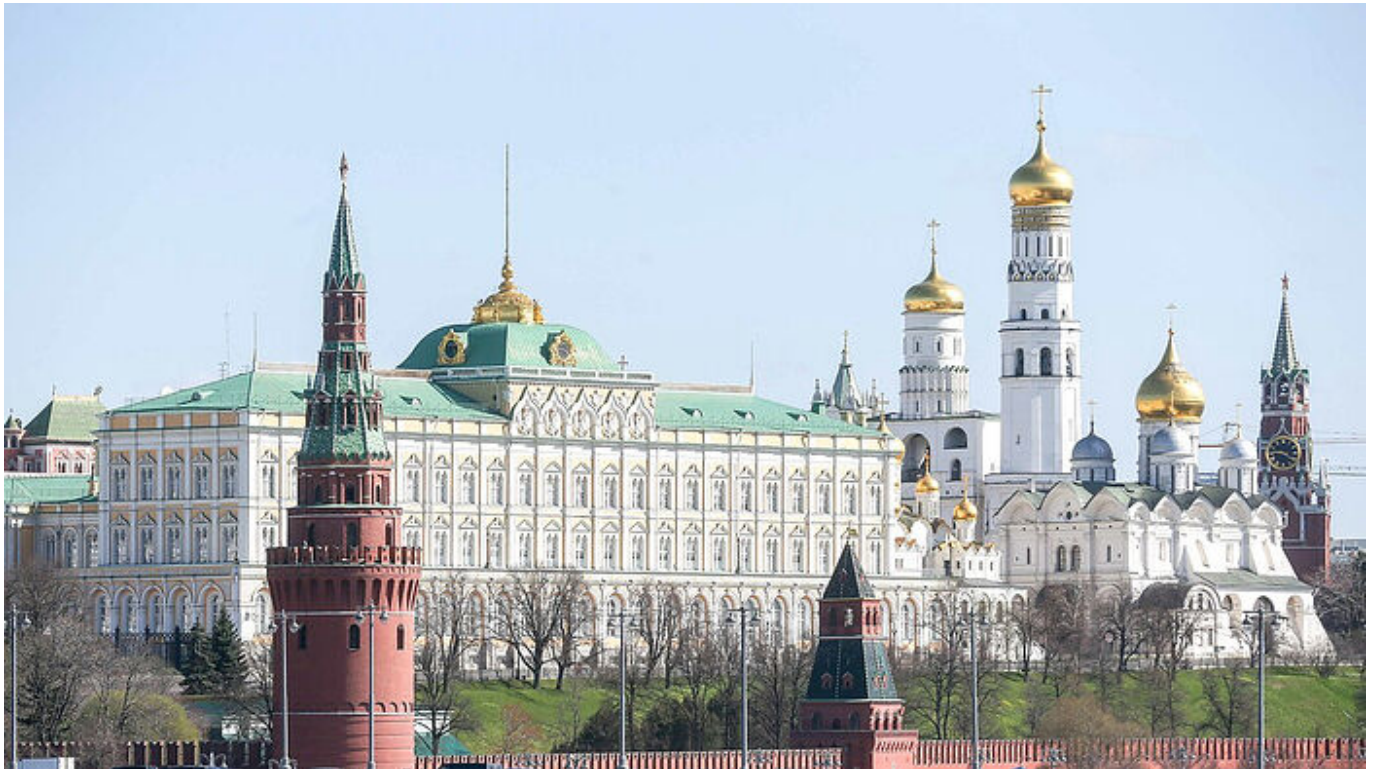


Russian Duma passes law protecting Religious Symbols



State Duma deputies, at a plenary session, adopted in the second and third readings a law aimed at protecting religious symbols of the main traditional faiths. The law was prepared by an inter-factional working group and received the support of all religious denominations in the Russian Federation. Amendments are being made to the Federal Law, “On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations.”

According to Vyacheslav Volodin [Chairman (Speaker) of the State Duma, the lower house of Russia’s Federal Assembly] , this regulation will ensure a careful and respectful attitude toward religious symbols and will protect the feelings of believers.

“This bill is extremely important. When it comes to symbols of faith, to faith itself, we must understand that national identity consists of language, history, culture, and faith,” Volodin emphasized during the consideration of the matter at the plenary session.

Under the law, it is prohibited to use images and other reproductions of religious

buildings and other religious sites, as well as official heraldic symbols or recognizable parts thereof, containing religious symbols of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and other religions that form an integral part of Russia's historical heritage, in mass media, the internet, product sales, services, and advertising — without these symbols being present.

An exception is made when:

Historical images are reproduced, provided that the corresponding period of time is indicated and that the religious symbols in question were absent in that period,

or if the reproduction of religious symbols leads to their desecration.

(Translated from the website of the Russian State Duma.)

In recent years, there have been public discussions among the Orthodox in Russia concerning the use of religious symbols. Some have argued that religious symbols, such as the cross, should not be depicted on merchandise such as bottles and packaging that will be thrown in the garbage once the contents are used.

On the other hand, such a law protects those who publicly display such symbols.

Notably, the emblem of the Russian State depicts a shield with a two-headed eagle, both heads crowned, with a larger crown above them. This emblem goes back to pre-revolutionary Russia. Its first reinstatement had omitted the cross above the larger crown. Now the cross has been restored to the crown in reproductions of the emblem.

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