

Media – In Massive Spending Bill, U.S. Lawmakers Back Several Measures Targeting Russia; May 04, 2017

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### **In Massive Spending Bill, U.S. Lawmakers Back Several Measures Targeting Russia**

By Mike Eckel

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WASHINGTON – Congress has authorized a new \$100 million effort to counter “Russian influence and aggression” and to support civil society organizations in Europe and Eurasia.

U.S. lawmakers on May 4 also backed a measure imposing new restrictions and oversight on Russian diplomats in the United States -- a measure that Moscow had angrily warned Washington against.

Both efforts were included in the \$1.1 trillion budget to fund the federal government for 2017 that was given final backing by the Senate. It now goes to the White House for President Donald Trump’s signature.

The \$100 million fund is the product of several proposals that have circulated in the House and Senate in recent months as lawmakers looked to push back against Russia’s perceived interference in Europe and elsewhere.

A growing number of Democrats and Republicans have pointed to the spread of fake news, foreign funding of political parties, outright propaganda, and other covert activities as indications of an aggressive Russian effort to meddle in or subvert governments seen as hostile to Moscow.

**[Election campaigns in France](#)** and Germany have been shadowed by suspicions of Russian involvement, as well as **[last year’s presidential election in the United States](#)**.

The \$100 million allocation, called the Countering Russian Influence Fund, is aimed specifically at Europe, earmarked for “civil society groups involved in rule of law, media, cyber, and other programs that strengthen democratic institutions and processes, and counter Russian influence and aggression,” according to the legislation.

**The money will go to** “support democracy programs in the Russian Federation, including to promote Internet freedom, and shall also be made available to support the democracy and rule of law strategy” under State Department policies.

The legislation also directs the money be made available to so-called Eastern Partnership countries -- a European Union program with the ex-Soviet states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

The funds will help “advance the implementation of Association Agreements and trade agreements with the European Union, and to reduce their vulnerability to external economic and political pressure from the Russian Federation.”

Also tacked onto the budget legislation passed by the Senate was an intelligence authorization measure that tightens oversight of Russian diplomats in the United States.

**The section** requires the State Department, the FBI, and the Director of National Intelligence to set up a procedure that would essentially obligate Russian diplomats to give the FBI advance warning about travels beyond the embassy and consulates’ immediate geographic territory.

Last year, when word first emerged that U.S. lawmakers were contemplating such restrictions, Russia’s Foreign Ministry complained loudly and threatened retaliation against U.S. diplomats in Russia.

The Foreign Ministry’s spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, **charged at the time** that the legislation was part of a “witch hunt” against Russia by outgoing President Barack Obama’s administration.

Privately, U.S. officials brushed off the threats of retaliation by Moscow, saying the movements of U.S. diplomats in Russia had already been severely curtailed for some time.

The intelligence measure also calls for the creation of a new interagency committee to counter what it calls Russian efforts to manipulate foreign opinion. That is a reflection of the growing bipartisan consensus that emerged in the wake of the U.S. presidential election, when the intelligence community concluded that Moscow actively meddled in the election campaign in support of Trump.

The Senate Intelligence Committee, which originally drafted the measures, is one of several House and Senate panels investigating those Russia efforts.

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*Link:*

<https://www.rferl.org/a/us-spending-bill-government-running-senate-trump/28468643.html>