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Russian President expands the competence of the Federal Security Service

On 29 July, President Dmitri Medvedev confirmed changes to laws regulating the operation of the Federal Security Service; these changes have been criticised by Russian democratic institutions and human rights defenders. The new regulations allow the FSS to summons physical and legal persons suspected of preparing activities which break the law, and if these summons are disregarded, to arrest or fine them. Giving the FSS right to issue 'warnings' may be considered as the government's reaction to the escalating protest activity in Russia, and as a preventative measure to force the organisers of anti-government activities and journalists critical of the government to apply self-censorship.

The new legal regulations allow the FSB to issue warnings to persons and legal subjects in case their activities are deemed to be threats to public order. Disregarding these warnings carries the threat of fines of between 500 and 1000 roubles (US$16.50 to US$33) or 15 days in jail. The authorisation of the new regulations has met with criticism from representatives of democratic institutions, who see the president's decision as showing a lack of respect for civic rights. The controversies connected with the expansion of the FSS's rights were also the reason for the resignation of Ella Pamfilova, the head of the presidential Human Rights Council. Despite these protests, the president has not changed his attitude. At one press conference, he emphasised that the changes in legislation were introduced at his recommendation, thus confirming the FSS's dominant role in Russia's internal security system. <pez>