Anti-press freedom laws in Russia

After Crimea was annexed in March 2014, its press became subject to draconian Russian laws and measures.

Separatism: Under Article 280.1, introduced into Russia’s Criminal Code in May 2014, anyone calling for separatism in the media can face up to five years in prison. The vaguely worded law implies a ban on referring to Crimea as occupied, annexed by Russia, or as being in Ukraine.

Soldiers’ deaths: In May, President Vladimir Putin issued a decree that extended a ban on coverage of military casualty figures to peacetime. Under the decree, coverage of soldiers’ deaths is considered a disclosure of state secrets and is punishable by up to 20 years in prison.

Regulation: The Russian media regulator Roskomnadzor has power to withdraw licenses from media outlets that it finds to be in violation of Russian law, including the broad legislation on combating extremism. If two warnings are issued in a year, Roskomnadzor can shut down an outlet.

Bloggers: As of August 1, 2014, Russian bloggers with more than 3,000 daily visitors to their website or social networking platform are required by law to register as a media outlet. They have to follow the same provisions as Russian news outlets, and failure to do so could result in a fine of up to 500,000 rubles ($8,700) and a 30-day suspension of blogging activities.

Criminalized defamation: When he returned to power in May 2012, Putin reinstated the criminalized defamation law his predecessor had struck down in 2011. According to the criminal code, journalists or media outlets found guilty of defamation may face a fine of up to 5 million rubles or 480 hours of corrective labor.

Internet censorship: Russian authorities can demand that Internet providers block access to any website, without presenting a court order. The provision came into effect in February 2014, after Putin signed a law authorizing the prosecutor’s office to restrict access to websites containing calls to mass disorder, extremist activity, or unauthorized mass rallies. Since its introduction, access to several news websites critical of the Kremlin have been blocked, according to reports.

[Compiled from CPJ reports and news reports by Lydia Tomkiw, CPJ’s 2015 Google Journalism Fellow]