

Big Brother Sweden: Critics force snoop law postponement

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Swedish lawmakers have agreed to postpone plans for the passing into law of a controversial surveillance bill following an emotional debate in the Riksdag on Tuesday evening.

A last gasp appeal from the Centre Party was accepted by the government, which promised to strengthen the law with regard to civil liberties.

Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt said his Moderate Party would back the amendments proposed by dissenting members of parliament in the governing coalition.

Rather than facing a straight 'yes' or 'no' vote on Wednesday morning, the government's proposal is expected to be referred back to the parliament's defence committee for further consultation.

Centre Party MP Fredrick Federley made an emotional plea to his coalition partners on Tuesday evening to rethink the proposed legislation.

"The pros and cons need to be weighed up very carefully before reaching what is a very, very difficult decision. Certain issues are of so much greater importance than others that we must give them whatever time it takes," he said.

Federley added that signal surveillance could sometimes be necessitated, but not in the form set out in the current proposal.

He then asked Defence Minister Sten Tolgfors whether the government intended taking further steps to guarantee the protection of civil liberties. Such a move would be decisive if he were to vote in favour of the law, said Federley.

A year after the bill was first put on ice following pressure from the opposition, the government eventually agreed to take another look at the proposed legislation.

Sten Tolgfors spoke of three concessions the government was prepared to make to members of parliament from the ruling coalition who had criticized the bill.

"First of all, the Swedish Data Inspection Board will be tasked with observing FRA's activities from the perspective of the protection of civil liberties until the 2011 review," Tolgfors told news agency TT.

The government would also request the appointment of an external committee to watch

over FRA during the period until 2011.

Finally, the government would also be open to the appointment by the parliamentary committee of a civil liberties ombudsman.

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