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Online State Registry to Monitor Extremism

By Natalya Krainova

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The government intends to create a web site by 2013 where vigilant Internet users can report extremist comments left by other readers on media sites, the Federal IT and Mass Media Inspection Service said Wednesday.

The initiative would compliment the work of the Federal IT and Mass Media Inspection Service, which currently monitors the media without help from readers, but it could raise new worries about media freedoms.

Agency spokesman Mikhail Vorobyov said by phone that readers can now contact the agency about extremist content but in the future will be able to register their complaints on the new web site.

He said it was "premature" to comment further on how the new web site would work.

Sergei Zheleznyak, head of the State Duma's Information Policy Committee, told Kommersant that the web site, dubbed the State Information System, will include an account for every media outlet, and readers would sent complaints to the relevant account.

Zheleznyak told Rossiiskaya Gazeta that the measure is part of a raft of legislation on the rights and responsibilities of online media that will be drafted by Aug. 1.

The web site would also provide the federal agency with a way to inform online media about extremist content and request its deletion, he said. The agency currently has to inform media by e-mail or fax.

Media will have to delete the comments or challenge the "extremism" label in court, Zheleznyak said.

It was unclear whether a reader's complaint would suffice to have a comment flagged extremist, or whether the agency would have to review the complaints first and then issue a decision.

The measure follows new legislation on media signed into law by President Dmitry Medvedev in mid-June.

A state tender to develop the web site will be announced soon, Zheleznyak said, without elaborating.

Repeated calls to Zheleznyak's cell phone went unanswered Wednesday.

The new media legislation will also spell out the responsibility of editors for publishing extremist quotes from third parties, Zheleznyak said.

The Federal IT and Mass Media Inspection Service is currently in charge of tracking down extremism and can issue warnings to media outlets. Two warnings within a year allow the closure of a media outlet on a court order.

Before issuing a warning, the agency sends out an "appeal" to delete or edit an extremist comment within 24 hours, Vorobyov said.

Since July 2010, the agency has issued more than 90 appeals, Vorobyov said. In all cases, the media outlets complied.

No prominent media outlets have been closed after extremism warnings. Ura.ru, the largest online news portal in the Urals Federal District, was slapped with two warnings in 2008 over comments posted by users but successfully challenged them in court the following year.

Komi blogger Savva Terentyev, who was handed a one-year suspended sentence in 2008 over a blog post, has been granted political asylum in Estonia, the BBC Russian Service reported Wednesday.

Terentyev was convicted of inciting hatred by calling for corrupt police officers to be "burned at the stake" during a blog discussion. He said he had to move to Estonia because he could not

find employment in his native Syktyvkar after the trial.

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