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Russian Wikipedia Strikes Over 'Online Censorship' Bill

By The Moscow Times

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Administrators' statement on the site Tuesday morning

Wikipedia's Russian-language page has shut down for 24 hours in a sign of protest against a bill restricting access to information scheduled to go before the State Duma on Tuesday.

Internet users visiting the Russian website of the free encyclopedia Tuesday morning were greeted by a statement written by the site's administrators decrying amendments to the law "On protecting children from information causing harm to their health and development."

But Nikolai Nikoforov, press and communications minister, said on social-networking site Twitter that the bill had been delayed until the Duma's fall session and that "he was sure the bill would be passed."

"I don't support Wiki's aim to close [the site]. But this step is an important reaction from society, a sign that we must perfect the bill," Nikiforov added.

The bill, a copy of which is posted on the Duma website, proposes creating a blacklist of Internet sites containing information banned for distribution.

Its authors claim that the draft legislation is targeted at blocking sites promoting pornography, drug use and self-harm, but critics fear that it could have wider implications.

According to Wikipedia administrators, the bill would lead to the introduction of a Russian analogue of the “great Chinese firewall,” a reference to Chinese authorities' practice of filtering online content, including international search engines.

“These amendments could become the basis for real censorship on the Internet, as well as the formulation of a list of banned sites and IP addresses with filtered [information],” the statement read.

Wikipedia has staged similar strikes in the past. In January, Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales took offline the U.S. version of the site to demonstrate against the Stop Online Piracy Act.

A similar Wikipedia blackout in Italy in October provoked major amendments to an analogous privacy bill.

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