

Internet Restriction Bill Flies Through Duma

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Communications and Press Minister Nikolai Nikiforov

Legislation creating a “website blacklist” and forcing Internet companies to block banned content sailed through its second and third readings in the State Duma on Wednesday, though not before deputies amended the bill amid continued protest from web companies, free-speech supporters and a top official.

After passing in a first reading Friday [with language](#) allowing any website content to be banned once the government deems it dangerous to children, the bill now has a more limited blacklist of materials displaying child pornography, soliciting children for porn, encouraging drug use, promoting suicide and distributing content that is illegal under Russian law.

State officials will be able to enlist websites, website-hosting companies and even Internet service providers to remove or block the banned Web pages. In the case of illegal content, they will need to obtain a court order before adding the pages to the blacklist, a federal registry to

be created under the law.

Despite the scaling-back of what images and text can be restricted, the third version of the legislation still doesn't make clear how much of an Internet publication — individual Web pages or whole Internet domain names — will be blocked once content is blacklisted.

Communications and Press Minister Nikolai Nikiforov said Wednesday that Russian and foreign websites exist in domains, or Web platforms. "The problem is that it's possible to technologically block off all of the platforms because of one particular situation, even though that's not the purpose of the law," he told reporters after a news conference to introduce his new deputy ministers.

As a reporter from Channel One state television lobbed questions at him about the bill, Nikiforov, appointed to Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's Cabinet in May, detailed his concerns about the legislation.

The bill was written by the Just Russia-headed Committee on Family, Women and Children's Issues and introduced by all four parties in the Duma.

On Tuesday, Nikiforov had used his Twitter account [to call for](#) re-examining the bill with Internet service providers and experts during the Duma's recess in July and August and reconsidering it in the fall. But the bill went up for a vote Wednesday anyway.

By Wednesday evening, the Duma had approved the bill in both the second and final, third readings, according to the Duma website. Deputy Ilya Ponomaryov, a member of A Just Russia, posted the amended, second version of the legislation on his [LiveJournal blog](#).

The Committee on Family, Women and Children's Issues recommended accepting the bill in the third reading without any changes to the second version, it said in a document on [the Duma site](#).

Also on Wednesday, more Russian Internet services unrolled public campaigns against the law, with Web portal Yandex and blogging platform LiveJournal telling users of the downsides of the law. Russian Facebook equivalent Vkontakte also publicly questioned the bill, news website RBK.ru reported.

The corporate protests came on the heels of a 24-hour blackout that the Russian version of Wikipedia had run on Tuesday.

On its home page Wednesday, Yandex [used red lines](#) to cross out the word "everything" from its slogan, "you can find everything." Clicking on the edited slogan led to an open letter about the bill, which is titled "On The Protection of Children From Information and Active Harm to Their Health and Development."

"The proposed methods provide a means for possible abuse and raise numerous questions from the perspective of users and Internet company representatives," Yandex said in the letter.

"It is necessary to put off the bill's consideration and discuss it in open forums with Internet company representatives and technical specialists," Yandex said [in the letter](#), which was

signed, “Yelena Kolmanovskaya, editor-in-chief, Yandex, a company where the parents of more than a thousand children work.”

Now that the bill has flown through the Duma — it was introduced only late last month — it will go to the Federation Council and then to President Vladimir Putin for his signature.

Though Nikiforov has opposed the bill in its current form because of its nebulous wording, he doesn’t have much say about the law as the head of a bureaucratic swath of government, Pavel Salin, a political analyst with the Center for Current Politics, said by telephone.

The Duma will listen to Putin “more than to a minister,” Salin said.

Nikiforov formally presented his three new deputies Wednesday. Alexei Volin, former president of mobile payments company A3 and former deputy chief of staff for the government, will be in charge of government policy in the media. Denis Sverdlov, former Skartel chief executive, will oversee telecommunications. Mark Shmulevich, former development director at the Russian Quantum Center, will be responsible for IT.

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