

'Online Censorship' Bill Softened as Yandex, VKontakte Protest

July 11, 2012

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A screenshot of Yandex's home page, on which the word "everything" was crossed out of its slogan, "You can find everything," on Wednesday in protest of a bill that could limit access to information online.

A bill that would restrict access to information online was altered in advance of its second reading in the State Duma on Wednesday, while Russian Internet giants Yandex, VKontakte and LiveJournal followed Wikipedia's move to protest it.

According to a new version of the bill, a vaguely worded clause on "harmful information" has been removed, and the list of content for which the government would be able to shut down a site without consulting judges has been strictly defined, Gazeta.ru reported.

From Tuesday morning, Wikipedia shut down its Russian-language page for 24 hours to protest the bill, whose authors say is aimed at protecting minors from accessing sites promoting child pornography, promoting drugs or self-harm.

The bill had been scheduled to go before the State Duma on Tuesday.

On the back of the shutdown, which was accompanied by complaints from prominent federal TV stations, authorities postponed the bill's hearing to Wednesday, allowing time for the authors of the controversial legislation to rework it overnight.

On Wednesday, the Yandex and Vkontakte websites did not cease operation as Wikipedia did a day earlier, but instead placed banners in prominent positions linking to information about the bill and asking users to speak out against it. LiveJournal also condemned the bill, saying it could lead to full-blown censorship on the Russian Internet, RBC Daily reported.

On the Yandex site, the word "everything" was crossed out from the logo, which normally reads "You can find everything."

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