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Duma Passes Anti-Piracy Bill in Final Reading

By Natalya Krainova

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The State Duma on Friday passed a bill combating film piracy on the Internet in the crucial second and final third reading.

The bill, which would allow authorities to block websites violating copyright on films and television series at the request of copyright holders, will take effect Aug.1.

Large Internet companies, including Google Russia, Yandex and Mail.ru Group, have spoken out against the bill, saying its unclear phrasing would allow authorities to block whole websites indefinitely.

But above all, they said the bill would deprive Russian users of Torrents and other file-exchanging protocols of free movies.

By various estimates, the damage from Internet piracy in Russia amounts to 60 billion rubles

a year ($1.8 billion), Robert Shlegel, one of the bill's authors with pro-Kremlin United Russia, said when the Duma tentatively approved the bill in mid-June.

Shlegel did not specify who suffers the 60 billion ruble losses from Internet piracy.

"Unfortunately, we have failed to resolve this issue with a mechanism of self-regulation," Shlegel said, Voice of Russia radio reported.

The bill, which was co-authored by six lawmakers — three from United Russia, two from A Just Russia and one Communist — was supported by 293 and 337 of the 448 lawmakers in the second and third readings, respectively, the Duma's website reported.

The Duma on Friday rushed the bill through the two readings without debates, Dmitry Gudkov, a lawmaker with A Just Russia and a co-leader of anti-government street protests, wrote on Twitter.

"It looks like authorities have decided to establish complete control over the Internet," he tweeted.

LDPR deputy Alexei Didenko accused people from the publishing business, the cinema industry and the show business of having lobbied the bill.

"They are thinking of ways to provide for their older years," Didenko told journalists outside the hall where the sessions were held Friday, RIA Novosti reported.

E-mails and repeated calls to three of the bills' authors before the weekend were not answered in time for the publication.

The procedure spelled out in the bill allows the Moscow City Court to take unspecified "provisional measures" to protect the rights of copyright holders at their request, according to the text of the bill posted in the Duma's online database.

Provisional measures can be applied to Internet "resources" that violate copyright, the bill says without elaborating or clarifying what is meant by "resources." It doesn't name any certain measures, saying only that the measures are spelled out in the Civil Procedures Code. But the current version of the code doesn't include such a notion.

Nor does the bill set a deadline for the application of provisional measures, or their duration, but it requires the copyright holder to file a civil lawsuit at the same court within 15 days after it rules to take provisional measures to protect copyright.

The court ruling on the lawsuit is expected to justify the provisional measures applied to Internet resources, the bill says.

After the court ruling takes effect, a copyright holder has the right to submit a complaint to the Federal Mass Media Inspection Service.

The media watchdog would be obliged to notify the hosting provider within three days about the copyright violation. The provider would then be obliged to demand within one day that the website owner remove the illegal content, for which the owner also has one day.

If the provider fails to take action, the media watchdog would demand that a telecom company block access to the pirated content.

The bill does not stipulate any fines.

A similar bill was drafted by the Culture Ministry in late January but was never submitted to the Duma by the government.

Contact the author at n.krainova@imedia.ru

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