

Phone Operators Cite Security Concerns as Reason to Regulate Skype

By [The Moscow Times](#)

July 18, 2013

The  Moscow Times

Russian mobile phone operators said the work of communication provider Skype in Russia must be regulated for national security reasons, a news report said Thursday.

The "big three" of leading mobile phone operators — Megafon, MTS, and Vimpelcom — quickly came back with another argument for regulating Skype following yesterday's decision by the Federal Mass Media Inspection Service rejecting MTS's request to make Skype obtain a license to operate in Russia, Vedomosti reported.

At a meeting with Federation Council member Ruslan Gattarov top executives of the "big three" and Rostelecom noted that their companies do not share information about their clients with any third parties or foreign intelligence services.

The meeting was prompted by an article in the Brazilian newspaper O Globo accusing the U.S. National Security Agency of tapping phone calls and e-mails of Brazilian citizens. Referring

to former U.S. secret services employee Edward Snowden, who has been living in the transit area of the Sheremetyevo Airport since his arrival to Russia from China, the article said the National Security Agency was also interested in eavesdropping on Russian citizens.

Megafon's director for legal issues and government relations Anna Serebryanikova said mobile operators guarantee the complete safety of their clients' personal information. However, she stressed that such services as Skype, Viber, WhatsApp and Facebook are not regulated in Russia, meaning they can not guarantee their clients' personal data safety.

Serebryanikova suggested that Russian authorities could follow the example of their Chinese colleagues in regulating Internet or IP-operators like Skype. But she said that control of internet content would not be suitable for Russia.

Russian phone operators deny they are using the issue of regulation for competition purposes, pointing out that the share of IP-communication in overall phone traffic is very small.

Serebryanikova says online operators should be placed in the same market conditions as traditional phone operators, who invest in infrastructure development. Online operators also use that infrastructure, but contribute nothing to its development, she said.

Microsoft's executive vice president for legal issues Brad Smith said the company, which owns 100 percent of Skype, does not provide access to its clients' personal information to any government other than by a court order.

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