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Russian Journalism Award Named For Snowden

By Anna Dolgov

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Accused U.S. government whistle-blower Edward Snowden is seen on a screen as he speaks via video conference with members of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly.

An association of Russia's largest Internet companies will create an Edward Snowden online media award named after the fugitive U.S. security leaker to honor journalists' achievements, the association's chief said.

Russian Electronic Communications Association head Sergei Plugotarenko said Thursday that his group — which includes more than 100 of Russia's largest online companies, such as Mail.Ru, Yandex, and news agencies Interfax, RIA Novosti and Ekho Moskvy — has "received official permission from Snowden" to use his name in the award, Lenta.ru reported.

The association's spokeswoman Yekaterina Vorobyova said the award will honor accomplishments in civic journalism, breaking news reporting and in a number of other still-

to-be-determined categories.

After making months of international headlines for leaking information about widespread NSA surveillance and fleeing the U.S. to find eventual asylum in Russia, Snowden has recently reemerged into the spotlight by asking a question about surveillance to President Vladimir Putin during the Russian leader's annual call-in show. While the intelligence leaker has received honors like being named rector of Glasgow University, he has also been criticized for his supposed cooperation with Russian authorities.

The announcement of the Snowden journalism prize came on the heels of a bill adopted by the State Duma that would require foreign Internet companies to release information about their users to Russian security services or face being banned from the country. Some commentators to point out the apparent irony of Snowden, seen by his supporters as fighting for the freedom of information, living as a political refugee in a country that suppresses such freedom.

"Russia says all foreign Internet companies have to turn over data on their users or be banned in the country. What say you, Edward Snowden?" a Russian-born U.S. journalist at The New Republic, Julia Ioffe, said on her Twitter account the day the bill was passed.

Former senior NSA official Colonel Cedric Leighton, said Thursday at a technology conference in New York that Snowden's leaks may not have been as liberating as his supporters believe, saying that they have done a "significant disservice" to the independence of the Internet around the world, business technology news website ZDNet reported.

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