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Internet Giant Yandex Evades Burden of Media Status

By The Moscow Times

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Yandex will not have to register with the government as a media outlet.

Leading Russian search engine Yandex will not have to register with the government as a media outlet, the Prosecutor General's Office said Wednesday, setting a precedent that suggests search engines' news aggregating sites may be safe from a wave of heightened regulation of the Internet.

"Based on the results of our inspection, no violation of current legislation on media has been found in the company," the agency's news service said, RIA Novosti reported.

A deputy from the Liberal Democratic Party, Andrei Lugovoi, had asked prosecutors in mid-May to investigate whether the Yandex.Novosti news aggregator had violated laws governing media.

"There is no difference between the news at the top of Yandex and news that is circulated,

for instance, in a newspaper," Luguvoi said at the time.

Lugovoi, a former KGB bodyguard turned politician, has his own issues with prosecutors: The State Duma deputy is wanted in Britain for the killing of Russian dissident Alexander Litvinenko in 2006.

The prosecutor's announcement is good news for search engines, some of whom had said they would stop posting news on their websites if they were forced to register and subjected to the same laws as media outlets.

Their apprehensions were not without precedent. In May, President Vladimir Putin signed a law requiring websites that attract more than 3,000 daily visits — including bloggers — to register as media outlets with the Federal Mass Media Inspection Service and follow the rules governing what media can, and cannot, publish online.

The question of Yandex's status was very publicly posed in April, when a blogger asked Putin to define the search engine's legal responsibilities during a media forum.

"Every day several tens of millions of people see Yandex's top five news reports. ... Despite this, Yandex does not have a media license and carries no legal responsibility as a media source," the blogger said.

"It is complicated," Putin said at the time, adding that the government and presidential administration were "considering the issue of what counts as mass media and what does not."

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