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Russia Plans to Partially Ban Skype — Again

By The Moscow Times

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Phone companies and state officials have advocated curbs on long-distance Skype calls in the past but have not yet finalized legislation on the topic.

Russian legislators have revived plans to ban long-distance calls via Skype and similar services, saying they foster terrorism and an illegal drug mafia.

A bill has been submitted to the State Duma proposing a curb on the so-called over-the-top services (OTT), which allow calls from one phone to another via the internet. Phone operators identify these calls as local, not long-distance, which leads to lower charges per minute.

OTT service operators should be made to identify their calls to phone operators, according to the bill. The measure would enable operators to charge callers the full price of long-distance calls.

Russian phone operators miss out on approximately 90 billion rubles ($2.3 billion) of revenue

a year because of OTT, or about 10 percent of the total revenue, according to RBC business news website.

Besides, the OTT services, which cannot be traced by security services, provide a safe communication channel to terrorists, spammers and drug dealers, the bill's co-author Yaroslav Nilov of the national-populist party LDPR said Wednesday.

The bill's review was set for this week, but postponed until October to give authors time to dispel the false notion that it implies a complete ban on Skype, Nilov said, Tass news agency reported.

Microsoft Corporation, which owns Skype, had not commented on the bill as of Wednesday afternoon.

Some Russian telecom operators actually use OTT services for their own long-distance phone call services to cut costs, but without slashing prices for customers, RBC reported.

Phone companies and state officials have advocated curbs on long-distance Skype calls in the past, proposing to license OTT services as phone operators, or monitor web traffic to filter such calls and charge users extra for them. However, no legislation on the matter has yet materialized.

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