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Russia to Block Piracy Websites Permanently After One Copyright Violation

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Starting next May, websites guilty of more than one copyright violation will be permanently blocked in the country.

The move comes as part of a new anti-piracy bill signed into law by President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday, ramping up what many critics see as an already draconian set of copyright protection rules.

Once a website is blocked by a court decision, it cannot be unblocked, according to the bill.

The first version of the anti-piracy bill was passed last year despite outcry from Internet companies and online freedom activists who said it was biased toward copyright holders.

The bill provided for the extrajudicial blocking of websites simply suspected of copyright

violations.

The original bill was limited to video production, but amendments approved by Putin this week expand it to include all kinds of copyrighted content such as books, music and software. The only exception made is for photographs.

The amendments also oblige website owners to disclose their real names, postal addresses and e-mail addresses on the site.

Both versions of the bill were blasted by the IT industry and activists, including representatives of search engine Yandex and the Russian Wikipedia.

An online petition against the amendments gathered more than 100,000 signatures in August, mandating a governmental review, but has so far been ignored by the relevant officials.

The original bill did little to curb online piracy in Russia, and the expanded version will fare no better, said Artyom Kozlyuk, the head of independent online freedom watchdog Rublacklist.net.

Russia retained its position on the priority watch list of the worst copyright offenders in this year's issue of the annual "Special 301 Report" by the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, which deals with copyright issues around the globe.

About 70,000 websites are currently blacklisted in Russia, but 95 percent of those were listed as a result of collateral damage from imperfect blacklisting mechanisms, retained in the updated law, according to Rublacklist.net.

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