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U.S. Social Networks, Blogs Allowed Back Into Crimea

By The Moscow Times

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The decision will allow U.S. Internet companies such as Apple and Google to continue services to the region without violating U.S. sanctions.

The United States on Friday announced that U.S. companies can still give users in Crimea access to a range of free online communications services, despite an earlier U.S. ban on providing any services to the region after it was annexed by Russia last year.

The decision will allow U.S. Internet companies such as Apple and Google — who previously announced that they were cutting off service to Crimea — to continue services to the region without violating U.S. sanctions.

Russia seized the region from Ukraine in March last year, to which the United States in December responded by barring U.S.-registered companies from investing in Crimea or providing services to companies there.

The free online services now exempt from the ban include "instant messaging, chat and e-mail, social networking, sharing of photos and movies, web browsing and blogging," a document posted online by the U.S. Department of the Treasury said.

Ensuring that Crimeans are able to communicate with the outside world via the Internet is "in the United States' national security and foreign policy interests," the U.S. Department of Commerce said in a rule published online.

"Persons in the Crimea region of Ukraine may use such Internet-based communication to describe their situation directly and counter any false messages being propagated by those currently exercising control over the Crimea region of Ukraine," the agency said.

Since the region joined Russia, the new Crimean authorities have been accused in the West of suppressing media freedom. A television station for the Crimean Tatar population was forced to shut down last month after it was repeatedly denied a broadcasting license, raising a chorus of objections internationally.

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