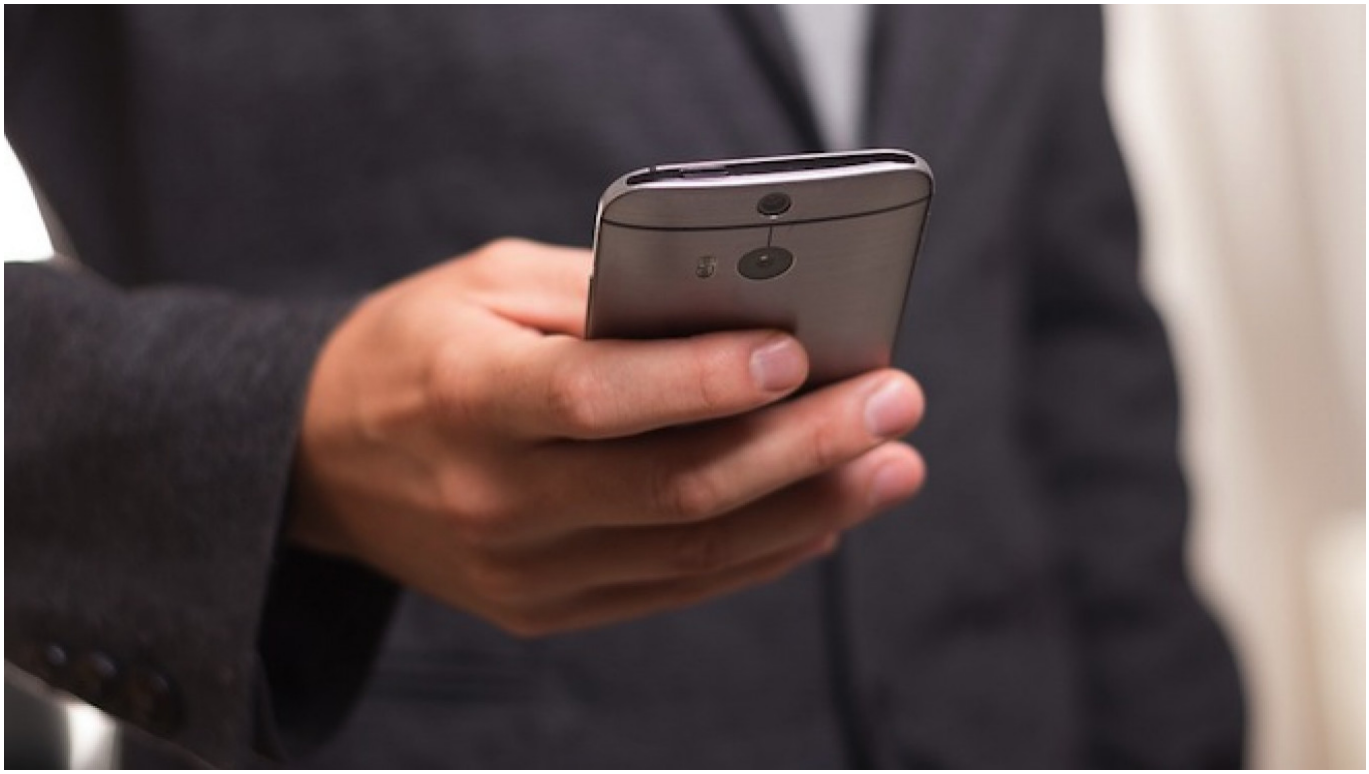
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Proposals to Ban Russian Officials From Western Messaging Apps

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Russian officials could be banned from using Western online messengers and email services under new proposals from the country's Ministry of Economic Development, the Kommersant newspaper reported Monday.

Military personnel would also be affected under the suggestions in a special report addressed to Vladimir Putin.

The ban would only relate to work related correspondence but would affect approximately two million Russian users of Viber, WhatsApp, Telegram and Gmail, Kommersant reported.

Although there has been no official announcement of the reasoning behind the move, but an unidentified source told Kommersant that the Russian state has become increasingly concerned by numerous leaks of official information through online chats and e-mail correspondence in recent years.

It is not the first time that banning foreign messengering services has been proposed, although it is the first time the suggestion has been made from an economic institution. The

Ministry of Economic Development has also suggested broadening the list of foreign software banned for state use.

The development of a special messenger for state institutions was proposed at a conference led by Putin's Internet development advisor German Klimenko in the end of April.

Foreign messaging services are popular both amongst ordinary Russians and the elite. The Telegram messenger service has grown particularly popular due to its secret chat options which limit access to third parties.

Any ban will be difficult to enforce, especially for those using messengers through mobile devices, Kommersant reported.

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