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Putin Tasks FSB With Decrypting Russian Messaging Apps

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Russian President Vladimir Putin has tasked Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) with finding the encryption keys needed to monitor the country's online messaging, the Meduza news website reported Thursday.

The FSB have been given two weeks to find the keys, which will make it possible to implement controversial new anti-terror legislation.

Alexander Bortnikov, head of the FSB, has been charged with overseeing the task, Meduza reported.

Increased government surveillance forms part of the anti-terrorism package authored by ultra-conservative United Russia deputy Irina Yarovaya. The legislation requires all internet messaging platforms which employ additional encryption to supply the FSB with information on how to decode all messages on the platform.

If companies do not apply, they can be fined up to 1 million rubles ($15,000), Meduza reported.

The new laws have received widespread criticism, with Tanya Lokshina, program director for Human Rights Watch in Russia, describing the legislation as an "attack on freedom of expression, freedom of conscience and the right to privacy."

Other laws in the package increase the number of crimes with which children aged 14 to 17 can be charged and lengthen prison sentences for those "encouraging people to take part in mass disturbances."

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