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Proposed Russian Laws Could 'End Online Anonymity'

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New Russian legislation could force messaging service providers to identify their users and delete messages containing illegal content, the Vedomosti newspaper reported Friday.

Such a law would effectively end the rights of users to online anonymity.

The legislation has been developed by Russia's Media Communication Union (MCU), which represents Russia's biggest service providers, three of which confirmed to Vedomosti that the project is currently under discussion.

Messaging services will have to "rapidly block messages or publications which contain information banned by Russian law," Vedomosti reported. If they do not comply, Russia's media watchdog maintains the right to limit access to the service.

The legislation may be presented in the fall to a parliamentary group headed by Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov, a MCU source told Vedomosti.

A representative of Rostelecom, a mobile operator working on the legislation, told Vedomosti that the precise details are still being discussed and that mobile operators previously had no such legal obligation to monitor the content of users' messages.

Users will no longer be able to write anonymously online, which is an infringement of their constitutional rights, according to a representative of Russian Internet giant Yandex. He also said that the law could force Internet companies to leave the Russian market and could lead to a fall in competition and an overall weakening of the sector.

Some believe the new legislation is unnecessary as all provisions for regulating messenger services are contained in anti-terror legislation approved this summer by President Vladimir Putin.

The anti-terror laws, authored by ultra-conservative Duma Deputy Irina Yarovaya, require messaging companies to monitor the content of phone calls and messages and to store them for six months. All messaging apps which use encryption will also be required to add additional code and allow access to Russia's security services.

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