

Russia Begins Search for Decryption of Online Messengers

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Russian companies have begun searching for ways to fully decipher intercepted messages on popular platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, the Kommersant newspaper reported Tuesday.

Decryption of messages is a key provision of the recently-passed anti-terror law authored by conservative lawmaker, Irina Yarovaya. As part of the wide-ranging law, all companies providing online communication are legally obliged to hand their encryption keys to Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB).

The FSB is working with the Ministry of Communication and the Ministry of Industry and Trade to find technical solutions to implementing the law, including interception and decryption of all Russian web traffic and so-called "Man in the Middle" (MITM) technology, Kommersant reported.

MITM technology modifies and responds to two parties who believe they are communicating with each other privately.

The company Con Certeza, a developer of search-and-surveillance System for Operative Investigative Activities (SORM), is currently looking for a contractor to investigate the interception and decryption of all messaging traffic, Kommersant reported, citing a copy of company correspondence in its possession.

In the document, Con Certeza request the contractor "prepare an expert evaluation on the possibility of intercepting sensitive information, i.e. users' identification information, passwords and messages," and "demonstrate a prototype if possible."

According to Kommersant, Con Certeza will pay the chosen contractor 130,000 rubles (\$2,082) with a bonus of 230,000 rubles (\$3,684) if the contractor can intercept users' information or message content using MITM.

The chosen company will be given two months to complete the required tasks, starting with the messenger Viber, the newspaper reported.

Kommersant cites a representative of one of the companies corresponding with Con Certeza as saying they "were ready to take on the work if on completion the results would be made public, and received a rejection."

The messaging platforms to be decrypted are WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook Messenger, Telegram and Skype, Kommersant reported, adding that all of the companies declined to comment on the report.

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