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Russian Phone Operators Could Be Compensated for Implementing Anti-Terror Law

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Russian mobile phone operators could be compensated for implementing sweeping new anti-terror legislation.

Nikolai Podguzov, the deputy head of Russia's Economic Development Ministry, hopes the compensation scheme will convince mobile operators to take on the massive costs of the controversial legislation, the Vedomosti newspaper reported Tuesday.

The new laws require mobile operators to store customers' messages, including photos and videos, for six months. Metadata, such as information on the time and date a message was sent, must be kept for three years. Companies will also face a fine of up to 1 million rubles ($15,700) for not decoding users' data at the request of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB). The law comes into force on July 1, 2018.

Russia's top communication companies say the cost of building data storage facilities capable of hosting the information could be as much as 2.2 trillion rubles ($33.8 billion).

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Podguzov plans to use Russia's Universal Telecommunication Fund to gather enough compensation to get mobile phone operators on board, Vedomosti reported.

The fund was originally established to bridge Russia's "digital divide," focusing largely on building communications infrastructure in the country's sparsely populated regions. All Russian mobile operators are expected to contribute 1.2 percent of their revenues to the fund.

The new data storage law forms part of conservative anti-terror reforms authored by United Russia politician Irina Yarovaya.

Signed by President Putin in July 2016, the Yarovaya legistlation has been criticized by human rights activists, businesses and politicians alike.

The laws also include restrictions on religious activity and penalties for inciting or justifying terrorism online.

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