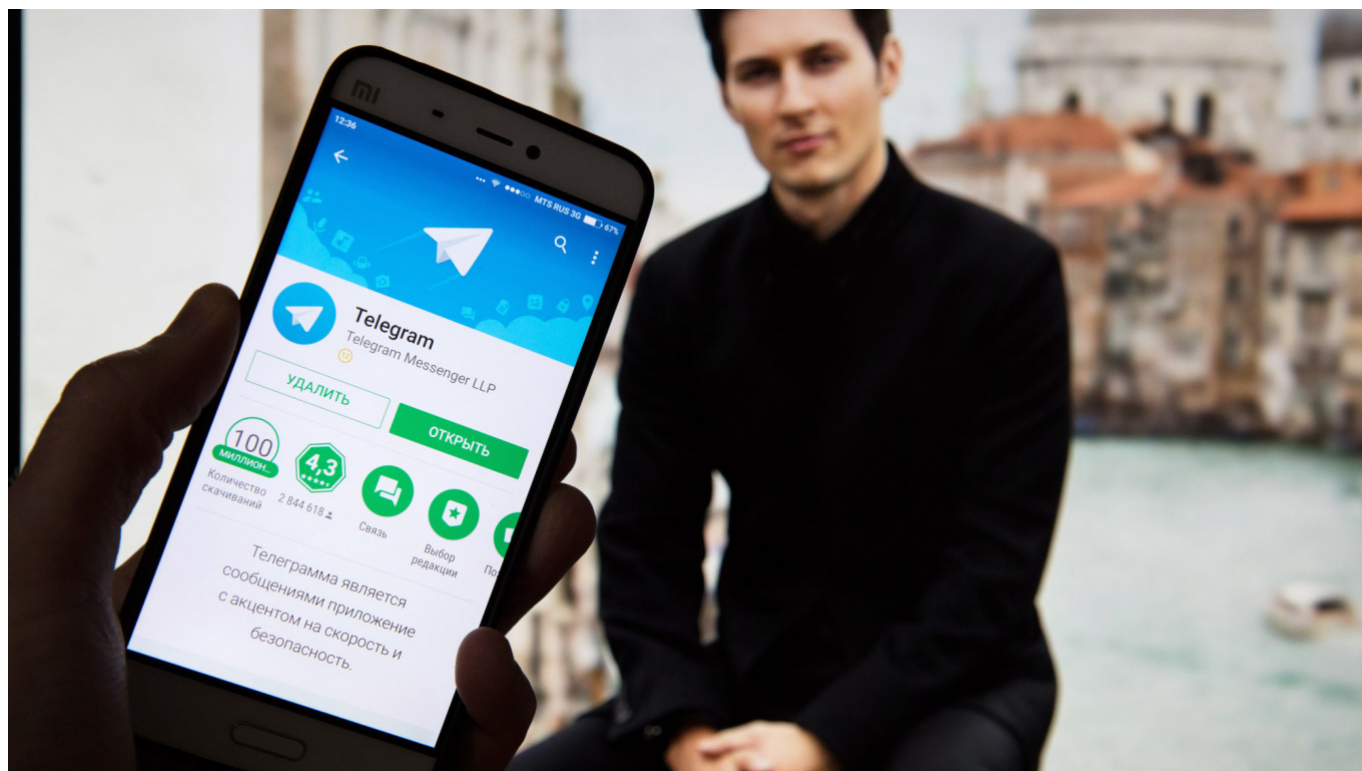


# Pavel Durov Revealed – Almost – in New Documentary

The film by Rodion Chepel debuted at the Moscow International Film Festival.

By [Uliana Pavlova](#)

April 28, 2021



Durov, 36, has been dubbed by the media as “Russian Mark Zuckerberg” for founding the social networking platform VKontakte and Telegram. **TASS**

Rodion Chepel’s documentary film “Durov” that premiered at the Moscow International Film Festival over the weekend tries to lift the veil of mystery surrounding one of the most talked-about IT entrepreneurs — Pavel Durov.

Durov, 36, has been dubbed by the media as the “Russian Mark Zuckerberg” for founding the social networking platform VKontakte, the Russian equivalent of Facebook, and later Telegram, the encrypted messaging app.

The film, which paints a picture of an arrogant but brilliant entrepreneur, is fascinating

material for anyone interested in how social media and messaging platforms have changed the way people communicate and the visionary who made it happen.

**Embed:**

### **Focus on privacy**

If the audience hopes to get a glimpse of an elusive tech mogul, they will be disappointed: Durov never appears in the film.

However, director Rodion Chepel told The Moscow Times that Durov was involved in the process of making the documentary about his life, answered all the questions sent to him and even saw the film post-production.

“Durov understands how to influence and how to keep control of everything that concerns him,” Chepel said.

In the absence of the main character, the film features several of Durov’s close associates, from his former business partners at VKontakte to his current employees in Telegram. But the most revealing and intimate moments were shared by Durov’s high school teacher, Grigory Mednikov.

Even in high school Durov maintained meticulous control over his public image: He was the only one in his graduating class who refused to have his picture taken for the yearbook. On the night of graduation, Durov vowed he would become “an Internet totem,” and he seems to have fulfilled his prophecy.

The documentary film follows Durov’s life beginning with the first student forum he created for the students of the philology department at the St. Petersburg State University and the early success of VKontakte, along with the wealth and fame it brought him.

The film also features some of his early stunts, like launching paper airplanes made of money from the top of his office building. This later became the symbol of Telegram, an encrypted messaging app with a focus on user privacy.

The film spends quite a bit of time recounting the events of 2011–2015 when Durov ran into problems with the Russian authorities by refusing to shut down the VK account of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

Durov was fired as CEO of VK after another standoff with the Russian government in 2014. During the start of the conflict with Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, he again refused to give out information on Ukraine’s opposition leaders.

Telegram was originally created as a side project with his brother Nikolai so that Russian security services couldn’t eavesdrop on their conversations. That would become the selling point of the app.

When his encrypted messaging app was later used by ISIS to plan terrorist attacks in Europe and the Middle East in 2016, Durov once again defended his insistence on user privacy when

Western governments urged him to share information.

Durov's one failure was a cryptocurrency called TON he tried to launch in 2019-2020 when the project was halted by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission and federal courts.

One thing remains consistent — Durov's dedication to privacy in his messaging app and his personal life. Since his last televised interview in 2017, Durov has been unavailable to journalists worldwide.

"Every word he says may have massive consequences," Chepel told The Moscow Times.

The film director said he had to ask Durov's permission to talk about their encounters.

The film producer admitted that at times he himself struggled to contain his own fascination with Durov during the filming process.

"There might be the impression that we are some kind of Pavel Durov fan club... but the guy who created our student forum is now raising a billion dollars on his word of honor alone without any paperwork," Chepel told The Moscow Times.

The film can be streamed with English subtitles on Russian movie-streaming platform [KION](#).

*Updated at 12:15 p.m. on April 30 to clarify events of 2011-2015.*

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/04/28/pavel-durov-revealed-almost-in-new-documentary-a73768>