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Apple Bows to Kremlin Demands For Local Office

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Apple has opened a representative office in Russia, the Roskomnadzor communications watchdog said Friday, becoming the first company to comply with the Kremlin's new rules requiring foreign technology firms to localize their operations in the country.

Under a new law, some 13 foreign technology companies are required to open local offices and fulfill a string of other technical requirements, like add a Russian-language feedback form to their website, or face hefty fines.

Critics see the law as part of Russia’s ongoing drive against big overseas technology companies, and it comes after years of mounting pressure on the likes of Apple, Google and Facebook.

Music streaming service Spotify also said it had also opened a representative office in Russia on Friday, but is yet to complete some of the law’s other technical requirements, the RBC business site reported.

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Foreign IT companies have held offices in Russia for a number of years, but regulators frequently complained that they were sales, marketing or development hubs — not so-called representative offices with the authority to engage on legal or corporate issues.

The 13 companies — which include Facebook, Twitter, TikTok and Google — all have more than 500,000 Russian users a day.

Google, Viber and Likee said they intend to comply with the new rules, while several companies, including Facebook-owner Meta, TikTok and Telegram, are yet to publicly respond.

The Kremlin has increased its efforts to exert control over foreign technology companies in recent years.

Both Apple and Google last year removed mobile apps linked to jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny from their online stores on the day of nationwide elections after their Russian-based employees were reportedly threatened with jail time if the requests were denied.

Russia also sends some of the highest number of content deletion requests to social networks, transparency reports show. After years of issuing small fines to the companies if they didn't remove posts or videos Russia said were illegal, last December Russian regulators slapped Facebook and Google with a record $125 million fine.

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