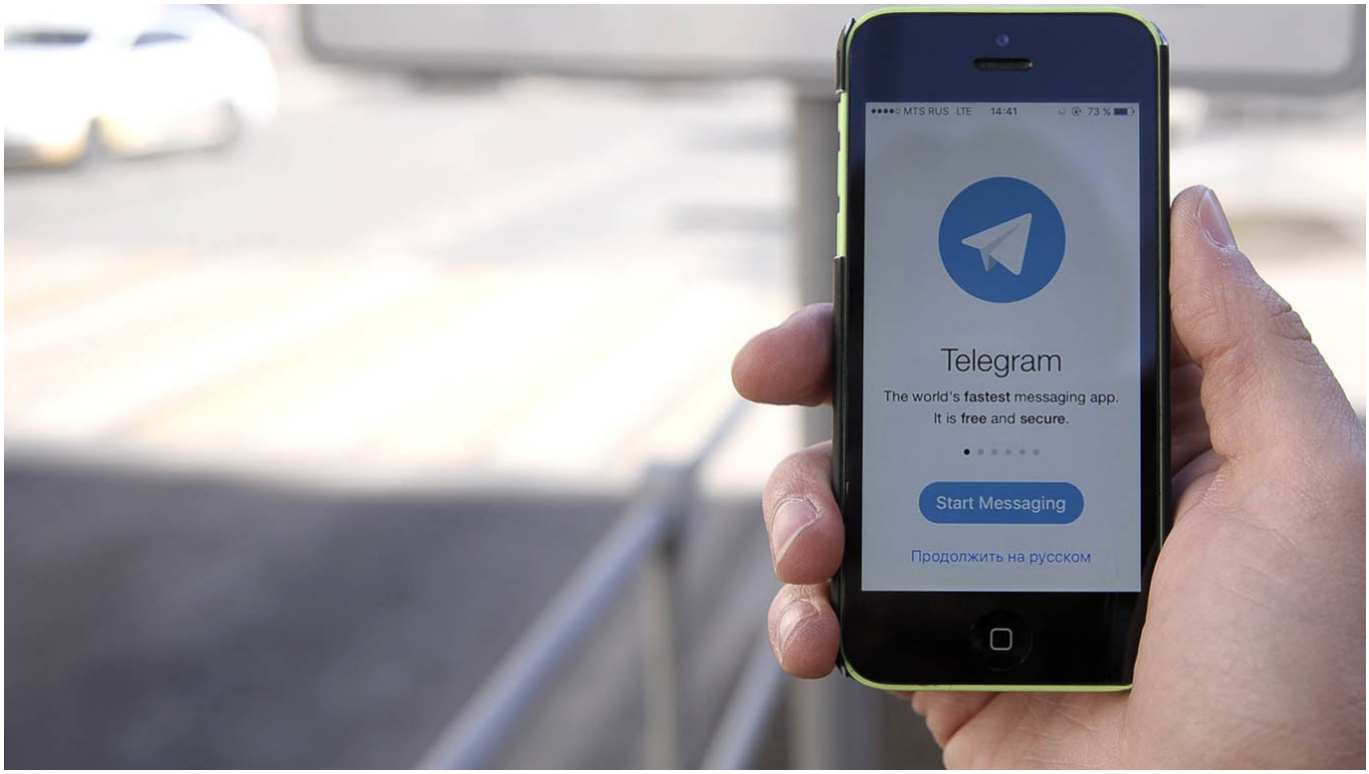
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Telegram Begins Legal Process of Opening Office in Russia

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Alexander Avilov / Moskva News Agency

The developer of the Telegram messaging app has begun the legal process of opening a representative office in Russia, media reported Thursday.

The move comes nearly four years after Russia passed legislation requiring foreign tech firms to establish a physical presence in the country or face legal penalties, including advertising bans and outright blocks.

While companies like Google and TikTok have complied to varying degrees, Telegram, founded by Russian-born entrepreneur Pavel Durov, has so far stopped short of opening a local office.

According to tech outlet Hi-Tech Mail, a new entry on the state communications watchdog Roskomnadzor's registry shows Telegram Messenger, Inc.'s office registration as "under approval." It is not clear when the application was submitted.

Until now, Telegram had taken minimal steps to comply with Russian localization laws, including registering an account with Roskomnadzor and publishing a user feedback form. The messaging platform is widely used in Russia, being popular among state officials, pro-Kremlin figures and opposition voices alike.

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Some analysts speculated that the timing of the move may coincide with Russia's push to introduce a state-sponsored copycat of Telegram.

Starting in September, a new law signed by President Vladimir Putin will require all personal electronic devices sold in Russia to include a pre-installed "national messenger." That role is expected to be filled by Max, a state-backed "super-app" under development by the tech giant VK.

Roskomnadzor declined to confirm Telegram's plans, saying it had no information on the matter and deferring further comment to the company itself, according to the Telegram news channel Ostorozhno Novosti.

IT expert Alexander Isavnin told the outlet that registration with Roskomnadzor doesn't necessarily reflect voluntary cooperation, citing TikTok's registration as an example of Russian state-initiated compliance.

Telegram, which touts its encryption and independence from government influence, has not commented publicly on the office registration.

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