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Putin Signs Law Criminalizing Searches for 'Extremist' Content

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Vladimir Putin. **kremlin.ru**

President Vladimir Putin on Thursday signed into law a controversial bill that criminalizes accessing or searching for online content labeled "extremist."

The legislation, criticized by both Kremlin loyalists and opposition figures, introduces fines of up to 5,000 rubles (about $64) for individuals who "knowingly" view or seek out banned materials.

It does not specify how such activity would be monitored, raising concerns among legal experts about expanded surveillance and potential abuse by law enforcement. The law takes effect on Sept. 1.

Yekaterina Mizulina, head of the Kremlin-aligned Safe Internet League and a prominent advocate of online censorship, voiced unease over the bill earlier this month. She warned that it could obstruct the League's work, roughly 30% of which involves identifying extremist content and forwarding it to authorities.

Mizulina claimed that the legislation could even put police officers at legal risk for viewing content as part of their duties.

Amnesty International, a London-based NGO, had also decried the bill as "vague and overly broad," warning that it enables arbitrary enforcement.

Also on Thursday, Putin signed another bill into law banning the advertisement of VPN services, which have become widespread in Russia over the past three years as authorities block an increasing number of websites, including those of Instagram and news outlets such as The Moscow Times.

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