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Kremlin Downplays Impact of Telegram Restrictions on Frontline Communications

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A Russian artillery crew in the partially occupied Kherson region of southern Ukraine. **Alexei Konovalov / TASS**

The Kremlin on Wednesday expressed skepticism toward reports that Russian forces fighting in the war against Ukraine are facing disruptions to critical communications as a result of new government efforts to throttle Telegram.

State media regulator Roskomnadzor said this week that it imposed additional restrictions on the messaging app over its alleged failure to combat fraud and abuse by criminal and terrorist groups, as well as to protect user data.

Between Monday and Tuesday, users across Russia reported problems with sending and receiving media content such as voice notes, videos and images.

A number of Russian soldiers and pro-war military bloggers have accused Roskomnadzor of

undermining vital coordination between military personnel on the battlefield in Ukraine.

In one video posted online, a masked Russian serviceman, addressing officials, said, "Did you even ask us? Did even one of you come here to find out if this would be useful?"

Related article: Roskomnadzor Tightens Restrictions on Telegram as Users Report Disruptions

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters it was difficult to "imagine that frontline communications are maintained via Telegram or some other messenger."

He defended Roskomnadzor's decision and noted that the Russian authorities were in contact with Telegram over the alleged violations that prompted the restrictions.

"There's nothing good about [restricting Telegram], but the law must be followed," Peskov said, referring further questions to Russia's Defense Ministry.

Telegram founder Pavel Durov accused authorities in Moscow of restricting the app in an attempt to force Russians to switch to Max, the government-backed messenger that critics argue was created for surveillance and political censorship.

In Russia, Telegram is widely used for work communications and document sharing, much as apps like Slack are used elsewhere, and the slowdowns already appear to be disrupting daily workflows for some.

Officials and government agencies also use the app to provide information to the public.

Belgorod region Governor Vyachelsav Gladkov said he was "worried" the disruptions to Telegram would hinder people's ability to receive emergency notifications during Ukrainian air attacks.

Separately, a Moscow court on Wednesday ordered Telegram to pay a fine of 10.8 million rubles ($14,000) after the company was found guilty of failing to remove content banned in Russia.

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