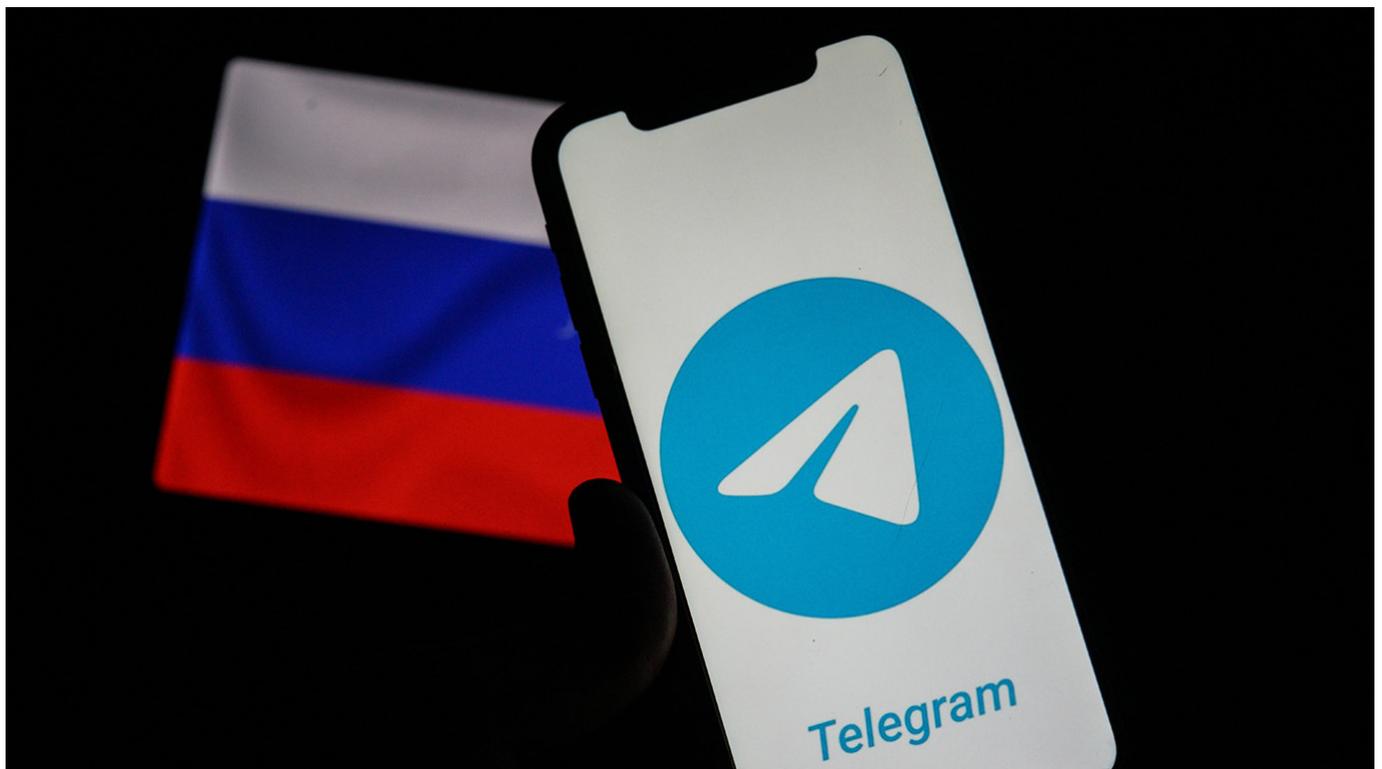


Irkutsk Rejects Permit to Hold Protest Against Government Restrictions on Telegram

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Zuma / TASS

The mayor's office in the Siberian city of Irkutsk has revoked a permit for a public demonstration against government restrictions on Telegram after earlier saying the gathering could take place, the liberal Yabloko party, which applied for the permit, [said](#) in a statement on Friday.

Yabloko said earlier this week that it [received](#) a permit to hold a demonstration with up to 300 people this coming Sunday on Konnyi Island, located around 18 kilometers (11 miles) north of the regional capital of Irkutsk.

The mayor's office in Irkutsk rejected the party's initial request to hold the demonstration in the center of the city. The location of Konnyi Island was seen as a compromise by city authorities.

However, after the upcoming demonstration “drew significant attention” on social media, the Irkutsk mayor’s office revoked the permit it had given to Yabloko over “public safety” concerns.

Related article: [Russia Plans to Block Telegram in April, Sources Say](#)

Russia appears to be moving closer to a complete ban on Telegram, an app with around 90 million users in the country and one that has become a critical tool for free speech in an otherwise tightly controlled media environment.

State media regulator Roskomnadzor has gradually introduced restrictions on Telegram’s features since August, making it impossible to hold voice and video calls on the platform without using a virtual private network, or VPN, a tool widely used in Russia to bypass government censorship.

This week, anonymous government and telecom sources told Russian media that the government is considering blocking Telegram by early April. Those reports came after it was revealed that the FSB security service is investigating Telegram founder Pavel Durov on allegations of aiding and abetting terrorism.

Yabloko unsuccessfully tried to receive a permit to hold a Telegram-related demonstration in Moscow on Sunday, but authorities rejected its application, citing Covid-19 restrictions.

Petitions to hold similar protests were [reportedly](#) rejected in the cities of Vladivostok, Novosibirsk, Voronezh and Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky. One Telegram-related demonstration was [approved](#) for March 6 in Khabarovsk.

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