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State Duma Lawmakers Demand Clarity on Alleged Telegram Advertising Ban

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Lawmakers in Russia's lower house of parliament are pressing state regulators for clarity after authorities suggested that advertising on Telegram is illegal.

Russia's Federal Anti-Monopoly Service (FAS) said Thursday that both advertisers and distributors could face legal penalties for placing ads on the messaging platform, marking the first official statement suggesting such a ban.

That announcement followed reports that the agency was pursuing criminal charges against a Telegram user over alleged violations of Russia's advertising laws.

State media regulator Roskomnadzor, which has gradually introduced restrictions on Telegram's features since August, appeared to back the FAS position that advertising on the platform is illegal but offered no further explanation.

State Duma lawmaker Alexander Yushchenko called on Roskomnadzor to clarify the situation.

“I haven’t heard from any officials that Telegram is a banned service,” Yushchenko told reporters Friday.

Yushchenko accused the ruling United Russia party of blocking the Communist Party’s attempts to obtain an official response from Roskomnadzor about its claims against Telegram.

Unlike organizations formally designated as “undesirable” or “extremist,” no such label has been applied to Telegram, which has around 90 million users in Russia and is widely used by government officials and state agencies — including Roskomnadzor and FAS.

Related article: Russia Plans to Block Telegram in April, Sources Say

Unconfirmed reports last week suggested Russia could move to block Telegram entirely as early as April.

The speculation followed accusations from several senior Russian officials and the FSB security service that the platform poses a security threat and serves as a tool for foreign intelligence in a “hybrid war” against Russia.

Telegram has rejected allegations that it facilitates criminal or terrorist activity and said the mounting restrictions are aimed at forcing Russians onto the state-backed messaging app Max, which critics say was designed to enable surveillance and censorship.

Another State Duma member, Andrei Svintsov of the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, said Friday that Telegram’s presence in Russia may be nearing a “logical conclusion” after comments this week by President Vladimir Putin.

During a televised meeting on Thursday, Putin asked a signal officer in the Russian army about how military personnel communicate with one another on the front lines in Ukraine.

The officer, Lieutenant Colonel Irina Golunova, said that soldiers use specialized military communication systems, but she also suggested that they could begin using the state-backed messenger Max after it is “fine tuned.”

Golunova called Telegram an “enemy communication tool” despite Russian servicemen and pro-war military bloggers claiming the messaging platform is widely used for coordination on the battlefield.

Putin appeared to agree with Golunova that Telegram represents a “danger” to Russian military personnel.

The Kremlin has previously expressed skepticism that Russian soldiers use Telegram for military communication.

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