

Brazil's Congress approves internet legislation (Update)

March 26 2014, by Stan Lehman

The lower house of Brazil's Congress has approved legislation meant to ensure the privacy of Internet users and to guarantee what is called "Internet neutrality," that all content be treated equally by carriers. But it dropped a demand that all data on Brazilians be saved within the country

The bill known as the "Internet constitution" was approved Tuesday night, though it still must pass the Senate before becoming law.

Approval was ensured last week when the government dropped a provision that would have required Internet companies such as Google and Facebook to store any information on Brazilian users on servers located here.

Facebook, Google and lawmakers opposed to that provision argued it would make access to the Internet more expensive. The final version says that companies collecting data on Brazilian users must obey Brazilian privacy and data protection laws even if the data is held on servers abroad.

The proposal to demand use of Brazilian data centers had been added to the bill last year after revelations that the U.S. National Security Agency's targeted President Dilma Rousseff's communications with aids and Brazil's state-run oil company Petrobras and collected information stored on Internet servers in the United States. Upset with those revelations, Rousseff canceled a state visit to Washington in October.

Brazil also asked the United Nations General Assembly to adopt a resolution calling on all countries to protect the right to privacy guaranteed under international law.

The bill upholds the principle of neutrality, stipulating that providers must grant equal access to the Internet without charging higher prices for different content such as Skype or video streaming.

Brazil is one of the globe's biggest users of social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

In September Rousseff pushed Congress to act by marking the bill as urgent, a procedure that forced lawmakers to vote on the measure before they can decide on any other legislation. The move paralyzed the lower house as the president struggled to gain support for the data-center measure.

With an international Internet governance conference scheduled for April 23 in Sao Paulo, Rousseff decided to facilitate the bill's approval by agreeing to drop the data storing provision.

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