

Moscow says Twitter to store user data in Russia

November 8 2017, by Anna Smolchenko



Social media sites Twitter and Facebook are widely used by the opposition to Russian President Vladimir Putin to coordinate protests and make political statements

Russia's telecoms watchdog said Wednesday that Twitter had agreed to store the personal data of Russian nationals on servers located in Russia by mid-2018 to avoid the prospect of a ban.

The statement from Roskomnadzor came after pro-government newspaper Izvestia earlier Wednesday reported that Twitter had agreed

to comply with Russian legislation and was now looking for sites for its servers in Russia.

"On April 13, 2017 Roskomnadzor received a letter from Twitter confirming its readiness to locate servers in Russia by the middle of 2018," the telecoms watchdog said in a statement sent to AFP.

The watchdog had received the letter following a meeting between Twitter representatives and Roskomnadzor officials in March, it said, adding it was monitoring the implementation of the agreement.

There was no official comment from Twitter but a source close to the matter told AFP that Twitter had only agreed to "review" the law.

Twitter is "only reviewing users with 'commercial relationships' - that is, advertisers only and no decision has been made," the source said.

The company wants to ensure that the storage of data in separate locations (outside the United States) "does not create a security risk or any vulnerability for Russian users and their accounts," the source added.

A 2014 law requiring foreign messaging services, search engines and social networking sites to store the personal data of Russian users inside the country has caused widespread concern as it was seen as putting the information at risk of being accessed by Russian intelligence services.

Twitter and Facebook are widely used by the opposition to President Vladimir Putin to coordinate protests and make political statements.

Russia is gearing up for a presidential election in March.

Facebook's Russia branch?

Russia's telecoms regulator has repeatedly warned Facebook and Twitter they could be banned in 2018 unless they comply with the law.

Roskomnadzor also said Wednesday that Facebook had not told it whether it planned to store the personal data of Russian nationals on Russian servers.

Izvestia, citing sources familiar with the situation, said Facebook was gearing up to open a branch in Russia.

"This could mean that the company has decided to develop business in our country according to the norms of Russian legislation. Including the implementation of the norms of legislation about personal data," the Russian watchdog said.

"This can only be welcomed."

The watchdog said it would in the near future conduct a probe to see if Facebook complied with Russian legislation, threatening to take action in case of violations.

Russian internet providers last year blocked the LinkedIn professional networking site after Roskomnadzor said it broke the law on personal data storage.

Russia also fined the popular Telegram messenger app last month for failing to provide the country's security services with encryption keys to read users' messaging data.

Last month Twitter banned advertisements from Russia's state-controlled RT and Sputnik media outlets in response to US intelligence findings that they sought to spread misinformation during the 2016 presidential election.

In June, China implemented a controversial cybersecurity law that tightens restrictions on online freedom of speech and imposes new rules on service providers, including one requiring tech companies to store user data inside the country.

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