

Russian lawmakers pass new bill restricting Internet

July 4 2014, by Maria Antonova



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Introducing the bill to parliament this week, MP Vadim Dengin said

"most Russians don't want their data to leave Russia for the United States, where it can be hacked and given to criminals."

"Our entire lives are stored over there," he said, adding that companies should build data centres in Russia.

The bill would increase pressure on social networking services which do not have offices in Russia and have become a vital resource for anti-government groups.

Both Facebook and Twitter refuse to hand over [user data](#) to governments.

Just days before the bill was formally proposed last month, Twitter's public policy chief Colin Crowell visited Russia to speak with media watchdog Roskomnadzor. Few details of the visit were publicised, but access to user data is thought to have been top of the list.

Russia is also asking Twitter to open a local office, which the company has so far refused to do.

"Nobody wants to relocate to Russia, but I am pessimistic. I think (the Russian authorities) will make them relocate the servers," said Andrei Soldatov, a journalist who tracks Russia's security services.

"For the most part, this is directed against Gmail, Facebook, and Twitter," he said.

If passed, the rules will not take effect until September 2016 but will provide the government with grounds to block sites that do not comply.

That could cause problems for Russian companies such as tourism websites and airlines that rely on foreign-based online booking services.

Google told AFP they need time to study the final version of the law before commenting.

Yandex, a popular Russian search engine, said by email that the company is already using Russian servers, but added that building data centres required by law from scratch would take more than the two years allocated.

'Iron curtain all over'

Russia's Association of Electronic Communication (RAEC), a group that lobbies on behalf of Internet companies and also helped organise Crowell's visit, said the new measures would be detrimental to Internet users.

"Many global Internet services would be impossible," the group said earlier this week. "The bill takes the right of people over their own [personal data](#) away from them."

"They want the iron curtain all over again, with everything written on pieces of paper like in the Soviet Union," Vladimir Kantorovich, vice president at the Russian Association of Tour Operators, told AFP.

"I feel like the Duma wants to lock us in an armoured cell for our protection without asking if we need it."

The [bill](#) must still be approved by the upper chamber and President Vladimir Putin before it becomes law, but is only the latest in what appears as a concerted push by the government to crack down on Internet dissent.

Lawmakers have already passed a slew of restrictions, including a requirement for bloggers to register as media if they have more than

3,000 followers and a law directed against "extremist" language that could see Russians go to jail for up to five years for retweeting offensive information.

Conservative lawmakers are also discussing the possibility of widespread Internet filters that could only be lifted for people who hand over their passport information.

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Citation: Russian lawmakers pass new bill restricting Internet (2014, July 4) retrieved 19 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-07-russian-lawmakers-bill-restricting-internet.html>

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