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▲ Lvl. 2

No state
reply yet

Russian Federation n° 34/2018

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Russia: Blocking of Telegram and Collateral Temporary Blocking of Media Sites

SOURCE OF THREAT ▶ State

CATEGORY ⓘ ▶ Other acts having chilling effects on media freedom

NO STATE REPLY YET

PARTNER: Article 19, EFJ/IFJ, Index, PEN, RSF

On 13 April 2018, Moscow's Tagansky District Court granted Roskomnadzor, Russia's communications regulator, its request to block access to the Internet messaging service Telegram on the grounds that the company had not complied with a 2017 order to provide decryption keys to the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB).

For Russian users, apps such as Telegram and similar services that seek to provide secure communications are crucial for users' safety. They provide an important source of information on critical issues of politics, economics and social life, free of undue government interference. For media outlets and journalists based in and outside Russia, Telegram serves not only as a messaging platform for secure communication with sources, but also as a publishing venue. Through its channels, Telegram acts as a carrier and distributor of content for entire media outlets as well as for individual journalists and bloggers.

Since the 13 April decision, the actions taken by the Russian authorities to restrict access to Telegram have caused mass Internet disruption, including mass collateral website blocking. Between 16-18 April 2018, almost 20 million Internet Protocol (IP) addresses were ordered to be blocked by Roskomnadzor as it attempted to restrict access to Telegram. The majority of the blocked addresses are owned by international Internet companies, including Google, Amazon and Microsoft. Among those temporarily blocked were at least six online media outlets (Petersburg Diary, Coda Story, FlashNord, FlashSiberia, Tayga.info, and 7x7). As of 30 April 2018, 14.6 million websites remain blocked.

On 17 April 2018, Roskomnadzor requested that Google and Apple remove access to the Telegram app from their App stores, despite having no basis in Russian law to make this request. The app remains available, but Telegram has not been able to provide upgrades that would allow better proxy access for users. Virtual Private Network (VPN) providers –

such as TgVPN, Le VPN and VeeSecurity proxy – have also been targeted for providing alternative means to access Telegram. Federal Law 276-FZ bans VPNs and Internet anonymisers from providing access to websites banned in Russia and authorises Roskomnadzor to order the blocking of any site explaining how to use these services.

UPDATES

30 Oct 2018: On 9 October 2018, a Moscow City Court's appeals panel rejected a request to forward a cassation appeal lodged by Telegram Messenger LLP representative contesting the Tagansky Court of Moscow's 13 April 2018 ruling and the Moscow City Court's appellate ruling of 14 June to a cassation court for consideration.

03 Aug 2018: In June 2018, following the exhaustion of the domestic remedies, Telegram's lawyers have lodged an application with the European Court of Human Rights with regard to the blocking of Telegram messenger in Russia".

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

-  [Letter of the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression/UN Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy](#)
-  [Report by PEN International "Russia's Strident Stifling of Free Speech 2012-2018"](#)
-  [Statement by 26 international human rights, media and Internet freedom organisations : "Russia: Telegram block leads to widespread assault on freedom of expression online"](#)

FOLLOW-UPS

 **02 May 2018** | Blocking of Telegram and legal restrictions on social networks will limit freedom of expression in Russia, says OSCE Representative Désir.

-  [Statement by Harlem Désir](#)