

Putin Says Russia Won't Restrict Internet Access

President Vladimir Putin says Russia is not planning to limit access to the Internet or put it under "total control," but will need to ensure the stability and security of its Russian segment.

Putin, speaking at a meeting of his presidential Security Council, said Russian Internet domains had faced a growing number of cyberattacks.

Putin said the security services had detected constant growth in the number of cyberattacks, particularly in the last six months -- the period when the crisis in Ukraine worsened.

He added that the intensity of the attacks "depends on the current international situation."

Putin said Russia will consistently and legally close sites disseminating or promoting extremism, xenophobia, terrorism, and child pornography.

"It is obvious that today we need to elaborate and implement a range of additional measures in the area of information security," he said, adding that Russia did "not intend to limit access to the Internet" or "to put it under total control."

The Russian leader appeared to be trying to defuse speculation about possible Internet restrictions amid escalating tensions with the West over Ukraine.

The Russian daily "Vedomosti" reported on September 19 that the government may require Russian Internet service providers to install equipment that would make it possible to sever Russia's access to the global Internet in situations deemed by the authorities as "extraordinary."

The Kremlin has denied the report, but said on September 30 that Russia was "rehearsing responses should our esteemed partners decide to switch us off from the Internet."

According to experts, the more domestic service providers a country has, the more difficult it is to completely switch off the Internet.

Domestic providers offer web access after purchasing connectivity from another provider outside the country.

There are more than 300 domestic service providers in Russia that have purchased connectivity from outside the country, and the government would have to force them all to shut down to fully sever access.

However, there are several precedents. Egypt shut off the country's Internet for five days in 2011 during the Arab Spring protests.

Syria's Internet was shut off three times in 2011. Nepal and Myanmar have briefly disconnected, and China shut off access to the mostly ethnic Uighur region of Xinjiang amid unrest in 2009.

An alternative to shutting down the Internet completely is filtering content. Russia has already blocked several opposition sites and passed a law requiring registration by some bloggers.

Russia also has indicated that foreign Internet companies will have to comply with its laws.

According to a September 26 report in the "Izvestia" daily, Russia's media regulator, Roskomnadzor, has notified Facebook, Twitter, and Google that they must comply with a law requiring registration with the agency, and store six-month archives of metadata for their users at a location within Russian.

With reporting by Reuters and TASS

<http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-internet-putin/26615429.html>