

The Russian Internet's Autonomy: For and Against

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One of the most disputable questions nowadays is the autonomy of the Russian internet.

It is a known fact that, on the 12th of February, 2019 the State Duma of the Russian Federation accepted the Federal Law on “the internet’s sovereign” as it is called in mass media. So, what will be the consequences of this law? What does it mean and what effects are about to happen, if the law is adopted at all?

Amendments to the laws "On Communications" and "On Information, Information Technologies and Protection of Information" were brought in by deputies Andrei Klishas, Lyudmila Bokova and LDPR deputy Andrei Lugovoy.

According to the authors, this bill will increase the security and stability of the national segment of the Internet in the event of some external negative impact. That is, attempts from outside to affect the quality of the signal or to organize some kind of "shot downs".

The law under discussion was introduced in order to provide continuous work of the Russian segment of the Internet even in case of unwanted disconnection from the global network. It is assumed that in the event of such a threat, Roskomnadzor will be assigned to manage the Internet in Russia.

The project regulates the routing of the Internet traffic in such a way that it will minimize the amount of data transmitted abroad, which is regularly exchanged between the Russian Internet users. The bill was prepared according to the explanatory note, adopted in September 2018, in accordance with the US National Cyber Security Strategy.

The only advantage that could be found in this bill is safety. But even this argument can be debated. The reason that can be pointed out for that is the absence of certain definitions about external threats, so government can give “slippery” or so called “shadow” interpretations.

At this point it would be necessary to pay special attention to some negative aspects that should be taken into consideration.

First of all, a potential ban of foreign services, like Google, YouTube, Facebook, Twitch and others. These services are expected to be replaced by Russian similar analogs. Yandex, services of mail.ru group, VKontakte will become the only possible services. Besides that, the majority Russia’s population uses the above mentioned services on a regular basis. As a result Russian government will face mass discontent, especially among young people.

The second point to be discussed is the easier way of banning some websites by the government. Recalling to this law, the government can ban websites without courts. Thus, this law is as follows: «In cases of threats to the integrity, sustainability and safety of the Internet in the Russian Federation, the public communications network can be centrally controlled by the federal agency responsible for monitoring and supervising the media and mass communications, information technology and communications». So, that means a full control of agency on websites, and in our opinion that is absolutely wrong. Our point of view can be proved by the example of an easy possibility of banning websites, that by their opinion, are threat to safety, but in reality they are not at all.

The next point that could be taken into consideration is the amounts of money spent by the government. Probably, some people would not even think of such a problem, but we should bare in mind that it will definitely affect every person. In case of acceptance of the law under discussion, new technologies and systems will be needed. In order to install and sustain them, the government will try to get the funding for that from tax payers. The bill contains the following lines: «The carrier, providing services to provide access to the information and telecommunications network "Internet", is obliged to ensure the installation in its communications network of technical means to counter threats, to provide information to the federal executive body that performs the functions of control and supervision in the field of mass media communications, information technology and communications, the installation of such technical equipment within three days from the date of installation and the technical conditions and requirements provided by Part 2 of Article 66.1 of this Federal Law». It means, that carriers will spend money on those “technical means”, as a result the prices for the internet will be increased.

The situation is quite the same in China, but it should be mentioned that it was a really time consuming process there.

In 1998, the Ministry of Public Security of China began to prepare a project called the Golden Shield Project. In the next 10 years, the project was carefully worked out and in 2011 it was approved by the State Council. Golden Shield Project is the largest system of censoring Internet content on the main data networks.

China’s Great Firewall (CGF), the famous Chinese firewall, is a part of the Golden Shield Project. Its goal is to block foreign sites and slow down cross-border traffic.

Since 1995, China has quickly connected to the Internet, began to open the first Internet cafes. But the attitude of the Chinese authorities to the Internet was rather wary. Deng Xiaoping, the leader of the Republic of China, commented on the Network as follows: “If you open a window for fresh air, you should expect flies to come with it!”

By marking the potential danger of the worldwide Internet network, the Chinese government, along with the adoption of new technology, established strict control over the Internet.

Thus, there is a prohibition on the Internet use for all the citizens in order to:

- damage to the national security; disclosure of state secrets; other harm to the interests of the state or society;
- creation, replication, search or transfer of information that is contrary to the Constitution of the PRC, laws or administrative regulations;
- the overthrow of the government or the socialist system;
- undermining national unity;
- distortion of truth, spread of rumors or violations of public order;
- search and disseminate material that is sexual in nature or that encourages gambling, violence or murder;
- damage to the security of computer information networks.

Thus, we should understand that this situation could be just the same in our country. But as for China, the process was slow and time consuming, and as for Russia it will probably be faster with a great amount of unwanted and unexpected difficulties.

In conclusion we would like to say that there is no place for panic yet, but the first step for autonomy is done. Will this law be of great help for the Internet's safety or not is not clear at the moment. The government's need in this law is not the only thing that should be taken into consideration. Is this law so important for people? This law will be debated.

Literature

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