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Russia: Internet Freedom is Under Severe Threat

In recent years, freedom of expression in Russia has come under severe attack. A number of pieces of legislation have been adopted limiting the ability of opposition voices to make themselves heard. An Analysis released today by CLD demonstrates that, even against this troubling backdrop, the recent decision by Russia's government to create an Internet blacklist is a particularly ominous development.

"Although the Internet is famously resistant to censorship or control, Russia's content regulation framework has tremendous potential to clamp down on online speech" said Toby Mendel, Executive Director of CLD. "We are particularly concerned about moves to ban speech that 'propagandises non-traditional sexual relations' which is clearly targeting the LGBT community."

Key problems with Russia's blacklist are that it imposes overly broad and illegitimate bans on content and that it lacks appropriate safeguards against political abuse. This problem is exacerbated by a lack of transparency in the way the system operates and insufficient procedural protections for those whose material is targeted for takedown.

In the period since the law has come into force, there is already ample evidence of its overbreadth, with several innocuous websites having been put on the blacklist. CLD calls upon the Russian government to review its whole approach to controlling Internet content, with a view to bringing the system into line with international standards regarding the right to freedom of expression.

The Analysis is available at:

http://www.law-democracy.org/live/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Russia.final_.pdf

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