

Medvedev Pitches a Free Internet at G8

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Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, center, speaking with the European Commission's Jose Manuel Barroso as Medvedev arrives for G8 Internet talks. **Charles Dharapak**

President Dmitry Medvedev pleaded for more Internet freedom at the Group of Eight summit, taking a more liberal line than some G8 counterparts and raising eyebrows among critics who note that Russian authorities have sought to tighten control over the Internet.

"Today the G8 discussed the future of the Internet. The net must be free, authors' rights need new defenses," Medvedev [wrote](#) on his Twitter account after talks at the French resort of Deauville.

This year's two-day G8 summit, which ended Friday, added the Internet to its agenda for the first time after social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter were credited with playing a role in toppling entrenched regimes in Egypt and Tunisia earlier this year.

Just days before the summit, Yandex, the popular Russian search engine, debuted in New York with a heavily oversubscribed initial public offering that is causing investors to take a second

look at Russia.

Medvedev, who has carefully honed his image as an Internet-savvy president, seemed to adopt a more liberal stance at the G8 talks than some of his fellow statesmen, first and foremost French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who called for tighter online regulation in the run-up to the summit.

Sarkozy's plea for a "civilized Internet" has pitched him against leading technology companies including Google and Facebook, whose top executives he invited to discuss proposals to balance freedom on the Internet with protections for privacy and intellectual property.

Speaking at the summit, Google chairman Eric Schmidt and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg both warned against tightening regulations, with Schmidt telling reporters that Arab leaders made "a terrible mistake" by cutting off Internet access in their countries.

An Egyptian court on Saturday fined ousted President Hosni Mubarak and two other former officials \$90 million for disrupting cell phone and Internet services in an attempt to quell protests.

The Internet leaders drafted a final communique at the G8 talks that calls for a commitment to take action against the violation of intellectual property rights and to protect against personal and data privacy.

Medvedev's aide Arkady Dvorkovich told reporters at the summit that Moscow backs changes to international and national laws that offer protection from cybercrime and breaches of privacy, but those changes should not limit freedom on the Internet, Interfax reported.

He added that First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov was heading a working group compiling Moscow's suggestions concerning the Internet for delivery to the G8 partners at a later date. Dvorkovich did not elaborate.

Internet freedom is being hotly debated in Russia as parliamentary and presidential elections loom and the Federal Security Service has threatened to close access to services like Skype and Gmail, citing national security concerns.

In February, Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin criticized Google for being partly responsible for the Egyptian uprisings.

Observers say Medvedev is the best guarantor that the web can remain the bastion of free speech that it has become in recent years.

"The president's words are very much in line with the Internet community," State Duma Deputy Ilya Ponomaryov said by phone Friday.

Ponomaryov, a member of A Just Russia, is pushing for legal amendments that would make it easier to punish cybercriminals.

A large swath of global cybercrime, ranging from spam to hacker attacks, originates in Russia. Russia's share of the revenue generated in the criminal activity was estimated at \$2.5 billion

for last year, or 35 percent of the world market, according to a [report](#) by Group IB, a Moscow-based computer security firm. At the current rate, that figure is expected to grow to \$7.5 billion by 2013.

Ponomaryov said current legislation usually only allows investigators to go after Internet providers, which are mostly innocent.

He said proposed amendments would be introduced in the Duma next month and a first reading could take place in the fall. But he acknowledged that the legislation would probably only pass the second and third readings next spring.

Other experts said the application of any new laws would be difficult because investigators and judges lack proper training to handle cybercrime.

"There are just too few judges who have the qualifications to deal with such crimes," said Rano Kravchenko, a spokeswoman for Antivirus Center, a Moscow-based IT security firm.

Kravchenko said national measures were not enough because of the nature of cybercrime, where spam is usually sent from hijacked computers, or bots. "These bots can stand in various countries while being controlled from abroad, she said.

Doubts about the country's role in global cyber security are also fueled by lingering suspicion that the government was behind a string of political cyber attacks against Western interests in recent years.

A 2007 assault that froze Estonian government and banking web sites and a 2009 attack on a Georgian blogger that temporarily crippled Twitter and Facebook have been blamed on the government, although officials have denied this and no proof has been provided.

More recent examples include a series of attacks against LiveJournal, the country's leading blogging platform, which have been explained as revenge for anti-corruption exposés by blogger Alexei Navalny.

Ponomaryov said it could not be ruled out that Kremlin-connected hackers were to blame for those attacks.

But he said the attacks only sharpened the need for better laws. "Then we can hopefully perform better investigations into these cases, too," he said.

Government officials have said they were serious about cracking down on Internet crime. Recent successes include the January closure of VolgaHost, a rogue provider that supported botnets, phishing and spam.

In April, the U.S. Justice Department said it had shut down a Russian cybercrime ring accused of stealing more than \$100 million over the past decade.

Russian officials are already cooperating with the United States. At a little-noted conference in Germany last month, Russian and U.S. experts for the first time agreed on terms and definitions for cyber conflict, [said](#) the East-West Institute, which convened the experts.

Also at the summit:

- G8 leaders compared the Arab world uprisings to the fall of the Berlin Wall, which changed Europe, and promised to foster new democracies in Tunisia and Egypt with at least \$20 billion in aid. French President Nicolas Sarkozy said \$20 billion in loans would come from the World Bank and other G8-led organizations, while \$10 billion could come in bilateral aid and \$10 billion from Gulf Arab states.
- Medvedev congratulated Yandex on its successful placement Friday but cautioned that this was not a sign that the investment climate has improved in Russia.

"This is one of the few examples of a high-tech firm succeeding in considerably outperforming the parameters set when preparing for a public offering," he said, Interfax reported. "It's a good sign for Yandex and for the economy."

"But as concerns the investment climate, my evaluation for now has not changed," he said, promising to provide a more detailed evaluation later and return to the issue of the investment climate at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in June.

Yandex shares soared more than 50 percent on the first day of trading last Tuesday. The offering raised a total of \$1.43 billion after its organizers "exercised in full" an overallotment option to buy 5,217,405 shares at \$25 each, the company said Friday, Bloomberg reported.

- G8 leaders promised to finalize talks on Russia's entry into the World Trade Organization this year.
- Rosatom deputy chief Nikolai Spassky urged other G8 countries to make the International Atomic Energy Agency's safety standards compulsory and introduce restrictions on building reactors in earthquake-prone areas, Reuters reported.
- British Prime Minister David Cameron confirmed during talks with Medvedev that he would lead a large delegation of British businesspeople to Russia in September, Interfax reported.

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