

Germany seeks to fine operators of Telegram messenger app

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German authorities have launched proceedings against Telegram that could see the messenger app's operators fined for failing to abide by laws requiring social media sites to police their users' actions.

German magazine Der Spiegel reported over the weekend that officials believe use of the Telegram app has reached a threshold where it can be treated in the same way as Facebook, Twitter and TikTok when it comes to requiring cooperation with German authorities.

A Justice Ministry spokeswoman confirmed Monday that authorities have written to Telegram's operators in the United Arab Emirates over its failure to provide a channel for raising complaints and a contact person in Germany.

"The company now has the opportunity to respond," the spokeswoman, Rabea Boennighausen, told reporters in Berlin.

Der Spiegel reported that the company could face fines of up to 5.5 million euros (\$6.7 million) if it doesn't comply with the requirements.

Telegram couldn't immediately be reached for comment.

Telegram, which was founded by Russian brothers Nikolai and Pavel Durov, has grown in popularity in Germany in recent years, including among right-wing groups and those opposed to the government's response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Germany parliament passed the Network Enforcement Act in 2017 with the stated goal of ensuring that the country's existing limits on speech, including the long-standing ban on Holocaust denial, can be enforced online.

Opponents have argued that the law risks stifling free speech.

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