

Telegram founder set to learn fate after France arrest

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Pavel Durov, co-founder of encrypted messaging app Telegram, was arrested at an airport near Paris.

Pavel Durov, the founder and chief of Telegram, is set to learn Wednesday whether he will face charges and even be remanded in

custody after his weekend arrest by French authorities over alleged violations at the messaging app.

Russian-born Durov, 39, was arrested at Le Bourget airport outside Paris late Saturday, and while the judicial authorities have repeatedly extended his initial period of detention, it can last a maximum of 96 hours.

This means that by Wednesday evening he should either be released or appear before a judge who will decide further measures against him.

As part of a probe that was confidentially opened on July 8, Durov is being investigated on suspicion of 12 offenses related to failing to curb extremist and criminal content on Telegram, sources close to the investigation have said.

The tech mogul founded Telegram as he was in the process of quitting his native Russia a decade ago. Its growth has been exponential, with the app now boasting over 900 million users.

An enigmatic figure who rarely speaks in public, Durov is a citizen of Russia, France and the United Arab Emirates, where Telegram is based.

Forbes magazine estimates his current fortune at \$15.5 billion, though he proudly promotes the virtues of an ascetic life that includes ice baths and not drinking alcohol or coffee.

Numerous questions have been raised about the timing and circumstances of Durov's detention, in particular why he flew into Paris apparently knowing a warrant had been issued against him.

Le Monde newspaper reported Wednesday that Durov had met French President Emmanuel Macron on several occasions prior to receiving French nationality in 2021 via a special procedure reserved for those

deemed to have made a special contribution to France.

The Wall Street Journal added that at one lunch in 2018, Macron—who along with his team were in the past avid users of Telegram—had suggested it should be headquartered in Paris. But Durov had refused.



Macron complained false information was circulating.

'In no way political'

In a post on X to address what he called "false information" concerning the case, Macron insisted Durov's arrest was "in no way a political

decision" and it was "up to the judges to rule".

In Moscow, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the charges were very serious and thus needed "no less serious evidence".

"Otherwise this would be a direct attempt to restrict freedom of communication, and, I might even say, directly intimidate the head of a large company," he said.

The UAE meanwhile said it was "closely following the case" and had requested consular access for its citizen.

Among those voicing support for Durov is fellow tech tycoon and chief executive of X, Elon Musk, who has posted comments under the hashtag #FreePavel.

Durov left Russia a decade ago as he was setting up Telegram amid an ownership squabble concerning his first project, the Russian social network VKontakte.

But his departure from Russia was reportedly not an abrupt exile: according to the Vazhnye Istarii news site, citing leaked border data, he visited the country more than 50 times between 2015 and 2021.

'Nothing to hide'

When the initial 96-hour questioning period ends, the investigating magistrate can either free Durov or press charges and remand him in custody.



Telegram's logo is a paper plane.

He could also be freed under judicial control that could include restrictions on his movements.

Durov, who has been based in Dubai in recent years, arrived in Paris from the Azerbaijani capital Baku and was planning to have dinner in the French capital, a source close to the case said.

He was accompanied by a bodyguard and a personal assistant who always travel with him, added the source, asking not to be named.

Russian President Vladimir Putin was in Baku on a state visit to Azerbaijan on August 18 and 19, though Peskov has denied that the two

met.

France's OFMIN, an office tasked with preventing violence against minors, issued an arrest warrant for Durov in a preliminary investigation into alleged offenses including fraud, drug trafficking, cyberbullying, organized crime and promotion of terrorism.

Telegram said in response that "Durov has nothing to hide and travels frequently in Europe".

It added, "It is absurd to claim that a platform or its owner are responsible for abuse of that platform."

Telegram has positioned itself as a "neutral" alternative to US-owned platforms, which have been criticised for their commercial exploitation of users' personal data.

It has also played a key role since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, used actively by politicians and commentators on both sides of the war.

But critics accuse it of hosting often illegal content ranging from extreme sexual imagery to disinformation and narcotics services.

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