

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 27, 2022

Pavel Durov
Chief Executive Officer
71-75 Shelton Street
Covent Garden London
United Kingdom

Dear Mr. Durov,

We write to express deep concern over persistent and growing efforts by the Kremlin to spread and amplify disinformation on Telegram five months into Putin's unjustified, unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. As Putin's regime takes increasingly draconian measures to prevent its own citizens from accessing the truth, by blocking social media and stamping out any remaining semblance of independent media in the country, Russian state media continues to exploit the platform provided by Telegram to amplify and export its lies abroad. Ongoing and heightened efforts by Russian state media to target the Western Hemisphere, especially through Spanish-language disinformation, are particularly disturbing.

Russian state media continue to abuse your platform and others like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter to quickly reach mass audiences globally. This includes in the Western Hemisphere, where RT and Sputnik—Russian state media outlets that are required to register as foreign agents in the United States under the Foreign Agent Registration Act and that have been identified by the State Department as the cornerstone of Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem—actively spread English and Spanish-language disinformation across Latin America and the Caribbean.

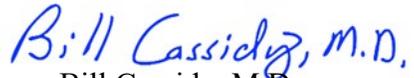
The Kremlin has long considered its Spanish-language disinformation campaign among its most successful efforts, and it has repeatedly used disinformation and propaganda to undermine democracy, polarize its adversaries' societies, and incite chaos in the Western Hemisphere. We also know that disinformation campaigns by Russian state media's Spanish-language outlets targeted at Latin American and Caribbean audiences regularly reach Spanish-speaking communities in the United States, directly harming our national interests. We are deeply concerned by reports that the operations and reach of such outlets have only increased amid Putin's actions in Ukraine, and that Russian state media has been encouraging viewers to turn to Telegram to continue accessing their disinformation and propaganda.

To defend regional allies and partners across Latin America and support the Ukrainian people, we call on Telegram to restrict content of RT en Español and Sputnik Mundo, two of the Russian state media's most popular services on Spanish-language communication platforms. We also urge you to dramatically increase efforts to identify and restrict the spread of disinformation in Spanish about the tragic events in Ukraine to ensure parity with efforts to mitigate the spread of such disinformation in English.

In these extraordinary circumstances, we must remain vigilant about the ability of known purveyors of Russian disinformation to propagate falsehoods about Putin's invasion of Ukraine, whether in Spanish or any other language.

Sincerely,


Robert Menendez
United States Senator


Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator


Tim Kaine
United States Senator