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Rostelecom Blocks YouTube in Omsk as Prosecutors Press for Restrictions

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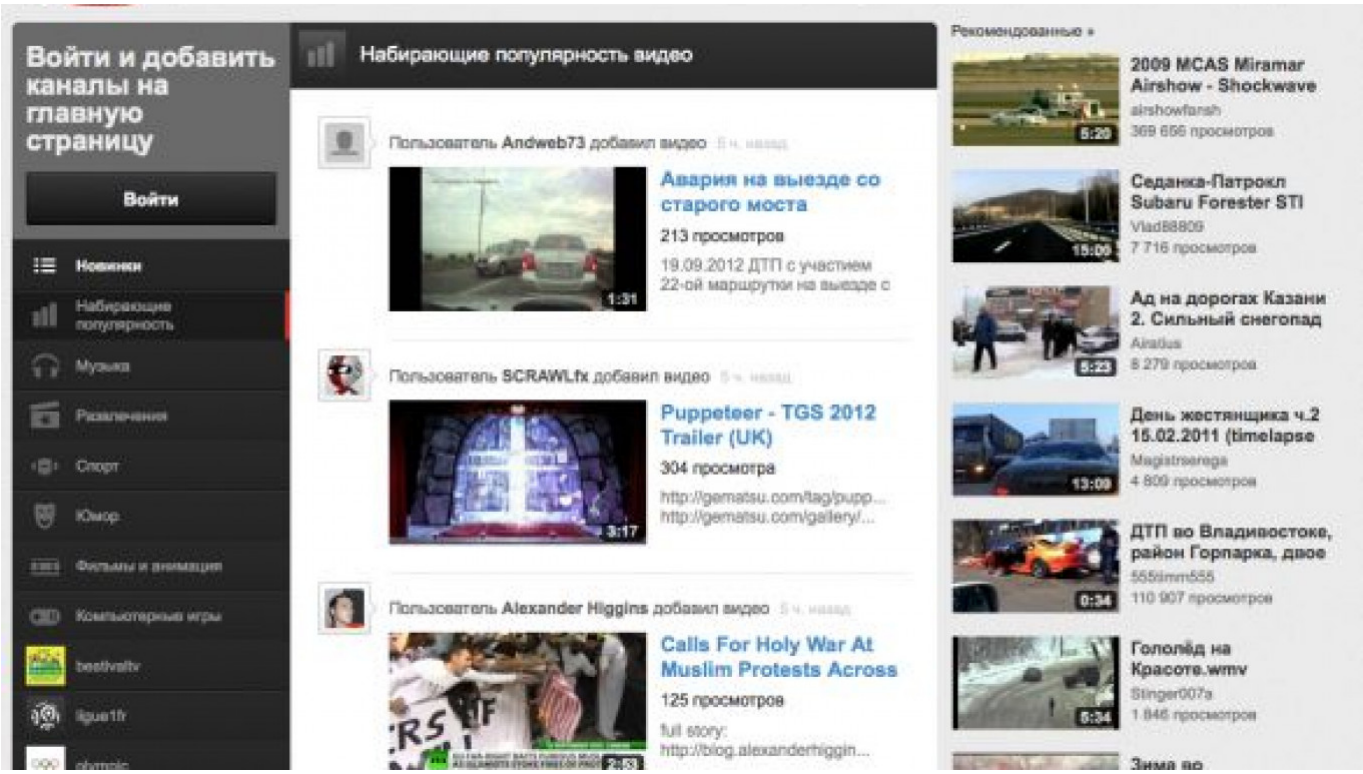

Google, the search giant that operates YouTube, has refused to delete the 14-minute clip from its servers, despite requests from the U.S. White House.

Federal prosecutors said that Internet providers could be breaking extremism legislation by failing to block access to an anti-Muslim video clip that has sparked violence abroad.

The Prosecutor General's Office instructed regional prosecutors to warn Internet providers that they could be breaking a federal law on extremism by hosting websites with the "Innocence of Muslims" film trailer, Interfax reported Wednesday.

The extremism law states that organizations can be held liable for providing access to materials suspected of being extremist in nature.

Rostelecom announced in a statement early Wednesday that it had barred customers in the Omsk region from accessing YouTube after receiving a warning from local prosecutors a day

earlier.

Omsk prosecutors wrote on their website that they had issued the same warnings to four other providers, including MegaFon, MTS and VimpelCom.

Senior politicians and government officials have complained that the low-budget "Innocence of Muslims" video could inflame interethnic tensions and should be banned for its extremist content.

Federal prosecutors are seeking a court order to ban the clip, which has dozens of versions on YouTube's Russian-language page and has garnered well over 1 million hits in total.

Rostelecom described the YouTube restrictions as "temporary" in its statement and said it was studying further recommendations from prosecutors and the Federal Mass Media Inspection Service. By Wednesday afternoon, no other Internet providers had apparently followed Rostelecom's lead in blocking YouTube.

The clip, which mocks Islam by depicting the Prophet Muhammad as lecherous and self-interested, has prompted protests across the Muslim world. Demonstrators in North Africa and the Middle East have targeted U.S. embassies and consulates, since the film originated in the United States, and ripples of discontent have spread as far as Europe.

Google, the search giant that operates YouTube, has refused to delete the 14-minute clip from its servers, despite requests from the U.S. White House, but said it would block the video in specific countries if local courts demand it.

French authorities said Wednesday that they would seek to thwart protests over the video and step up security at their embassies after a Parisian weekly published caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, The Associated Press reported.

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