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Vkontakte Founder Pavel Durov Learns He's Been Fired Through Media

By The Moscow Times

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The founder and former CEO of Vkontakte, Pavel Durov, at a promotional event.

Vkontake founder Pavel Durov has been fired as the social network's CEO, the company said, while Durov added that the move puts the network under the "full control" of Kremlin insiders.

Durov, who said he had resisted months of increasing pressure from the Federal Security Service, or FSB, to release personal information about opposition activists who use Russia's most popular social network, said he that learned about his dismissal from media reports.

"It is interesting that shareholders did not have the courage to do it directly," he said on his Vkontakte page on Monday night.

Vkontakte said in a statement a few hours earlier that it had acted on a resignation letter that Durov submitted on March 21 and supposedly failed to properly withdraw before a one-month

deadline had expired, Interfax reported.

On April 1, Durov announced on his Vkontakte page that he was stepping down as the company's CEO before revealing two days later, on April 3, that the announcement was an April Fool's prank.

The social network will now fall under the "full control" of Kremlin-linked Rosneft CEO Igor Sechin, and Vkontakte billionaire shareholder Alisher Usmanov, Durov said.

"Something like this was probably inevitable in Russia, but I am glad that we held on for seven and a half years," Durov said on his Vkontakte page. "We managed to do a lot. And part of what has been accomplished can no longer be turned back."

Durov also said that he had withdrawn his prank letter of resignation a few days after offering to step down.

However, "based on what has been reported, the board of directors of Vkontake today has *suddenly* discovered that the withdrawal of my letter of resignation on April 3 — which they had previously publicly accepted — turned out to be drawn up 'not in accordance with all the rules,' and so I am automatically relieved of the position," he wrote on his Vkontakte page.

Until a new CEO is appointed, the social network will be headed by its deputy chief executive Boris Dobrodeyev and executive director Dmitry Sergeyev, the company statement said.

Sergeyev said that Vkontakte may offer Durov a job as a chief network architect, Interfax reported.

Durov said last week that he sold a 12 percent stake in the company back in January after coming under increasing pressure from the FSB to hand over the personal details of people who were members of a Vkontakte group dedicated to the Euromaidan protest movement.

The term 'Euromaidan' has become synonymous with the protesters who helped organize demonstrations in Kiev against the government of former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych, eventually leading to his ouster in February.

"To give the personal details of Ukrainians to the Russian authorities would not only be against the law, but also a betrayal of all those millions of people in Ukraine who trusted us," Durov said last week. "The freedom to disseminate information is an inalienable right of a postindustrial society."

Durov said he was also asked in March to shut down a Vkontakte group dedicated to anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny, but refused to do so.

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