

Teen Gets 160 Hours Community Service for Insulting Russian Chauvinists

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The drunken, belligerent Russian Vatnik mascot. **Rashka: Square Vatnik / Vkontakte**

He made the mistake of insulting “vata” — a pejorative for chauvinist Russian patriots — and now 19-year-old Alexander Gozenko will pay the price: 160 hours of mandatory community service, according to the news site Mediazona.

Gozenko’s conviction in Saratov is just the latest example of how Russian courts liberally interpret laws against hate speech, often using the criminal code to protect “social groups” that are defined by no immutable qualities, such as the police, state officials, and now “vatniki.”

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According to psychological-linguistic expertise conducted by police, Gozenko demeaned the “human dignity” of a group of people “on the basis of national origin” in comments he

posted on the social network Vkontakte in November 2015, when he called for a “holocaust of the vata.”

In November 2016, Russian officials blocked a community on Vkontakte called “Rashka: Square Vatnik,” which also mocked chauvinist Russian patriots. According to a ruling by a court in Omsk, the group offended ethnic Russians and Russian state officials, and depicted President Vladimir Putin in a Nazi uniform.

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