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Russia Wants to Recruit Volunteer Internet Censors

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Vladimir Kolokoltsev (Stanislav Krasilnikov / TASS)

Russia's police chief seeks to recruit volunteers for a new project: as censors to weed out banned information from the internet.

Internet providers in Russia are legally required to restrict access to banned content. Most recently, legislation went into force requiring Russian telecom companies to store users' communications under controversial anti-terrorism laws.

Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokoltsev told a forum of volunteers assisting with missing persons search and rescue that his staffers "always need the public's help" in drug prevention and battling juvenile delinquency.

"We could also partner in monitoring the internet networks to search for banned information," he said to the RBC business portal on Tuesday.

Related article: Internet Censorship Skyrockets in Russia in 2017, Study Says

The Agora international human rights group estimated that Russian authorities blocked an average of almost 250 web pages a day in 2017. RosKomSvoboda, a nonprofit that monitors internet censorship, said there were over 100,000 blacklisted websites in Russia as of Wednesday.

Authorities have also increasingly handed out jail sentences on charges of extremism to ordinary Russians for social media activity ranging from sharing images to posting comments critical of the country's leadership.

The Russian Supreme Court has for the past two years opposed the surge in extremism convictions, most of which are handed down on web and social media users.

The same court, however, ruled last month that the authorities can confiscate phones even without a criminal prosecution.

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