

Russia Blocks 1,000 News Stories on Major Bank's Leader

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Andrei Kostin Kremlin.ru

Russian regulators have blocked more than 1,000 online news stories ruled by a court as defamatory toward the head of a major bank, leading lawyers to decry the mass censorship as “legal nihilism.”

The state-owned VTB Bank [went](#) to court last year seeking to stop the circulation of stories harmful to its business reputation. A St. Petersburg court issued several rulings to delete scores of articles mentioning Andrei Kostin, the head of VTB.

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Russia’s federal communications watchdog blocked 1,000 stories based on some of these rulings, the *Vedomosti* business daily [reported](#) Friday, citing Roskomsvoboda, a Moscow-based group that campaigns against online restrictions.

The lack of a defendant or a specific defamatory passage — as well as the past rulings' application toward new removals — reflects the court's unprecedented "legal nihilism," said media law expert Fyodor Kravchenko.

"The court must re-evaluate each text from scratch, and the author should have the right to prove to the court that the provided information is correct," Vedomosti quoted him as saying.

The St. Petersburg arbitration court banned the reproduction and redistribution of the offending VTB material within Russia, the publication reported.

Russia's recently created Baza investigative news outlet became the latest victim of the court rulings this week after a Russian tech giant's personalized content platform deleted Baza's report on Kostin.

Pavel Chikov, head of the Agora international rights group, called the mass bans "censorship of the RuNet in the interests of specific people."

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