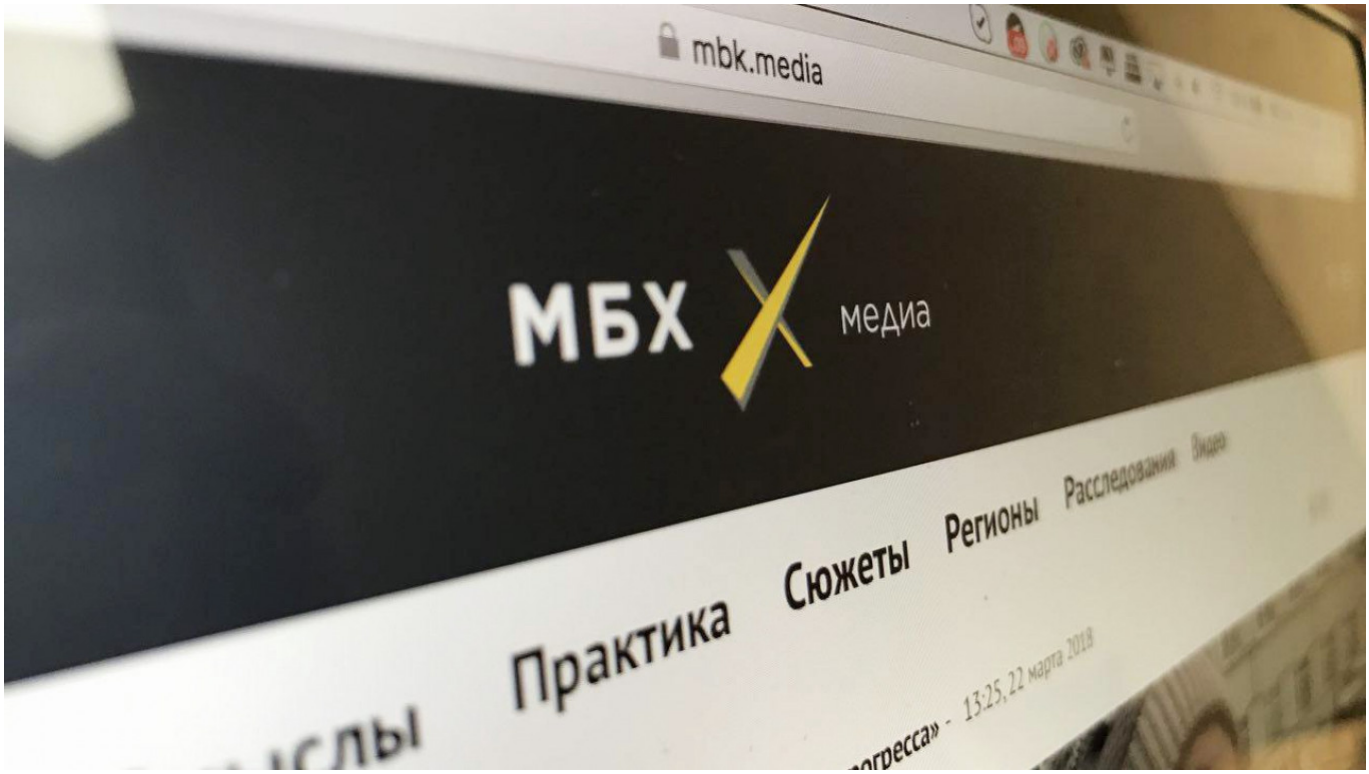
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Orders Closure of Independent News Site's Twitter Account

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The independent MBKh Media news website denied publishing materials from Open Russia, a blacklisted group within Russia. **MT**

Russia has demanded that Twitter delete the independent news website MBKh Media's account for allegedly publishing an "undesirable" organization's materials, the outlet said Wednesday.

The reported demand comes a day after Russia's state communications regulator Roskomnadzor threatened to block Twitter itself for failing to delete tweets containing child pornography, suicide and drug use.

MBKh said Twitter notified it of Roskomnadzor's request, prompted by the outlet's tweets containing materials from the Open Russia pro-democracy movement. Russia blacklisted and banned the activities of Open Russia as an "undesirable organization" in 2017.

Related article: Russia Threatens to Block Twitter Within 30 Days

MBKh editor-in-chief Veronika Kutsyllo denied publishing Open Russia's materials and said the website hadn't received any offical notice from Roskomnadzor of the demand, only a Twitter notification.

"They long ago chose a new tactic to put pressure on [social] networks or [internet] providers without warning their potential 'victims'," Kutsyllo said.

Roskomnadzor had not commented on its reported demand to take down MBKh's Twitter account as of midday Wednesday.

Roskomnadzor said Tuesday it has the "technical capacities" to fully block Twitter and warned other IT giants of similar consequences if they fail to abide by Russian law.

The Kremlin on Wednesday defended Roskomnadzor's actions toward Twitter as an attempt to force the social platform to follow Russian law, which it "demonstrably violates."

Russia's tensions with western social media platforms have recently escalated over what Moscow calls censorship against its state-affiliated accounts. Twitter, Facebook and YouTube began labeling state-controlled news outlets in the years following allegations of Russia using social media to meddle in the 2016 U.S. presidential race.

President Vladimir Putin this year granted Roskomnadzor the power to block social media platforms if they are found to "discriminate" against Russian media.

Previously, Russia blocked access to LinkedIn for not storing users' data on Russian servers and waged an unsuccessful two-year attempt to block the popular messaging app Telegram for not sharing encryption keys with the security services.

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