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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Gives Google 24 Hour Ultimatum to Remove Banned Content

Communications watchdog says it will slow down Google's services in Russia if the company does not comply.

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Google is contesting Russia's content removal requests. **Zuma / TASS**

Russia's internet regulator has threatened to slow down Google services in Russia if it does not comply with requests to delete content within 24 hours, Russia's state-run TASS news agency has reported.

The federal communications watchdog Roskomnadzor said Monday that Google had failed to remove 20-30% of links to content which it says are prohibited in Russia — a controversial category which includes content promoting drug use and featuring child pornography, as well as posts Russia says encourage under-18s to attend unauthorized protests.

"Google is not not fully complying with its obligation to exclude from its search results in Russia links to internet sites with information prohibited in our country," the state-run TASS

news agency cited Roskomnadzor as saying in a statement.

Roskomnadzor said Google had failed to remove about 5,000 individual pieces of content — 3,500 of which were related to "extremism."

Russia is currently moving to brand Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's organizations "extremist" — a label which would outlaw their activity in the country, and which is currently used against the likes of Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

Related article: Russia Says Won't Block Twitter, Will Keep Throttling Speeds

The ultimatum came hours after it emerged that Google has filed its first-ever lawsuit against Russia over earlier demands to remove content from YouTube.

The U.S. technology giant is challenging Roskomnadzor requests submitted in January to take down 12 videos Russia says call on minors to participate in unauthorized rallies.

Google has previously only acted as a defendant or third party in lawsuits brought against it by the Russian authorities, the business paper Kommersant reported. The company filed a lawsuit April 23 against Roskomnadzor in the Moscow Arbitration Court. The application was accepted by the court on May 11 and a first hearing is scheduled for July 14.

Russia has embarked on a high-profile campaign against a host of social media giants this year over a surge in the number of posts supporting jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny following his return and detention in Russia.

Roskomnadzor requested both foreign and Russian technology companies, including Facebook, VKontakte, TikTok, YouTube and Twitter, delete tens of thousands of posts, videos and pictures it said violated Russian law against promoting participating in unauthorized rallies to under-18s.

It is one of many areas where Russia and Google have clashed in recent months.

In a separate statement, Roskomnadzor on Monday also said it had sent a letter to Google demanding that it unblock a YouTube video posted by the state-run Sputnik France outlet.

Google-owned YouTube has also come under fire for blocking the channel of pro-Kremlin, conservative Tsargrad TV, as well as removing state-run RT videos which Google said promoted coronavirus disinformation. Russia's competition authorities are also investigating Google for alleged abuse of its market dominance, and have sought to oust foreign companies' dominance of the Russian software market through laws requiring Russian-made apps, such as browsers and search engines, to be pre-installed on all smartphones sold in Russia.

The regulator is also forcibly slowing-down Twitter and previously said it was prepared to ban the social media platform if it did not comply with Russia's requests to remove content.

Russian lawmakers last week submitted a draft bill that would force large technology companies to open offices in Russia or ban Russian companies from advertising with them.

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