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VK Sells RuStore to Developer's CEO Following EU Sanctions

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Russian tech giant VK announced Thursday plans to sell 100% of RuStore, the country's state-backed app marketplace, to the CEO of the company that develops the platform.

The divestment comes after the European Union sanctioned VK this week over its role in creating the Kremlin-backed messaging app Max.

RuStore was created as a domestic Android alternative following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, stepping in after Apple and Google limited access for Russian users.

Last year, the Russian government made it a legal requirement for the storefront to come pre-installed on all smartphones sold in the country.

Dmitry Pankrushev, CEO of RuStore's developer, Mnogo Prilozheniy, has managed the platform's day-to-day operations for several years.

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VK took full ownership of RuStore in 2023. On Thursday, the company did not disclose the sale price to Pankrushev or elaborate on its sudden decision to offload the marketplace three years after its launch.

However, the tech giant promised that RuStore would continue to operate as usual during the transition.

In its announcement, VK described the platform as a vital, unified access point for Russia's Android users, noting that RuStore currently hosts over 110,000 apps and games and draws 68 million monthly users.

Later on Thursday, Russian media reported that apps for VK platforms, including the social media websites VKontakte and Odnoklassniki, were removed from Google Play and Huawei's AppGallery. Earlier, VK platforms were removed from Apple's App Store.

The RuStore sale also follows recent controversy surrounding its security.

Reports last month alleged that RuStore secretly tracks users by simultaneously monitoring GPS data, cell towers and nearby mobile base stations. The marketplace was also accused of logging installed applications, accessing user photo galleries and downloading software without explicit consent.

RuStore has denied the tracking allegations, maintaining that its access permissions are standard industry practices used by all major app storefronts.

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