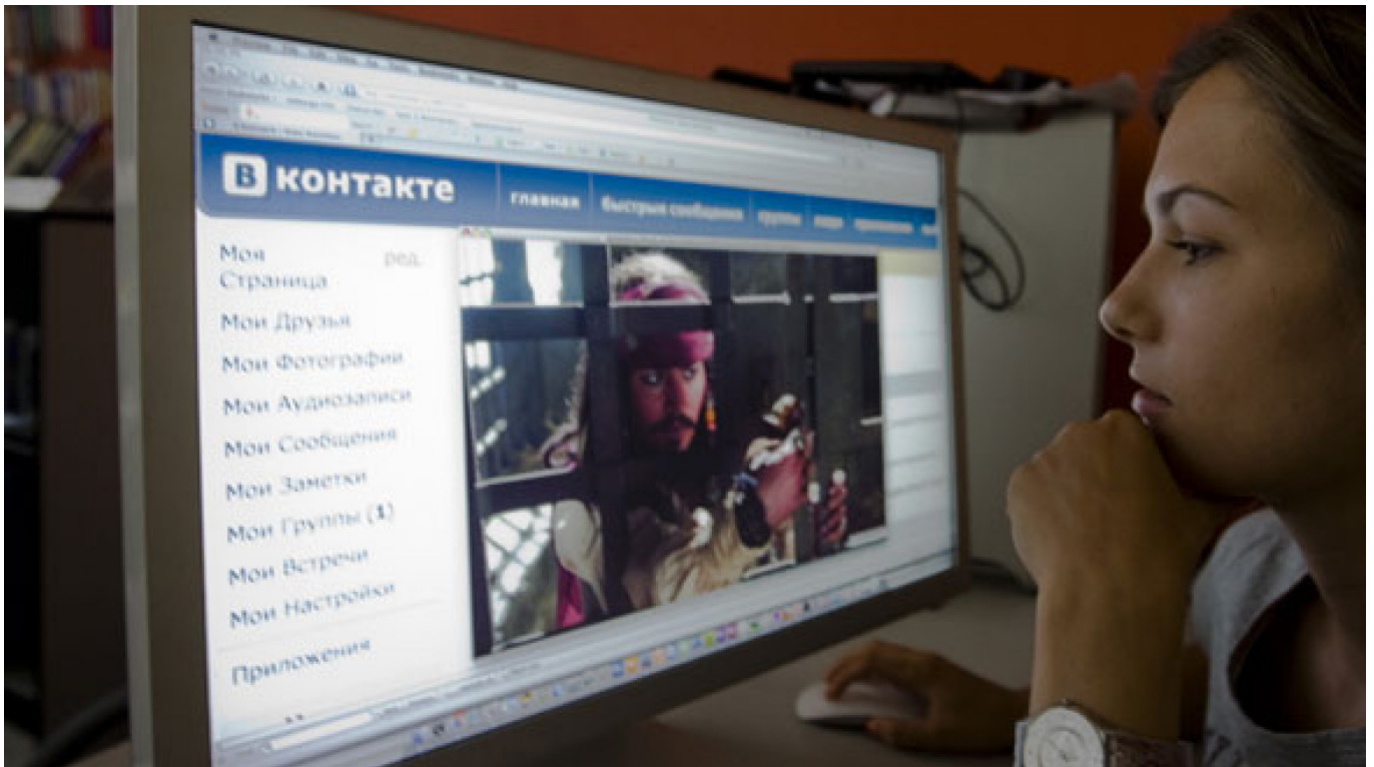


Social Network User Convicted of Racism

By [Nikolaus von Twickel](#)

November 15, 2010



A Vkontakte user watching a film on the popular social network. **M. Stulov**

A 21-year-old Samara resident has been given a one-year suspended sentence for forming a racist group on the popular Vkontakte social network.

The sentence, published on the Samara prosecutors' [web site](#) Friday, is raising legal questions because it pits the country's tough extremism law against a social network.

Media experts voiced doubt that the law could be applied to a site not officially registered as a media outlet, but a prosecutor said it worked because the law also referred to public speech.

Samara resident Artyom Gnilomyodov founded a user group called "I am Russian and I have had enough of blacks in Russia," which was linked to his dislike of people from the North Caucasus and Central Asia, in November 2009, prosecutors said in the statement.

In Russian, "black" is a derogatory word used to describe non-ethnic Russians from the

North Caucasus and Central Asia.

During an Oct. 20 hearing, Gnilomyodov admitted his guilt, the statement said, adding that the sentence was legally binding.

Article 282 of the Criminal Code prohibits “the incitement of hate, enmity and breaching human dignity” against groups defined on national, racial or religious affiliation. Offenders can be sentenced to up to five years in prison.

The law says it applies to incitements made publicly or in the media, leading media experts to conclude that the court recognized Vkontakte as a media outlet.

Vkontakte spokesman Vladislav Tsyplukhin also said the court decision was odd because the site lacks media registration, but he refused further comment pending a review by company lawyers, RIA-Novosti reported.

But Samara prosecutor Denis Lazarev told Gazeta.ru that the ruling did not mean that social networks were now considered media but that in this case the law had been applied to a public statement.

In 2009, an Arkhangelsk court sentenced a local university student to 150 hours of forced labor for setting up a page with racist content, the news report said. Also, a Samara court in November 2009 ruled a nationalist video extremist, which led to a brief ban of YouTube.com by a court in the far eastern city of Komsomolsk-on-Amur.

Styled like a Russian clone of Facebook, Vkontakte [claims](#) to be the country’s largest social network with over 80 million registered users worldwide.

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