

Mail.Ru Asks Government to Stop Prosecuting Social Media Posts

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Mail.ru building / Wikimedia Commons

The parent company of two popular Russian social network sites has asked the government to stop prosecuting social media users under anti-terrorism laws, and offer an amnesty for people already convicted.

Mail.ru Group, which owns the Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki social media websites, [called on](#) the authorities last week to pardon those convicted of extremism for their posts. Russia's Supreme Court estimates that criminal prosecutions for memes, likes and other social media content has more than tripled between 2012 and 2017.

The internet giant petitioned the State Duma to introduce a bill pardoning internet users charged with hate speech or religious insensitivity, Interfax [reported](#) Wednesday.

“The amnesty should apply to those convicted of extremism for social media activity [including likes, reposts and images] in cases where these actions haven't led to socially

dangerous consequences,” reads the petition.

Mail.ru Group also asked the Supreme Court, the Justice Ministry and the chief of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights to take steps to prevent future criminal prosecutions over Internet activity, according to the Tjournal news [website](#).

Related article: [Vkontakte Announces Privacy Reforms After Spate of Extremism Prosecutions](#)

Vkontakte, which has been accused of cooperating with authorities in criminalizing online speech, [promised](#) new privacy measures earlier this week. And on Tuesday, the social network [pledged](#) to release information on how many law enforcement requests it receives to share user data.

Critics [accused](#) the company of “hand-wringing” to prevent a mass exodus of users, and predicted no changes from Mail.Ru’s requests.

Instead, they [noted](#) that authorities had several ways to access users activity on sites like Vkontakte through the recently [enacted](#) anti-terror legislation that gave Russian telecom companies authority to store users’ communications.

“Under the Yarovaya [anti-terrorism] law that entails long-term storage of traffic, officers will continue to search using keywords and images,” Pavel Chikov, the head of the Agora international human rights group, [told](#) the Vedomosti daily.

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