



Illustration: Katya Simacheva for OVD-Info

28.05.2024, 11:59

OPINION

## Open letter to YouTube and Google: Stop helping Roskomnadzor censor Runet

**Russian censors are pushing Big Tech to pressure dissidents. In this open letter the key civil society organisations in Russia and beyond are calling on Big Tech to uphold democratic values and squarely reject the Kremlin's attempts to hijack online platforms.**

### ОБ ЭТОМ НИКТО НЕ УЗНАЕТ

Если об этом никто не напишет. Подпишитесь на регулярные пожертвования ОВД-Инфо, чтобы плохие дела не оставались в тишине.

**ПОДПИСАТЬСЯ**

Русская версия

We, the undersigned members of civil society, are calling on YouTube and its parent company Google to take clear and decisive action in their response to the Russian authorities' blocking requests and orders.

We are aware that since the end of 2021, Google has twice been fined for repeated violations of Russian law, the total amount of which **exceeded 29 billion rubles**. In addition, the company was fined millions of dollars for failing to remove prohibited information from its resources, including YouTube.

In 2022, after 1 billion rubles of Google's funds were **seized** from accounts in Russia to enforce a court ruling in the biased case of the pro-government TV channel «Tsargrad», and Google's office was searched, the company announced the bankruptcy of its subsidiary in the Russian Federation and closed all monetization and advertising services for Russians.

Nevertheless, we appreciate that YouTube still operates in the country and remains an online platform where independent publishers, media, bloggers, and public organizations, whose activities have been for one reason or another banned or restricted on the territory of the Russian Federation, can share their content and interact with their Russian audience who is living under the condition of information blockade and a «sovereign internet.»

YouTube, one of the largests and most influential video hosting platforms in the region, serves as an important platform for Russian independent media, persecuted politicians, and human rights organizations that work to defend human rights in the face of repression.

At the same time, we are very concerned that the company appears to be helping the Russian censor to silence human rights and anti-war voices.

Since February 2024, YouTube **has blocked** several videos about military service evasion, including videos from the channels «Dozor

in Volgograd» («Watch in Volgograd») and «Shkola Prizivnika» («Conscript School»).

Also, at the request of Roskomnadzor, YouTube notified about the threat of blocking the entire channel «Kak teper?» («What Now?») of the human rights project «OVD-Info» for a certain violation of the foreign agent formal reporting obligations. This has nothing to do with the content of the videos on the channel, which are purely human rights and educational in nature. The channel of the human rights organizations «Roskomsvoboda» and «Internet Protection Society, » as well as the channel of journalists Ekaterina Kotrikadze and Tikhon Dzyadko also received blocking notices for videos about VPNs.

On May 21, 2024, after significant publicity due to coverage by Russian independent media, YouTube **unblocked** at least three of the above mentioned videos. However, these videos are still absent from the hosting search engine in Russia.

YouTube should realize that the Russian norms of information laws, on the basis of which Roskomnadzor requests blocking, contradict both the very principles and rules of YouTube and international human rights standards. The European Court of Human Rights in the cases of *Kablis v. Russia*, *Engels v. Russia*, and *Flavus, Kharitonov, Bulgakov v. Russia* has repeatedly established the vagueness of Russian legal norms in terms of restricting access to information and their obvious contradiction to the European Convention on Human Rights.

In the Concluding Observations on the eighth periodic report of the Russian Federation dated December 1, 2022 (CCPR/C/CO/RUS/8), the UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern about reports of blocking of thousands of sites and Internet resources, social networking platforms, and called on urgently repeal all legislation unduly restricting freedom of expression. The Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (HR/PUB/11/04) in turn require private companies to avoid contributing to adverse human rights impacts through their own activities and to address such impacts when they occur.

We, the undersigned, are writing to ask you to address these important human rights issues on your platform.

We recognize the challenge your company faces when asked to comply with laws that violate international and regional human rights standards and are used to censor and suppress freedom of expression. However, we believe that your company has the tools to resist censorship attempts from the Russian authorities and uphold the human rights of the users.

Therefore, we call on you to assess all blocking orders and requests against international human rights standards and resist complying with those that restrict access to protected expression, including by challenging them through all legal means available.

We look forward to your attention to this issue and are open to a dialog and collaboration to find solutions that are in the best interests of the entire YouTube community.

## **Signatories\*:**

*Access Now*

*Roskomsvoboda*

*OVD-Info*

*Teplitsa. Technologies for Social Good*

*Reporters sans frontières*

*\*Please note that we decided that only the list of first few orgs will be published for security reasons and the full list will be sent directly to YouTube*



## ЧТО Я МОГУ С ЭТИМ СДЕЛАТЬ?

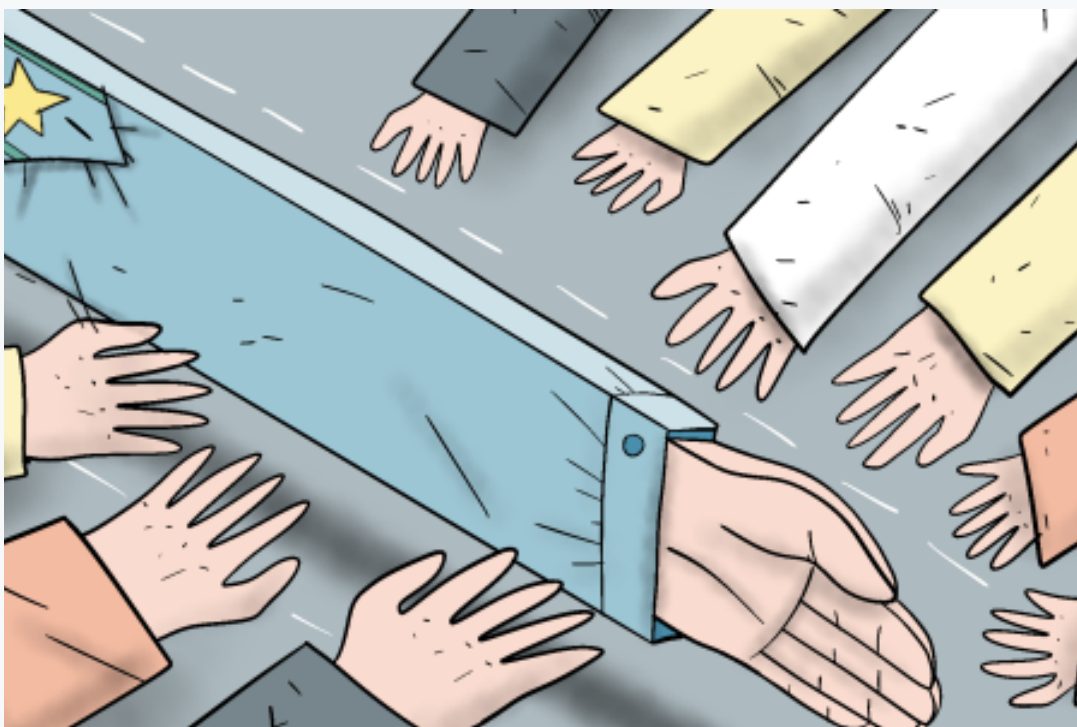
Прочитать, рассказать, поддержать. Подпишитесь на регулярные пожертвования ОВД-Инфо, чтобы как можно больше людей узнали о политических репрессиях в России сегодня.

**ПОДДЕРЖАТЬ**

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## Закон о фейках и публичные мероприятия

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