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## Russia Seeks to Block Protest Groups on Social Network

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MOSCOW—Russia's Federal Security Service, or FSB, has asked Russia's largest social networking site to block the online activities of political protest groups during a tense period following parliamentary elections, according to people involved with the site.

"Over the last couple of days the FSB has asked us to block opposition groups, including yours," said Pav el Durov, the founder of VKontakte, in a message exchange with a blogger who supports anti-corruption campaigner Alexei Navalny.

Mr. Durov said, however, his site wouldn't take such action "out of principle."

VKontakte, part-owned by London-listed Mail.Ru Group, is Russia's most popular social networking site, with over 17 million daily users, according to data from Russian portal LiveInternet.

The FSB declined to comment on the issue.

Mr. Navalny was recently sentenced to 15 days in jail for his participation in post-parliamentary election protests. Many Russians who are unhappy with the elections have turned to social networks to express their discontent with the election results.

Mr. Durov told the blogger, known as 'edvvvard' on the U.S.-based LiveJournal blog-hosting service—which is unrelated to VKontakte—that VKontakte is a "100% apolitical company that does not support either those in power, the opposition or one of the parties." The blogger couldn't immediately be reached for comment.

Mr. Durov also said that the company doesn't block government opponents, but does restrict users who instigate violence, regardless of where the violence is directed.

Edvvvard's group on VKontakte was temporarily blocked after the volume of posts in support of Mr. Navalny exceeded the blog's 16,384 limit.

Earlier this year, the FSB asked Russian search engine Yandex NV for information about his Mr. Navalny's donors. Yandex complied with the request, citing Russian law.

VKontakte spokesman Vladislav Tsyplukhin said that "the FSB is not exercising any pressure on the management of VKontakte."

In an e-mailed statement, he said that the company received a written request from the FSB to shut down groups that encourage people to "trash the streets, to organize a revolution." The company said it responded to the authorities that it wouldn't be fair to shut down opposition groups because of a few people who are calling for violence and that it would only make sense to block the violent users.

"There is no pressure, threats or rudeness on behalf of the FSB," Mr. Tsyplukhin said, adding that the company receives regular requests from law-enforcement authorities, as it does denial-of-service requests, when online activity runs contrary to its principles or flouts the law. The spokesman didn't specify whether the number of requests from law enforcement authorities had risen following Sunday's elections.

Mail.Ru Group, which holds 40% of VKontakte and also owns social networks Odnoklassniki and MoiMir@Mail.Ru—Russia's second and third-largest social networking sites—said through a spokeswoman that none of its other Russian social networking sites had received such requests from the FSB.

