

## **Freedom of expression, free media and information**

### **Alexander Malkevich, Chairman Commission of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation on Development of Information Community, Mass Media and Mass Communications**

Initially, the owners of the largest social networking websites presented their platforms as free from political censorship. However, in recent years, there has been a clear trend of increasing repressive policies toward users who publicly advocate specific political concepts and support their mouthpieces.

From October to December 2017, Facebook moderators deleted about 1.6 million posts containing signs of “hate speech.” From July to September 2018, the number of deleted posts rose to 2.9 million. There has been a significant increase in the number of moderators on social media. In May 2017, 4,500 moderators worked on Facebook alone, and by February 2018, their number grew to 7,500.

However, for the most part, this crackdown does not affect the content published by users with radical political views.

Most often, censorship hits adherents of moderately conservative views and politicians acting as spokesmen for these views. Several such accounts were shut down, including those of conservative activist Laura Loomer, the PragerU non-profit organization, writer and blogger Rod Dreher and Donald Trump Jr.

Facebook’s administration removed the accounts of the independent journalism projects Free Thought Project (3.1 million readers) and Anti-Media (2.1 million subscribers).

The accounts of any projects directly or indirectly associated with the Russian media – RT and Sputnik – are also being massively deleted.

In particular, on October 11, 2018, RT America correspondent Rachel Blevins had her page removed by Facebook.

On January 17, 2019, Facebook deleted seven official pages of the Sputnik agency and another 357 related pages and accounts. On February 16, 2019, Facebook banned RT host Anissa Naouai's In the Now project along with related pages – Soapbox, Waste-Ed and Backthen.

Progressively minded journalists and activists often become victims of social media censorship. As an example, Facebook has removed the page of the Filming Cops project (liked by more than 1.5 million) because its representatives campaigned against the unjustified use of violence by the police. In November 2018, feminist Meghan Murphy was blocked on Twitter.

It is important to note that social media do not even have a complete list of criteria to identify inappropriate user behavior. The existing standards are being used selectively. In particular, dehumanizing an opponent and calling for their social disqualification and violence against them can be used as formal grounds for blocking and deleting accounts. However, all of these signs were found with the Smash Racism D.C. left-wing group persecuting Fox News host Tucker Carlson, but the violating account was not blocked.

**In this context, the need to adopt legal regulations limiting the use of censorship on social media becomes especially obvious. Likewise, social media companies must be required to adopt an exhaustive list of reasons for blocking or deleting user content.**

**The full text will be submitted to the secretariat.**