

Russia faces rare Internet copyright challenge

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An Internet cafe in Moscow. Russia's loose copyright protection laws were put to the test Thursday when prosecutors filed charges against a social network user who put 18 of his favourite pop group's songs online.

Russia's loose copyright protection laws were put to the test Thursday when prosecutors filed charges against a social network user who put 18 of his favourite pop group's songs online.

The 26-year-old V Kontakte (In Contact) website user faces a six-year prison sentence if convicted of violating the unnamed Russian group's "copyright and related rights."

A spokeswoman for the Russian police department in charge of Internet crimes said the music had been illegally downloaded more than 200,000 times.

"The copyright holder suffered damages incurred from lost profits in the amount of 108,000 rubles (\$3,600)," interior ministry spokeswoman Larisa Zhukova told NTV television.

The station said that V Kontakte -- similar to Facebook and also popular in countries such as Belarus and Ukraine -- was previously unsuccessfully sued by a record company when the judge ruled that the website was not responsible for material posted by its users.

Russia's inability to implement any meaningful form of [copyright protection](#) has been one of the main issues raised by the United States during the latest rounds of two sides' [World Trade Organization](#) negotiations.

The country remains the largest economy outside the global free trade club and piracy stands out as one of the last issues still not resolved to the United States' full liking.

Moscow has reached framework agreements with Washington and the European Union to join the WTO but must still go through more detailed technical negotiations before formally joining the group.

Pressure over the WTO has recently prompted the Russian government to reassert its commitment to copyright protection laws.

The police have already staged several high-profile raids against various kiosks that peddle pirated computer and video disks across the country.

However, the Russian Internet remained largely ungoverned until the interior ministry vowed to open other cases like the one launched against V Kontakte this week.

An interior ministry source said the initial complaint against the popular

website user was raised by the Nikitin recording company.

The user "has not been arrested and is probably not going to be put in jail," the source told the Vedomosti business daily.

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