

# Tajikistan blocks US-funded news website

November 30 2012, by Olga Tutubalina

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(AP)—Tajikistan has blocked a popular U.S.-funded news website, only days after barring access to social networking site Facebook for featuring content allegedly insulting to the Central Asian nation's president.

State communications service chief, Beg Zuhurov, said Friday that the block on Ozodi, the Tajik-language service of Radio Free Europe, was in response to public complaints that the site featured content detrimental to the national interest.

Tajikistan has low levels of [Internet penetration](#), but the former Soviet republic's authorities have nonetheless proven nervous over critical reporting and any signs government opponents could use online media to mobilize.

Radio Free Europe is funded by the U.S. Congress and has local news services in several former Soviet nations.

Zuhurov drew withering online mockery this week after demanding in an interview to know who the owner of Facebook was and asking that he travel to Tajikistan to meet with him in person.

Radio Free Europe's English-language site subsequently published a photo of Facebook founder [Mark Zuckerberg](#) holding up a sign in Tajik reading: "I own this network."

Zuhurov has claimed that groups of volunteers trawl the Internet for

inaccuracies and material defamatory to government officials and businessmen. He has also said Internet users are being paid up to \$10,000 to post online remarks criticizing state officials.

Zukhurov maintains that at least a million people in Tajikistan—one seventh of the population—support barring certain websites, including [Facebook](#).

It was unclear how Zukhurov was sourcing these claims, which critics in Tajikistan have derided.

Other websites to be targeted by online blocks in the past include the BBC, Russian state-owned news station Vesti, and YouTube.

Access to the country's most popular news website, Asia-Plus, was barred in July in an apparent attempt to limit information about fighting between government troops and armed groups in a remote area on the border with Afghanistan.

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