

'Russian Facebook' accepts founder's resignation

April 21 2014



A view of the building where the social network VKontakte (In Touch) rents an office space, in St. Petersburg, Russia, on November 1, 2013

Russia's top social network said Monday it had accepted the resignation of its founder, Pavel Durov, after he announced earlier this month he was leaving and then apparently changed his mind.

On March 21 Durov told the company, VKontakte, he was resigning and

did not formally withdraw his resignation, the firm's press service was quoted as saying by the Interfax news agency.

"Since... the set period of a month has passed and his resignation has not been withdrawn, Pavel Durov's powers as general director of VKontakte have been terminated," it said.

Durov has not yet commented on the announcement.

The 29-year-old entrepreneur had announced on April 1 that he had resigned as chief executive in a bitter conflict with a major shareholder, in a message some suspected was an April Fool's joke.

Several days later Durov said in a message on his [social networking](#) page that he was retracting his resignation.

However, VKontakte executive director Dmitry Sergeyev was quoted in Monday's statement as saying that Durov had not formally withdrawn his resignation.

"Despite the comments that followed and the discussions... unfortunately it was not withdrawn," Sergeyev was quoted as saying by business daily Vedomosti.

A spokeswoman for VKontakte's main stakeholder, Mail Group, confirmed Durov's resignation to Vedomosti, adding: "We would have liked Pavel to stay in the company."

With more than 100 million users concentrated in the ex-Soviet Union, VKontakte (In Touch) is Russia's most popular social network, far outstripping Facebook.

Durov, who founded the company after leaving university, is often

compared to Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg.

VKontakte called him a "visionary" in its statement on his resignation.

Durov has made waves by fiercely resisting moves by Russian security services to gain access to VKontakte's data.

He wrote last week on his VKontakte page that he had refused demands from the security services last year to hand over details of people running group pages for pro-Western protests in neighbouring Ukraine that eventually toppled Kremlin-backed president Viktor Yanukovich.

Durov claimed his refusal led to his losing his 12-percent stake in the company, valued at hundreds of millions of dollars.

He had previously announced he had sold his stake, effectively giving control of the firm to billionaire Alisher Usmanov's Mail Group, which now controls 52 percent.

The remaining 48 percent is controlled by investment group United Capital Partners, which Durov has accused of being tied to the security services and gaining the stake through a hostile takeover.

In announcing his [resignation](#) on April 1, Durov said he was leaving because the ownership changes at the company had limited his control and made it "harder and harder to remain with those principles on which our social network is based".

He has also fallen out with United Capital Partners over his independent development of a hugely successful messaging service, Telegram, which the shareholders say should have been developed as part of VKontakte.

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