

Russian court fines Wikipedia for article about Ukraine war

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Wikipedia logo.

A Moscow court on Thursday again fined Wikipedia for a Russian-language article it refused to remove about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the latest in a series of government moves to silence objective reporting or criticism of the war and restrict the Russian public's access to information.

The court fined Wikimedia Foundation, the nonprofit that runs the free, publicly-edited online encyclopedia, 2 million rubles (\$24,464) for not removing a Wikipedia article titled "Russian occupation of the Zaporizhzhia region," a reference to one of four Ukrainian provinces that Russia annexed last September. Most countries have condemned the annexation, as well as that by Russia in 2014 of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula, as illegal.

The state Tass news agency said the Wikimedia Foundation had failed to heed the demands of Russia's state communications watchdog Roskomnadzor to remove articles containing "[false information](#)." Tass said a Wikipedia representative asked the court to reject the removal demand as vague.

President Vladimir Putin in recent years has increased his crackdown on criticism and factual reporting that doesn't correspond to his government's views or versions of events. The crackdown has widened since his troops invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, focusing especially on information and dissent against what he calls Russia's "special military operation" in the neighboring country.

Through Roskomnadzor, his government has also tried, with mixed success, to technically limit Western news reports that can be seen in

Russia. The BBC and some Voice of America sites are among those it has blocked but which Russians can access using virtual private networks.

This is not the first time Wikipedia has been fined for refusing to delete "false" information about the war in Ukraine.

Last week, the same Moscow court issued a fine of 800,000 rubles (\$9,785) to the Wikimedia Foundation for not removing materials linked to a song by a Russian rock band called Psychea, which Russian authorities consider to be extremist.

In November 2022, the organization was fined 2 million rubles for refusing to delete "false" information in seven Wikipedia articles about the "special military operation," including [information](#) about atrocities in Bucha and the destruction of Mariupol's theater.

Wikipedia didn't respond immediately to a request for comment but says in its [online encyclopedia](#) about censorship: "Since the early 2010s, Russian Wikipedia and its editors have experienced numerous and increasing threats of nationwide blocks and country-wide enforcement of blacklisting by the Russian government, as well as several attempts to censor pages, spread propaganda, and disinform."

Tass said Roskomnadzor will label Wikimedia in search engines as a violator of Russian law, and that more action against specific articles is planned.

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