

Snubbed Nashi Calls Off Le Monde Case

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Nashi, the outspoken pro-Kremlin youth group, said Friday that it had withdrawn a defamation lawsuit against French newspaper Le Monde that it filed last year.

Nashi decided to drop the case because Le Monde had refused to participate in a dialogue with the youth group both in and out of the courtroom, said Nashi's lawyer, Sergei Zhorin.

"We decided to withdraw the lawsuit because, unfortunately, we didn't get what we expected — a constructive dialogue with Le Monde," he said by telephone, adding that newspaper representatives had declined to come to court or get in contact with Nashi.

The only newspaper representative who took part in the hearings was Le Monde journalist Mari Jego, but Nashi said it had no claims against her personally.

Jego expressed surprise with Nashi's decision, saying the group had demonstrated its commitment with its yearlong struggle, but she added that she was glad the case was over.

"I'm glad because it was a big waste of time," she said.

A hearing was scheduled for Thursday, but Nashi representatives didn't come and the judge announced that they had withdrawn the lawsuit.

Jego said she had not been notified about the reason behind Nashi's decision. "Probably they have other, more important problems," she said.

Nashi has been fighting speculation in recent weeks that its relevance is waning. The group is embroiled in a high-profile fight with Moscow district prefect Oleg Mitvol, who has demanded that it vacate its headquarters. Auchan, a French supermarket chain, called law enforcement authorities last week to complain that Nashi activists were rallying outside its stores in a fabricated campaign to expose expired goods on its shelves.

Nashi lawyer Zhorin said he was sure that the court would have ruled in his favor in the defamation lawsuit but the decision would not have been enforced, which he said happened in the case of France's Le Journal du Dimanche.

Nashi filed defamation lawsuits against four foreign newspapers last year, including Le Monde, Le Journal du Dimanche, Britain's Independent and Germany's Frankfurter Rundschau, for reports comparing the group to Hitler youth, bandits and nationalists.

The Independent later apologized, causing Nashi to withdraw its claims.

The court ruled that Le Journal du Dimanche must publish a retraction and pay Nashi 250,000 rubles (\$8,070), but Nashi said neither had happened.

"We won the case formally but in fact didn't get anything. ... The situation appears to be the same with Le Monde. ... We would get the same ruling like for Dimanche," Zhorin said.

Le Journal du Dimanche representatives could not be immediately reached for comment.

Zhorin insisted that Nashi's claims against Le Monde remained and said the group planned to seek action in a French court.

Meanwhile, a court is scheduled to consider Nashi's lawsuit against Frankfurter Rundschau in December. If the newspaper doesn't send its representatives to the hearing, Nashi will withdraw the lawsuit as well, Zhorin said.

Frankfurter Rundschau representatives had no immediate comment on the lawsuit.

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