

Nashi Founder 'Joked' About Funding Claims

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Yakimenko said he was "joking" during an appearance on internet channel Dozhd.

The founder of pro-Kremlin youth organization Nashi said he was joking when he claimed to have funded a liberal-leaning news site, saying his humor was mistaken as a serious comment.

Vasiliy Yakimenko said on writer Sergei Minayev's Internet talk show Monday that he had financed Ridus, called by its founder Ilya Varlamov an independent news outlet of "civic journalism," but the Nashi founder went back on his claims when pressed on the question in an interview on Dozhd television.

"There was a question about a school in Perm. I said, 'I financed it.' Then the question 'And you are financing everyone?' I said, 'I finance everyone.' In this case, you know, I sometimes joke with a serious face. It happens," Yakemenko said on the show Hard Day's Night.

Ridus founder Varlamov, whom some have suspected of having a close relationship with powerful government officials, said he did not know about any funding from Yakemenko

and that he would leave Ridus if Yakemenko's comments turned out to be true, BBC's Russian Service reported.

Yakemenko spoke about his relationship with Varlomov on the Dozhd show, saying he had met him at an event he organized in 2009 to give awards to the best bloggers and journalists, where Varlomov won third place.

"I know [Varlomov] and consider him a talented person, and all my involvement in this story is when he had some problems. I united the team, I introduced him to KamAZ ... Of course, I did not finance Varlamov. I have no money and no desire," he said.

It was reported Monday that KamAZ, a Tatarstan-based truck maker owned by Kremlin-connected Russian Technologies, now owns Ridus. Varlamov confirmed the news on Twitter.

KamAZ's other partners include Germany's Daimler and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

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