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Police Raid Regnum.ru After Latvia Blacklists Founder

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Modest Kolerov, founder of Regnum.ru, at this year's Moscow International Book Festival.

Police raided the newsroom of one of Russia's biggest online news publications on Friday, after Latvia accused the website's founder and one of its editors of compromising the Baltic nation's security.

Investigators visited the offices of Regnum.ru, questioned staff and confiscated documents to prove the identity of two individuals, Interfax reported. The investigation had been initiated upon a request from Latvia, the report said, quoting an anonymous city police spokesperson.

The raid came a day after the Latvian Foreign Ministry declared the website's founder, Modest Kolerov, and a deputy editor, Igor Pavlovsky, personae non gratae.

The ministry said in a statement that it had information that Kolerov and Pavlovsky were

pursuing "covert activities" in Latvia directed against the nation's security interests, "including territorial integrity and economic security.

Kolerov rejected the accusations, telling Kommersant that "this is unrelated to any concrete event except the arrival of the new U.S. ambassador, Mark Pekala."

It was not immediately clear how Pekala, a career foreign service officer who arrived in Riga on Aug. 8, could be linked to the blacklisting.

The Russian Foreign Ministry has denounced the blacklisting as an unfriendly act that jeopardized the pragmatic ties between both countries.

Latvia has denied that it had anything to do with the searches. Latvian Foreign Ministry spokesman Janis Silis said Friday that no Latvian agency had requested Russian authorities to take measures against Regnum, the Delfi.lv website reported.

Regnum, however, said in a statement late Friday that official police documents showed that the investigation had been requested by "relevant Latvian authorities." http://

The news site, which specializes in regional politics, employs some 70 journalists across the former Soviet Union, according to its website.

Kolerov, a former financial PR manager, founded the site in 2002. In 2005, he became head of a new Kremlin department set up to maintain Moscow's influence in former Soviet republics after Ukraine's Orange Revolution.

However, Kolerov was forced to resign in 2007, amid reports that his tenure was too radical and ineffective. Kolerov reappeared last fall as a campaign adviser in South Ossetia's presidential election, where he backed two Kremlin-friendly candidates who subsequently fared poorly in the Georgian breakaway region.

Kolerov, a historian by training, is known for his outspoken stance against the Baltic states, some of which he has repeatedly accused of letting the United States and NATO influence their politics.

Pavlovsky and Kolerov visited Riga in late June to present the latter's new book. In an interview with the Vzglyad news site last week, Kolerov said that during his visit he made some comments about radical nationalists in Latvia.

According to Kommersant, Kolerov is already a persona non grata in Estonia, Lithuania and Georgia.

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