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# Prosecutors Asked to Investigate Cable Companies Over Dozhd Suspensions

By The Moscow Times

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The presidential human rights council has asked prosecutors to check whether cable and satellite companies violated the Constitution in dropping broadcasts by independent television channel Dozhd, which is embroiled in a row over an opinion poll about World War II.

An online poll by television Dozhd last weekend asked whether the Soviet Union should have surrendered the besieged city of Leningrad — now St. Petersburg — to the Nazis to avoid hundreds of thousands of deaths.

The survey outraged politicians and public figures, leading several telecommunications companies to hastily drop Dozhd from their packages.

The head of the Cable Broadcaster Association, Yury Pripachkin, appeared to have prompted the rush to take Dozhd off the air by urging carriers to "exercise certain censorship functions."

But the Kremlin's human rights council said in a letter to Prosecutor General Yury Chaika published online Thursday that the move violates the Constitution, Russian media law and consumer rights.

Chaika has now been asked to run a check on the unofficial ban.

Prosecutor General's Office has not yet commented on the reports.

The council, known for its outspoken position on rights violations by authorities, has no power to issue orders to state agencies, but can only make requests.

Prosecutors in St. Petersburg had earlier announced a check into what they called Dozhd's "blasphemous" decision to create the poll.

The channel is suspected of giving rise to hatred, which is punishable by up to two years in prison, a spokeswoman for prosecutors said.

Bans continued on Friday, with leading telecom operator VimpelCom announcing a suspension of Dozhd broadcasts. No reason was given.

VimpelCom and other cable companies that blocked Dozhd, including industry leaders Rostelecom, Tricolor and Akado, did not comment on the possibility of prosecutor checks or censorship allegations.

The poll that triggered the ire of conservatives came on the eve of the 70th anniversary of the lifting of the 900-day Leningrad siege in 1944. The siege, which resulted in about 750,000 deaths, mostly due to starvation, is considered the deadliest in history.

Dozhd's management apologized for the poll, but said it was used as a pretext to shut down the channel, known for its criticism of the Kremlin.

Station director Natalya Sindeyeva has cited broadcasts on anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny's report into countryside mansions belonging to Vyacheslav Volodin, the Kremlin's powerful first deputy chief-of-staff, and other high-ranking pro-government lawmakers as a potential spur for the pressure Dozhd is now experiencing.

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