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Consumer Rights Group Files Suits Against Anti-Dozhd Cable Operators

By Christopher Brennan

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Dozhd general director Natalya Sindeyeva. **D. Abramov / Vedomosti**

The Society for Consumer Rights Protection has filed suits against four cable operators for dropping independent television channel Dozhd from their packages over a poll about the Siege of Leningrad.

The society said on its website that it had received numerous complaints from consumers that the companies Tricolor TV, Akado, NTV-Plus and Beeline had violated the terms of their contracts by turning off the station.

The suit maintains that the operators must keep the channel and also says that customers should be able to seek damages for "moral harm" from the companies.

Dozhd itself has been the subject of at least 23 lawsuits in the St. Petersburg area since it posted a poll in January asking whether the city should have been surrendered to the Nazis

during World War II to save hundreds of thousands of people who died in the blockade. Many of the moral damages lawsuit applications were reportedly rejected.

Other outraged responses included a call by St. Petersburg lawmakers for the Prosecutor General's Office to check Dozhd for extremism and cable providers have suspended broadcasts of the channel resulting in an 80 percent drop in its television reach, Lenta.ru reported.

The management of Dozhd, known for its independent coverage of Russian politics, has said that the cable companies' actions may have been motivated by a larger, Kremlin-driven campaign against the channel.

During one broadcast, Beeline founder Dmitry Zimin told one of Dozhd's news presenters, Yulia Taratuta, that his "soul hurt" over the situation, The New York Times reported.

"I think that everyone understands that this is not Beeline's decision, nor the decision of the other companies, that have shut you off," Zimin said in an apparent reference to the channel's powerful enemies.

More than 40 demonstrators were detained in Moscow on Saturday after they held an unauthorized protest with umbrellas to support Dozhd, which means "rain" in Russian.

The poll about the Siege of Leningrad was taken down shortly after it was posted and the channel quickly apologized. On Friday, two of Dozhd's presenters personally met with members of a group dedicated to commemorating the event, who said that they did not want the channel to be shut off, Interfax reported.

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