The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

# Lenta.ru Editor Replaced After 'Extremism' Warning

By Matthew Bodner

March 12, 2014



Galina Timchenko, former chief editor of Lenta.ru news website

*Correction appended.*

The longtime editor-in-chief of news agency Lenta.ru has been replaced by the former editor of a Kremlin-friendly online publication, prompting an uproar among many journalists who say the move is just the latest nail in the coffin of Russia's independent media.

Alexander Mamut, head of the Russian Internet news service's parent company Afish-Rambler-SUP, said Galina Timchenko had resigned from her post, but the Lenta.ru editoral staff released a statement saying she had been forced out.

She will be replaced by Alexei Goreslavsky, former head of the online publication Vzglyad.ru, and the official change is set to take place immediately. Goreslavsky has a reputation for being pro-Kremlin, and speculation erupted immediately after the announcement of Timchenko's

departure that this was orchestrated by the Kremlin as part of a wider media crackdown.

Lenta.ru was widely considered one of only a handful of independent Russian news outlets.

The reshuffling at Lenta.ru came immediately after the Federal Mass Media Inspection Service sent the news agency an official warning on Wednesday of possible "extremism" charges for publishing an interview with a member of a Ukrainian ultranationalist group. The media watchdog said the interview had violated "a range of Russian laws, including the law on information, the law on mass media and the law on countering extremism."

The Lenta.ru editorial staff seemed to see the warning as a pretext to shut the agency down, however, saying in an open letter to readers that "we definitely always expected that they would come for us."

The situation parallels that of another media outlet, Dozhd, which found itself in hot water after publishing a poll on the anniversary of the liberation of Leningrad from Nazis that many considered offensive. After being cut by all major cable providers, the channel lost the bulk of its finances and has said it will likely be forced to shut down in the near future.

Just like Dozhd staff, journalists at Lenta.ru said that the decision to replace the longstanding editor was made in order to put pressure on the independent news outlet and keep it under tighter control. The online statement, which was signed by the entire staff, declared the decision to be "a violation of the law on mass media, which talks about the inadmissibility of censorship."

"Over the past couple of years, the space of free journalism in Russia has dramatically decreased. Some publications are directly controlled by the Kremlin, others through curators, and others by editors who fear losing their jobs. Some media outlets have been closed and others will be closed in the coming months. The problem is not that we have nowhere to run. The problem is that you have nothing more to read," the statement said.

Similar sentiments dominated Twitter on Wednesday. Ilya Krasilshchik, a top manager at Afisha Rambler, published an expletive-laden message on Facebook that said "to hell with corporate etiquette" and slammed the new editor, Goreslavsky, for being a journalist whose only task was to "walk around and be friends with the Kremlin."

"Advice for beginning journalists: pick a new profession," Krasilshchik wrote, adding that "now is not a good time."

Former U.S. Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul also reacted to the news on Wednesday, saying only that he "respects Lenta.ru."

One Russian on Twitter told McFaul, "you got out just in time," referring to speculation that McFaul's post-Sochi departure signalled concern over a wider crackdown following the end of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi.

The development with Lenta.ru is the latest in a series of moves that are expected to dramatically alter Russia's media landscape.

In December, President Vladimir Putin signed a decree liquidating the state-owned media

giant RIA Novosti, changing its name to Rossia Segodnya – which translates to Russia Today, the former name of the pro-Kremlin soft-power project now known as RT – and appointing controversial pundit Dmitri Kiselyov as its new head.

*Correction: Due to an editing error, an article in Thursday's issue titled "Lenta.ru Editor Replaced After Warning" identified Ilya Krasilshchik as a Lenta.ru employee. In fact, Krasilshchik is a top manager at Afisha Rambler.*

Contact the author at m.bodner@imedia.ru

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/03/12/lentaru-editor-replaced-after-extremism-warning-a32902