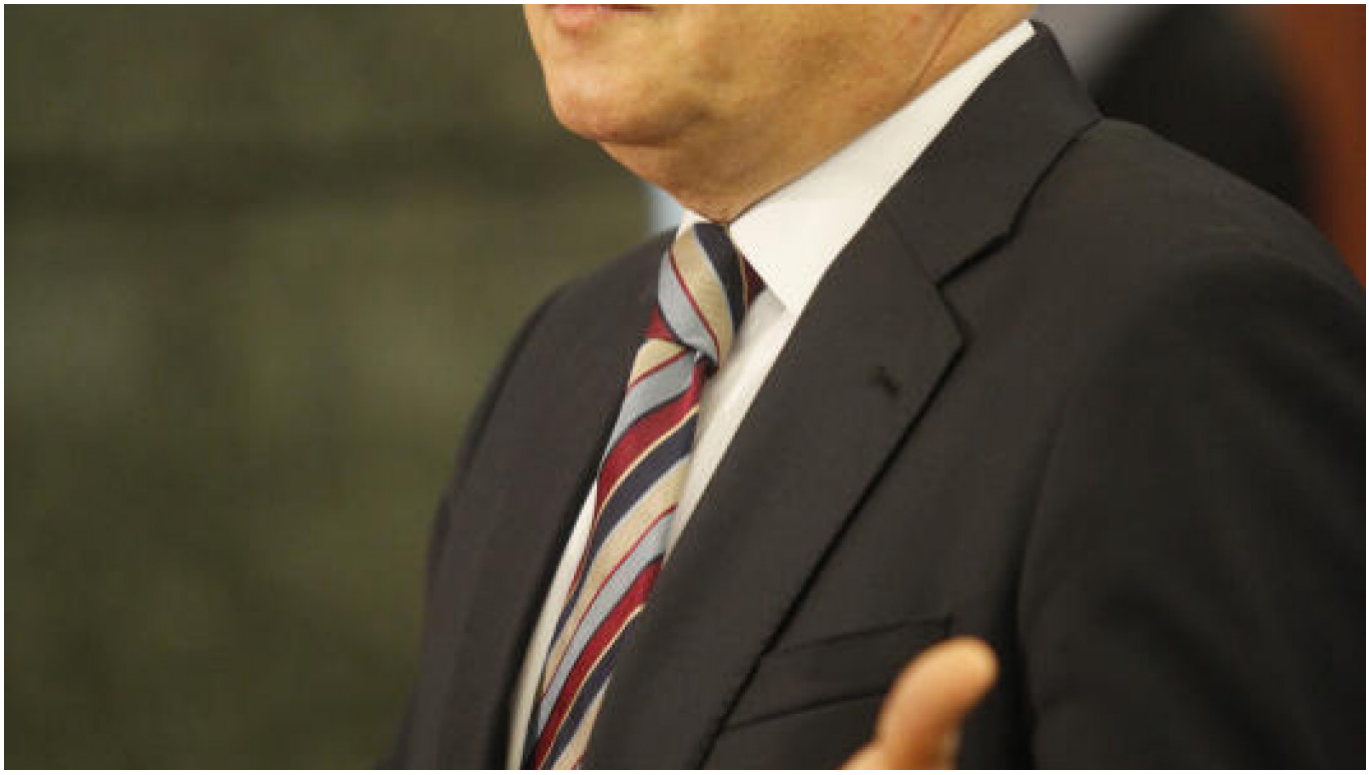
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Russia Pulls Voice of America Radio Off Air

By Peter Spinella

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Dmitry Kiselyov, general director of Rossia Segodnya, the company that is taking over from RIA Novosti.

Russia has pulled Voice of America radio off the air by not renewing the U.S.-funded station's contract, state media reported, citing a senior official who called its broadcasts "spam."

The station, which began broadcasting in Russian in 1947 at the onset of the Cold War, has lost its right to use the 810 AM radio frequency since the expiration of its contract this month, state news agency RIA Novosti reported Wednesday, citing its general director Dmitry Kiselyov.

Kiselyov, a veteran journalist recently named head of the news agency that took over RIA Novosti, was one of the first Russian officials upon whom the European Union imposed visa and financial sanctions in the wake of the country's annexation of Crimea.

The RIA report said Kiselyov personally notified the U.S. federal agency that controls Voice

of America, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, that the contract would not be renewed.

"There is such an impression that they broadcast from ... a world that no longer exists. I view these stations, Voice of America and Radio Liberty, as spam on our airwaves," he was quoted as saying, referring to another U.S.-funded radio station that broadcasts in Russian online.

"This does not have anything to do with freedom of speech because Voice of America and Radio Liberty do not talk about anything original," added Kiselyov, who also hosts a popular and highly opinionated news show on national television.

The U.S. Embassy released a statement Thursday saying it was "disturbed by the latest Russian effort to decrease space for independent and free media in this country."

The statement, titled "Does the Russian government only support media freedom outside of Russia?," said that "it is particularly ironic that the decision came the same week that Russian authorities denounced a district court in Kiev for temporarily allowing the suspension of Russian broadcasts in Ukraine."

The embassy statement added: "In the last year, the Russian government has passed laws imposing unprecedented censorship and restrictions on media. ... It turned the respected news wire service RIA Novosti into a propaganda service ... and forced leadership changes at several media outlets simply because those outlets dared to challenge the Kremlin's extremist policies."

The Broadcasting Board of Governors last week issued a statement saying Kiselyov sent the agency a "one-sentence" letter dated March 21 that said "we are not going to cooperate" with the request to continue the contract.

The BBG's chairman, Jeff Shell, said in the statement that "we urge Mr. Kiselyov and other Russian authorities to open Russian airwaves to more of our programs and those of other international broadcasters."

"We're asking for an even playing field: As Moscow's media crackdown deepens, Russian media — including Russia Today television, which is under Mr. Kiselyov's authority — enjoy open access to the airwaves in the United States and around the world. The Russian people deserve the same freedom to access information," Shell said.

He added that the BBG intends to continue broadcasting in Russia through digital platforms and satellite transmissions.

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