

Media Minister Says No Barriers Against Independent TV Channel Dozhd

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Russia's communications minister has said there is no reason why independent channel Dozhd cannot return to cable television packages, in a sign of hope for the cash-strapped station.

Communications and Mass Media Minister Nikolai Nikoforov said nothing was preventing Dozhd from being carried by cable television providers, and that the state was not interfering in the matter, Interfax reported Monday.

Nikoforov's comments came after President Vladimir Putin said he would do everything he could to counteract "excessive attention on the part of regulatory organs" towards Dozhd during his annual call-in show with the nation earlier this month.

Putin also said Dozhd was "an interesting channel with a good, young team," after which

the Russian Association of Cable Operators announced it would conduct negotiations to help get the channel back on air.

Dozhd, known for its independent coverage of Russian politics, was dropped by cable providers earlier this year after it published a controversial poll about World War II — a move that many observers viewed as part of a Kremlin-coordinated crackdown on liberal-leaning media.

As a result of being dropped, Dozhd lost about 80 percent of its audience and a significant share of its revenue, with general director Natalya Sindeyeva saying in early March that the station could only survive for two more months.

In late March, a fundraising drive for Dozhd earned an estimated \$1.5 million, The New Republic journalist Julia Ioffe reported, enabling it to further extend its broadcasts for another six weeks.

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