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Accused Litvinenko Killer Goes After Internet Giant Yandex

By The Moscow Times

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Andrei Lugovoi, State Duma deputy representing the nationalist political party LDPR and, according to British prosecutors, murderer of Russian dissident Alexander Litvinenko, has asked Russia's prosecutor general to investigate Internet giant Yandex to make sure its news page complies with media law.

According to the ex-KGB bodyguard turned politician, Yandex's news aggregator, Yandex.Novosti — an equivalent of Google News — should be counted as a media outlet. "There is no difference between the news at the top of Yandex and news that is circulated, for instance, in a newspaper," he said. And if the prosecutor general does not rule Yandex to be under mass media law, Lugovoi is prepared to change the law, Kommersant reported.

Lugovoi is backed by Leonid Levin, deputy chairman of the State Duma's committee on mass media. "Many people receive information from Yandex's top news," Levin said, "so why not equate Yandex Novosti to a form of mass media?"

Yandex's place in mass media has been up in the air since April 24, when a blogger at a media forum asked President Vladimir Putin if he classed the popular Internet company and search engine as a media organization. Putin answered that with Yandex the issue was complex but that "currently both the government and the presidential administration are considering the issue of what counts as mass media and what does not."

Yandex said that its news homepage presents headlines only from well-respected media sources that are licensed in Russia.

Claims that Yandex is a news agency are unfounded, said Igor Yakovenko, former secretary of the Union of Russian Journalists and current head of the fund Obshestvennaya Ekspertiza. Yandex is even "less of a mass media organization than the postal service or a newspaper kiosk," Yakovenko told Dozhd.

This year has so far been difficult for Russian media. In early May, Putin signed into a law a bill requiring popular online bloggers to register with the government. The move followed the highly debated, allegedly political restructuring of several Russian news organizations, including RIA Novosti and Lenta.ru.

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