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Russia's Media Watchdog Slaps Site With Warning Over Religious Cartoon

By The Moscow Times

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Vendors selling newspapers and magazines on the street in Moscow.

Russia's media watchdog has issued a warning to an online news site for publishing a religiously themed caricature that lampooned "one of the faiths," despite an appeal to avoid such cartoons in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attack.

In line with Russia's law on extremism, the caricature published by the Respublika news site was seen "to incite various sorts of enmity," a spokesman for the Roskomnadzor media watchdog, Vadim Ampelonsky, was quoted as saying by the TASS news agency.

Ampelonsky said the warning related "to a published caricature that ridiculed sacred religious objects of one of the faiths."

The warning comes after Roskomnadzor on Friday issued an appeal to the country's media against publishing religious-themed cartoons, with the watchdog saying their publication

could be classified as a crime.

Given the earlier appeal, Roskomnadzor considered Respublika's publication to be a deliberate provocation, Ampelonsky said, TASS reported.

"We put in a lot of effort last week to explain to the media that such actions were unacceptable," he was quoted as saying.

On Jan. 7, armed gunmen stormed the offices of French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, in an act that the gunmen said was revenge for its depictions of the prophet Muhammad.

Since the attack, publications across the world have reprinted some of the cartoons in a show of solidarity and support for the freedom of speech.

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