The Moscow Times
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Russian Watchdog Shuts Down Country's Only Crimean Tatar TV Channel

April 01, 2015



The crew of the ATR television channel.

The world's only Crimean Tatar television channel went off air on Wednesday, after Moscow cited technicalities to reject the station's attempts to register for a Russian broadcasting license.

Media watchdog Roskomnadzor turned down four requests by ATR television to register before the April 1 deadline, the channel's director Elzara Islyamova said, the RIA Novosti news agency reported.

ATR, which had been broadcasting under a license issued by Ukrainian authorities, will continue to "do everything possible to receive the necessary documents to resume its work," Islyamova added in the report.

Crimea's Moscow-loyal officials, including regional leader Sergei Aksyonov and local information and communications chief Dmitry Polonsky, have previously accused ATR of fueling a groundless conflict with the authorities, according to Russian media reports.

"I think it's possible that errors are being made intentionally in the documents — so that Roskomnadzor decline to accept them for review — in order to blow up the situation politically," Aksyonov was quoted as saying by the Interfax news agency.

"Attempts to defend the interests of Ukraine on the territory of Crimea are futile and are not needed," he added. "There is no need to agitate the population by [suggesting] that Crimea will at some point return to Ukraine."

Polonsky said ATR had repeatedly filed documents containing the same errors, even after Roskomnadzor had pointed them out, RIA Novosti reported.

Crimean Tatars, a sizable ethnic minority who were earlier exiled from the peninsula by Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, have opposed the annexation, with many citing fears of renewed persecution under Moscow's rule.

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