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Soldier in Russia's Troll Army Sues Her Ex-Employer

By Anna Dolgov

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A former Internet "troll" who had been hired to promote political views online is suing her former employer in an attempt to draw attention to Russia's "information war" technologies, a news report said Friday.

The grounds for the lawsuit filed by Lyudmila Savchuk, which is expected to be heard by a St. Petersburg city court next month, is the employer's failure to provide any labor contract or other paperwork supporting her hiring and eventual dismissal, Kommersant reported.

Savchuk said she was fired after speaking to the media about her employer, Internet Research, which she described as part of Russia's "troll factory," according to the report.

Internet Research is believed to be linked to another company with a similar name, Internet Reseach Agency, which in the spring merged with a firm called New Technologies, whose official registration documents identify it as a construction company, according to media reports.

"The 'troll factory' operates based on very weird schemes, but all those firms are connected to each other, even though they are separate legal entities," Savchuk was quoted as saying.

Since her dismissal, Savchuk has been organizing a public movement against online trolling called "Informatsionny Mir" — a name that can be translated both as "Information World" and "Information Peace — in contrast with the so-called information war.

"There are both opposition activists and supporters of the government among us, but we all believe that such methods of information war are unacceptable," she said, Kommersant reported.

Lawyer Darya Sukhikh from St. Petersburg-based human rights organization Kommanda-29 (Team-29), which is representing Savchuk, was quoted as saying the lawsuit was "just a pretext to force this rather secretive organization into public view," allowing lawyers to demand the organization's documents.

Savchuk said she was hired in December after responding to a job ad, Kommersant reported. She was to work 12-hour shifts posting political comments on an assigned topic on various websites, for a monthly salary of 41,000 rubles ($778), which was paid in cash until her dismissal in March, Savchuk was quoted as saying.

Internet Research was not immediately available for comment. Its business registration listing provides a cell phone number, which was answered by a man who declined to provide his name but said he was no longer employed by the company, Kommersant reported.

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