

Russian 'Troll Farm' Lawsuit Postponed When Defendant Fails to Show

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Russian court hearings into a lawsuit by a former Internet "troll" against her former employer have been postponed after the defendant failed to show up for the proceedings.

A city court in St. Petersburg also ruled that the plaintiff, Lyudmila Savchuk — who said her suit was intended to stop Moscow's allegedly shady "information war" practices — failed to present sufficient documents to prove her identity at the start of the hearings, which were scheduled to begin on Monday, RosBalt news agency reported.

The new court date has been set for June 23, Russian media reports said.

The lawsuit against the company, Internet Research, which has been described by Savchuk as a "troll farm," would mark the first hearings in Russia against what many consider Moscow's large-scale practice of promoting its political agenda online.

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The operation of the "troll farm" is reportedly controlled by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a food industry businessman and restaurant owner dubbed the "Kremlin's chef" by Russian media.

The businessman, a well-known ally of President Vladimir Putin, was also one of the organizers of a pro-Kremlin film called "Anatomy of a Protest" that aired on nationwide television following major opposition rallies in 2012 and accused opposition leaders of paying protesters to demonstrate against the government.

Prigozhin also runs a restaurant at the Russian Cabinet headquarters, the report said.

Hearings into the lawsuit against Internet Research had initially been scheduled for June 23 when Savchuk filed her lawsuit in April, but then were moved to June 1 after her lawyers requested faster proceedings, Savchuk's lawyer Darya Sukhikh said, Novaya Gazeta newspaper reported. But the court may have failed to promptly notify the defendants about the date change, Sukhikh was quoted as saying.

Savchuk said she was hired by Internet Research late last year to post political comments online along with scores of other "trolls." The employer paid her in cash and provided no paperwork related to her hiring and subsequent dismissal in spring — issues that served as formal grounds for her lawsuit, she said in media interviews.

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