The Moscow Times
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Men's Magazine Maxim Fined, Threatened With Closure in Russia

By Howard Amos

June 11, 2015



Sergei Mikhalok

A Russian court ordered prominent men's magazine Maxim to pay a 25,000-ruble ($456) fine Thursday for printing bad language, the second such punishment the publication has had in less than a year, paving the way for the country's media watchdog to request the magazine's closure.

The Moscow court issued the fine over an interview published by Maxim in May with Sergei Mikhalok, the former lead singer of Belarussian rock band Lyapis Trubetskoi, Russian news agency Interfax reported, citing a court spokesperson.

Under a law passed last year, if a media outlet is fined twice in 12 months, Russia's media watchdog Roskomnadzor can ask a court to withdraw the publication's official registration, obliging it to shut down.

A raft of new media legislation in Russia in recent years has imposed heavy punishments for violations that critics fear could be used to pressure the country's remaining independent media outlets.

Maxim's chief editor in Russia, Alexander Malenkov, said in an interview earlier this week published by news website Slon.ru that his magazine had violated the rules — under which it is no longer enough to replace the letters of curse words with dashes — and now understood what mistakes had been made.

“It's nothing out of the ordinary, panic is inappropriate, it's not political persecution or any other kind of persecution. It's a formality,” he said, Slon.ru reported.

Roskomnadzor has not yet decided whether it will make a legal bid to shut down Maxim, Interfax reported Thursday, citing Vadim Ampelonsky, a spokesperson for the watchdog.

The first warning and fine issued to Maxim was also over bad language that appeared in a March review of an album by Russian rock band Leningrad, the RBC news website reported.

Last year, the popular men's magazine was officially warned over an article about how to give bribes. The article was subsequently removed from the magazine's website.

Maxim is published by Hearst Shkulev Media, a joint venture between U.S.-based Hearst and Russian media mogul Viktor Shkulev, which controls other glossy magazines including Elle. The media group is currently awaiting official approval for a deal to buy a clutch of magazines from Helsinki-based Sanoma, which is selling off its Russian media holding, Independent Media.

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