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Russia's Famed 'Troll Factory' Faces Fraud Investigation

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Russia's famed "troll factory" may be in hot water for its business practices.

Law enforcement authorities in St. Petersburg have launched an investigation into Teka, a company that publishes patriotic comments on the internet and blogosphere, RFE/RL reported. According to a document from the local anti-corruption department, the authorities are investigating the company for fraud.

The news came as a surprise to journalist Lyumila Savchuk, a former Teka employee who filed the legal complaint led to the investigation. In the document, prepared together with the legal non-profit Team-29, she informed the authorities of potential tax evasion, violations of health standards, and fire safety violations in the company.

But she and Team-29 hardly expected Teka to face a fraud investigation, and they have little clue what the investigation could mean.

“This tells us only that the police are probably reacting to some kind of pattern,” Ivan Pavlov, Savchuk’s lawyer, told RFE/RL.

In early 2015 Savchuk took a three month job at Teka, then called the Internet Research Agency, to investigate its activities. The information she subsequently provided journalists revealed that the company, a project of chef and close Putin associate Evgeny Prigozhin, was carrying out a broad campaign to promote pro-Kremlin views online.

After leaving Teka, Savchuk also alleged that Teka had violated her labor rights by failing to provide her with a contract, underpaying her, and paying her salary off the books.

In the summer of 2015, Savchuk and Team-29 successfully took Teka to court for unpaid wages.

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