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Russian TV Channel Dozhd Suspended in Ukraine

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Denis Abramov / Vedomosti

Independent Russian television channel Dozhd has been suspended in Ukraine.

Ukraine's National Council on Television and Radio Broadcasting voted unanimously to remove Dozhd from the airwaves, ruling that the channel's broadcasts broke Ukrainian law.

Council member Sergei Kostinsky claimed that Dozhd's programs' questioned the sovereignty of Ukraine's borders.

"[The channel] regularly shows maps which present Crimea as Russian territory," Kostinsky said. "Dozhd reporters also travel to Crimea [from Russia] in violation of Ukrainian law."

Dozhd had also previously been cautioned by Kiev for airing advertisements which promoted Russian companies. The channel ultimately agreed to run an ad-free version of its regular

programming in Ukraine.

While the advert-free version of the channel is now on the air, "Dozhd Ukraine" has not been "formally submitted" to the council for consideration. Its ruling only affects Dozhd in its previous form, as it is shown on Russian television.

The council has given cable television providers one month to replace Russian Dozhd with "another channel."

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Dozhd Editor-in-Chief Roman Badanin said that the channel would lose access to half a million Ukrainian households as a result of the decision.

He also said that any map shown on the channel was strictly in accordance with Russian law, which names Crimea as part of Russia.

In Russia, a criminal charge of "inciting separatism" carries a maximum jail sentence of five years.

"It seems that the Ukrainian authorities have decided [to close the channel] on a technicality. Our audience has no doubts on the objectivity of our coverage on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict," Badanin told The Moscow Times.

"We hope that our Ukrainian viewers will continue to be able to watch Dozhd via our website, app, or other distribution channels."

Dozhd's General Director Nataliya Sindeeva told The Moscow Times that she regretted the decision, but maintained that the National Council of Ukraine had been notified of Dozhd's new channel without direct Russian advertising. She also said that the channel had not received any official notice of non-compliance from Ukrainian authorities.

In an ironic twist for the liberal news outlet, government officials have so far rushed to defend Dozhd.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova took to social media to denounce Kiev's decision.

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"I hope that the authorities in Kiev have not sunk to such censorship," Zakharova wrote on Facebook. "If this information is true, we will inform the OSCE [the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.]"

The Dozhd network remains one of the last remaining independent television channels in Russia.

Pro-Kremlin groups have previously accused the channel of breaking anti-terror laws, and the outlet was investigated for media law, licensing and labor violations in December 2015.

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