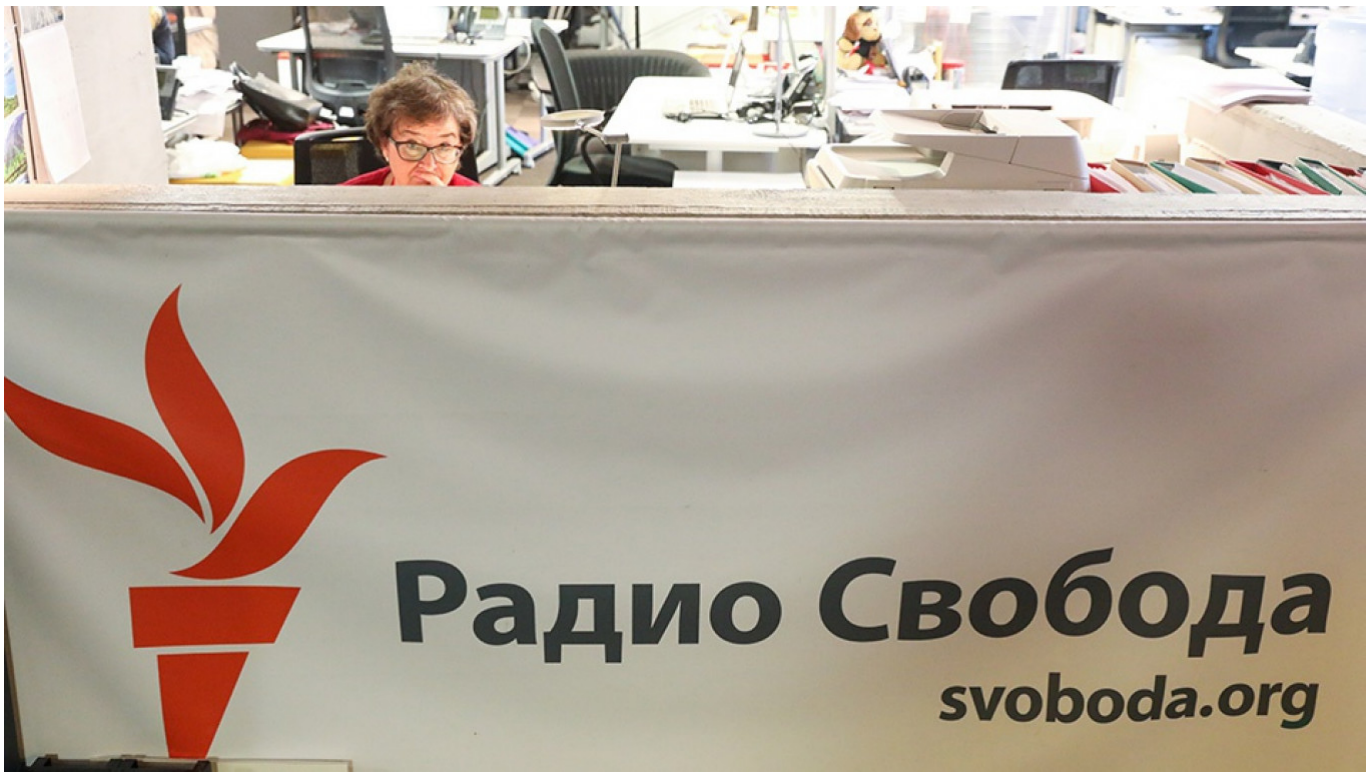
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American News Outlet Fined Under 'Foreign Agent' Law

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Mikhail Pochuyev / TASS

A Moscow court has fined the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) news outlet for violating the 'foreign agent' label, a move that could threaten the organization's operations in Russia.

The U.S. labelled the Kremlin-funded RT news channel a 'foreign agent' in America last year, and in response Russia listed nine U.S. outlets, including state-funded Voice of America (VOA) and RFE/RL, as 'foreign agents' in Russia. Lawmakers in the Duma are now considering a law that would allow it to label individual journalists and bloggers as 'foreign agents.'

A district court in Moscow ordered RFE/RL to pay 100,000 rubles ($1,600) for failure to comply with the law, the news outlet reported on Thursday.

Related article: Russia's Foreign Agent Law 'Distorts Reality,' Says U.S. Media Official

The ‘foreign agent’ law requires foreign-funded outlets deemed suspicious by the Russian government to report their activities and face financial audits.

Thomas Kent, the head of RFE/RL, called the court ruling a “sharp new escalation” aimed at “hamstringing the work of the company and at casting public suspicion on its Russian staff.”

Kent maintained his outlet’s editorial independence, saying “suggestions that we are agents of any government are false.”

The Russian government “have already affected our ability to gather news in Russia, and they create danger for our people there,” he said. RFE/RL said it was considering its next legal steps.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) called on Russian authorities not to extend the ‘foreign label’ warnings towards individual journalists. To do so, the group wrote in a public statement, indicated from Russia a “systematic policy towards obstructing the free flow of news.”

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