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Vedomosti Sale Delayed Amid Pro-Kremlin Censorship Scandal

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Demyan Kudryavtsev, the former owner of Vedomosti. **Yekaterina Kuzmina / RBC / TASS**

The sale of Russia's top business newspaper Vedomosti has been postponed as the paper struggles to maintain independence under its new chief editor, the Open Media investigative website reported Wednesday.

Claims of censorship have swirled around Vedomosti since its sale was announced in March. In the span of a month, acting editor-in-chief Andrei Shmarov has been accused of removing columns critical of Russian oil giant Rosneft, as well as banning coverage of independent poll results and articles criticizing President Vladimir Putin's proposed constitutional changes.

Related article: Leading Russian Paper Vedomosti's New Editor Bans Putin Criticism

"Some deadlines are being shifted due to the coronavirus, but I can't say that these are fundamental changes," Open Media quoted former Vedomosti owner Demyan Kudryavtsev as saying.

Kudryavtsev said it was “too early” to consider bankruptcy following reports of depleted funds, adding: “I hope the deal doesn’t fall through.”

The Bell business outlet reported last week that businessman Alexei Golubovich, one of Vedomosti’s buyers, was considering pulling out of the deal because of the censorship scandal.

The announcement of Vedomosti’s sale to Golubovich and publisher Konstantin Zyatkov in March drew concern among the paper’s staffers, with former editor-in-chief Tatiana Lysova describing the two buyers as “alien to Vedomosti’s rules and ideals.”

Shmarov’s hiring as acting editor-in-chief sparked further backlash within Vedomosti’s ranks and upset Russia’s heavily regulated media landscape. Five deputy editors appealed to Vedomosti’s new owners to appoint a different chief editor on March 31.

Founded in 1999, Vedomosti largely operated independently with backing from foreign media organizations until 2015, when Russia passed a law limiting foreign ownership in media companies to 20%. Kudryavtsev, a former chief executive of another business daily Kommersant and associate of the late oligarch Boris Berezovsky, bought the newspaper that year.

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