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Russia Fines RFE/RL $500K Under 'Foreign Agent' Law

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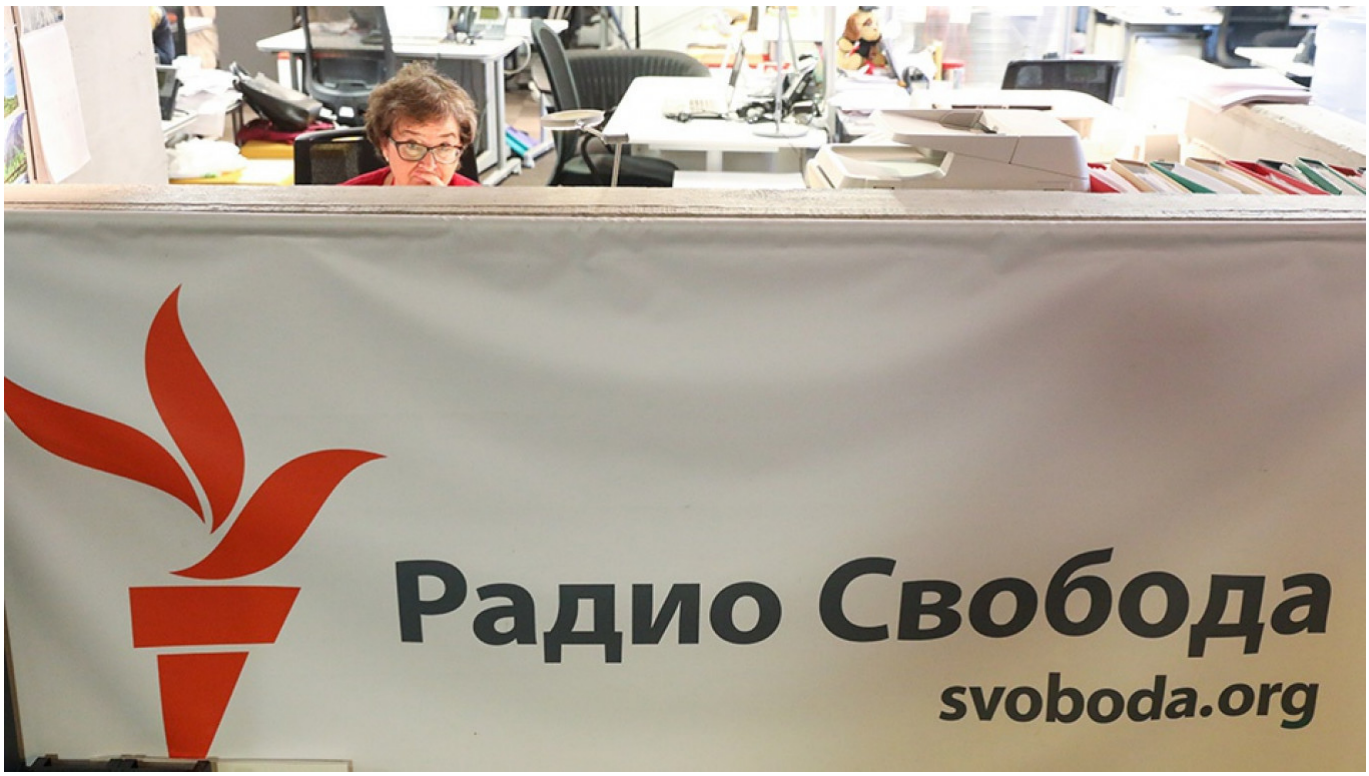

RFE/RL has accused Russia of trying to squeeze it out of the country with "disastrous" foreign agent labeling requirements and fines. **Mikhail Pochuyev / TASS**

Russia has fined the U.S.-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty media outlet more than half a million dollars so far for violating the country's controversial "foreign agent" law, Interfax reported Wednesday.

RFE/RL has accused the Russian authorities of trying to squeeze it out of the country with "disastrous" foreign agent labeling requirements and fines of up to $5 million.

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Russian state media watchdog Roskomnadzor said a Moscow court has issued fines for 142 out of the 260 notices of violations it filed against RFE/RL, according to Interfax. The regulator previously signaled its intention to issue half as many notices for RFE/RL's failure to label its content as produced by a "foreign agent."

“The notices against RFE/RL and its director general have been filed due to a lack of (or improper) labels on the foreign agent media outlets’ resources,” Roskomnadzor said.

As of Wednesday, RFE/RL has been hit by fines totaling more than 39 million rubles ($528,000).

The head of RFE/RL’s Russian-language service has vowed to appeal every fine.

In addition to the financial penalties, the U.S.-funded organization faces website closures and prison time for employees under Russia’s newly tightened “foreign agent” law. Critics say the recent expansions to Russia’s 2012 “foreign agent” law are designed to stifle dissent ahead of this fall’s legislative elections.

Russia labeled RFE/RL and its regional affiliates “foreign agents” in 2017 after the United States required Kremlin-funded media to register under anti-propaganda laws.

The State Department has criticized the fines and the threat of prison time for RFE/RL’s contributors and affiliates as “intolerable.”

A bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers urged President Joe Biden in January to sanction Russia in retaliation to the restrictions on RFE/RL.

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