

# U.S.-Funded RFE/RL to Move Staff Out of Russia Over Crippling ‘Foreign Agent’ Fines – BBC

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RFE/RL faces nearly \$1 million in fines for violations related to its “foreign agent” designation in Russia, a move its president calls “illegitimate.” **Mikhail Pochuyev / TASS**

The U.S.-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) news outlet has offered some of its staff the opportunity to leave Russia as it faces crippling “foreign agent” fines, BBC Russia [reported](#) Wednesday.

The move comes after Russia fined RFE/RL nearly \$1 million for violating tagging requirements related to its “foreign agent” designation. Russia’s newly tightened “foreign agents” law could also lead to website closures and prison time for RFE/RL’s employees.

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Citing nine unnamed employees, BBC’s Russian-language service reported that several dozen

full-time staff at RFE/RL's Russian-language affiliate Radio Svoboda and its Current Time broadcaster were offered relocation to Prague or Kiev.

"We're currently negotiating with employees, the company will provide all the needed assistance if someone agrees to leave," one of the employees was quoted as saying.

A small team is expected to remain in Moscow "to maintain minimal work," BBC reported. The relocations, which do not yet affect RFE/RL's regional freelancers, are reportedly expected to begin in May.

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Radio Svoboda's press office said in response that it plans to stay open and confront "the Kremlin's attacks."

Earlier this month, Russia's media watchdog [warned](#) RFE/RL that it had 60 days to pay off its "foreign agent" fines.

A Russian court had ordered RFE/RL to pay nearly \$1 million in fines after considering two-thirds of the total complaints against it for failing to label nine of its websites operating in Russia with the designation.

RFE/RL president Jamie Fly said Russia's "illegitimate" fines aimed to muzzle the broadcaster "at a moment when the Kremlin is trying to limit the Russian people's access to information."

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.

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