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Russia Out to 'Kill' Popular News Site Meduza With 'Foreign Agent' Label, Editors Say

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Meduza's editors say the designation will lead to an exodus of advertisers, "destroying" its business model. **Sultan Suleimanov / tjournal.ru**

Popular Russian independent news website Meduza said Monday that authorities are attempting to "kill" it with an onerous foreign agent designation that will strip it of advertising revenue and put employees at risk of jail time.

The Justice Ministry declared Meduza, one of the country's most-read news outlets, a "foreign agent" on Friday. The designation, which Meduza vows to challenge in court, requires it to slap the "foreign agent" label on all published content and report its activities to the authorities.

Related article: Russia Declares Independent News Site Meduza a 'Foreign Agent'

“No media outlet saddled with the ‘foreign agent’ label can practice full-fledged journalism. This designation destroys our business,” Meduza’s editor-in-chief Ivan Kolpakov said in a statement.

“Make no mistake: the authorities’ goal is to kill Meduza.”

He noted that recent changes to Russia’s “foreign agent” law allow the authorities to not just fine or block Meduza, but also to imprison journalists for reporting errors and press felony charges against Kolpakov.

The Kremlin on Monday called the Justice Ministry’s decision to label Meduza a foreign agent “lawful.” The European Union said it rejects Russia’s inclusion of Meduza on its registry of 19 so-called foreign agents.

The independent Open Media news site said Friday that an unnamed Kremlin official claimed that Meduza was labeled a “foreign agent” in retaliation to Latvia’s expulsion of Russian diplomats in solidarity with the Czech Republic.

Latvia, where Meduza has been based since 2014 after its then-chief editor was forced out of Russia, is among the several Baltic and central European nations that have recently expelled Russian diplomats after Prague accused Russian special services of involvement in a deadly arms depot explosion. Moscow has retaliated to the expulsions with tit-for-tat measures.

Kolpakov said in the statement that Meduza has “no clear plan of action, heading forward.”

“We honestly don’t know what to do next,” he wrote. “There’s no solution, no matter how simple or complex, that allows us to manage all the challenges of this designation.”

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