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Meduza Launches Fundraiser in Bid to Survive 'Foreign Agent' Branding

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Meduza says its future is in jeopardy after its "foreign agent" designation led to an exodus of advertisers.
Sultan Suleimanov / Meduza

The independent Meduza news website has launched a fundraising campaign after editors said its branding as a "foreign agent" has put its survival in jeopardy.

Russia's Justice Ministry added Meduza to its "foreign agents" registry last week, a move supporters say is aimed at silencing one of Russia's most popular independent media outlets. Meduza's editors accuse the authorities of trying to "kill" it, saying the designation will lead to an exodus of advertisers and put its staff at risk of jail time.

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

"Meduza was recognized as a 'foreign agent.' Because of this, Meduza lost almost all of its earnings, our journalists lost the opportunity to work normally inside Russia, and you have

not yet lost, but could lose a large and truly independent media outlet (of which there are very few left in Russia)," the news website, whose staff are located in Latvia and Russia, said in a statement.

First passed in 2012 and expanded over the years, Russia's "foreign agents" law requires labeled individuals and entities to submit to rigorous reporting and auditing requirements.

As a designated "foreign agent," Meduza must also display information on its status on all its published material, including advertisements and sponsored content.

"And this is not to mention the risks for Meduza's journalists, many of whom live in Russia," the outlet wrote. "At best, it will be more difficult for them to work (in particular, to find out something from the authorities); at worst, they themselves are recognized as 'foreign agents' (which means reporting, fines and criminal prosecution)."

The outlet said individuals from any country can contribute and asked supporters to sign up for recurring monthly donations to better help it plan its operating budget.

"Change in Russia is impossible without quality independent journalism," Meduza wrote.

Russia has previously labeled Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Voice of America news outlets, both funded by the U.S. government, as "foreign agents." RFE/RL is reportedly planning to relocate staff out of Russia as it faces steep fines for "foreign agent" violations.

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