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Belarus Denies Russian State Media Accreditation Over 'Bias' – FM

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Belarus' foreign minister accused TASS of allowing headlines "that surpass even [U.S.-funded RFE/RL] in their emotional coloring." **Zuma / TASS**

Belarus has denied press credentials to state media from close ally Russia over what it called "biased" coverage that rivals Western media, its foreign minister said during talks in Moscow on Friday.

Vladimir Makei said two out of three TASS news agency correspondents have been denied press accreditation as part of an overhaul last October to "protect information security" in Belarus. The Belarus Foreign Ministry canceled all foreign journalists' credentials amid critical coverage of a violent crackdown on opposition protests against last summer's disputed presidential election.

"Lately, TASS has sometimes been allowing catchy headlines relating to Belarus that surpass even Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in their emotional coloring," Makei said at a press briefing.

Russia labeled the U.S.-funded RFE/RL a “foreign agent” and has fined it millions of dollars amid what critics call a crackdown on free media and dissent there.

According to TASS, Makei said its two correspondents who were denied accreditation “don’t fully meet the criteria that journalists should meet.”

The Belarusian diplomat suggested that countries previously took advantage of the accreditation process to install “opponents of the authorities in Belarus” that published “ideologically charged” reports.

“The result was ideologically charged propaganda, which I think is not the task of journalism. That’s why the decision was made,” Makei said.

“We all need to stop, think, draw conclusions and focus on a constructive solution to the issue,” he was quoted as saying.

Makei, who said half of the more than 150 accredited journalists in Belarus are Russian, offered TASS to “send Russian citizens so that they could be accredited within literally a few hours.”

TASS said its correspondents have been accredited in Minsk since the early 1990s and have worked in “full compliance” with local laws.

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