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Russia's First 'Undesirable' News Outlet Promises New Bombshell Investigation, Defying Ban

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Proekt is Russia's first news outlet to be declared "undesirable," a designation that forces labeled organizations to disband and places members and financial contributors at risk of significant jail time.
Proekt. / Facebook

Independent Russian investigative outlet Proekt has promised a new and potentially explosive investigation in the coming week in defiance of its new "undesirable" ban.

Proekt is Russia's first news outlet to be declared "undesirable," a designation that forces labeled organizations to disband and places members and financial contributors at risk of significant jail time. Over the past year alone, Proekt has released bombshell investigations into President Vladimir Putin's alleged extramarital daughter in addition to the alleged hidden wealth of tycoons with close ties to the president, Putin's security chiefs and Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov.

Related article: Russia Bans Independent Investigative Outlet Proekt with 'Undesirable' Label

Proekt's chief editor Roman Badanin, who founded the project in 2018, thanked supporters following the designation and quipped that "it's difficult to imagine better recognition" than being labeled "undesirable" in Russia.

"Proekt, to put it mildly, is not going anywhere. Something big is coming next week," Badanin wrote on his Facebook page late Thursday.

On Friday, Proekt said it was closing its U.S.-based entity and cutting financial ties between that entity and its Russia-based journalists, but pledged to announce its new iteration in the future.

"However, we as journalists continue to believe that our work is important and needed to our homeland," Proekt wrote on Telegram, pledging to announce its new iteration in the future.

"For now, we can say there won't be any fewer investigations."

One of Proekt's reports, exploring Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokoltsev's rise through the ranks and unexplained alleged upscale properties, was published as police raided the homes of Badanin and two of his deputies two weeks ago.

The Russian prosecutors' "undesirable" designation bans other news outlets from linking to Proekt's materials or directly quoting them.

In addition to being tagged "undesirable," several journalists from Proekt and other independent outlets were also added to Russia's registry of "foreign agents" by the Justice Ministry on Thursday.

Foreign agents, while not explicitly banned in Russia like "undesirable" organizations, are subject to steep fines for errors in more rigorous financial auditing requirements.

Foreign agents are also required to include boilerplate text stating their designation on everything they publish, including social media posts. Badanin defied the requirement in his Facebook post promising a new Proekt investigation next week.

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