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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Independent Russian News Outlets Launch Campaign Against 'Foreign Agent' Tags

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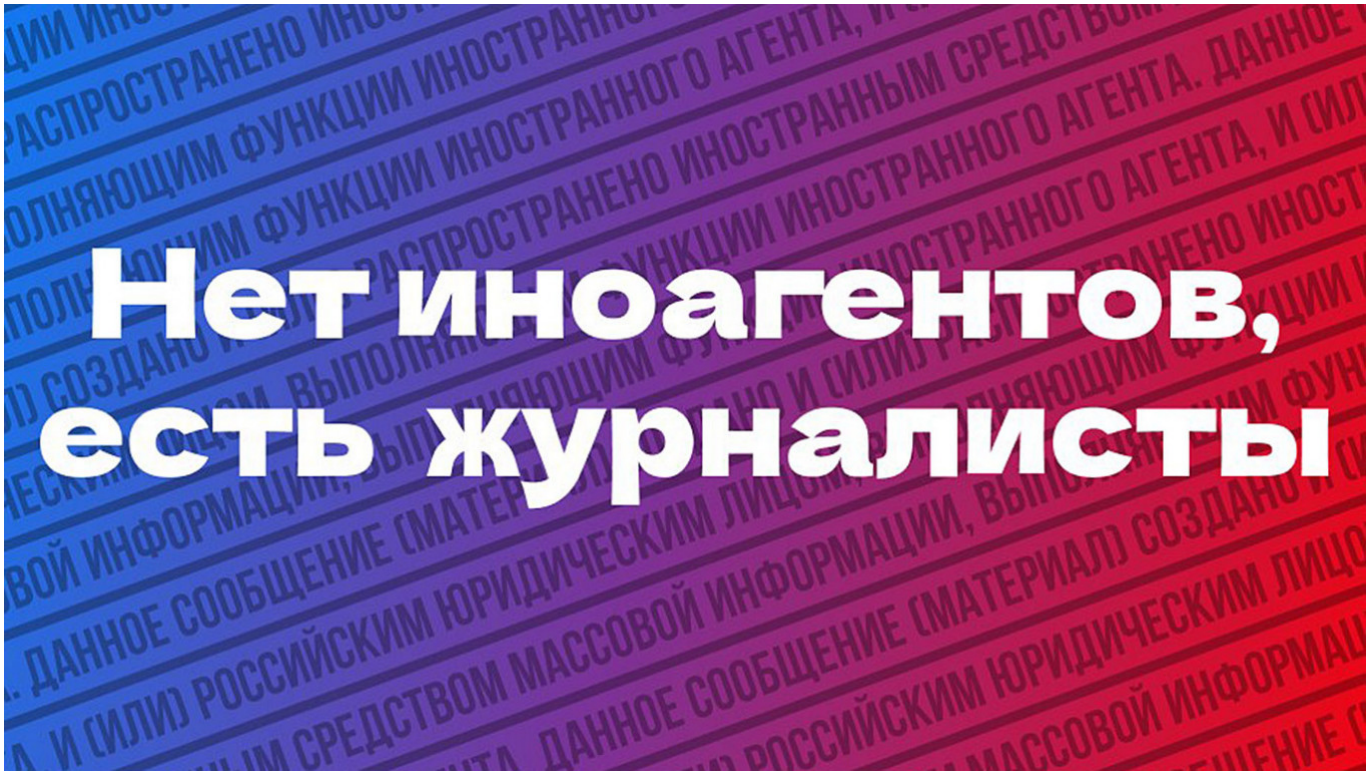

"There are no foreign agents, there are journalists"

Several dozen Russian news outlets have launched a campaign in support of independent journalism Wednesday amid mounting pressure on their profession in the run-up to next week's parliamentary elections.

The "There Are No Foreign Agents, There Are Journalists" campaign comes as Russian authorities target a growing number of media outlets and individual journalists with the "foreign agent" tag. A handful of labeled outlets have shut down after the designation sparked an exodus of advertisers, while others have vowed to adapt and continue their work.

As part of the press freedom campaign, 40 Russian outlets will add a note stating "This message (material) was created and (or) distributed by mass media performing functions of mass media" to all their materials.

The phrase is an altered version of boilerplate disclaimers that all designated "foreign agents" are legally required to include on everything they publish, including personal social media posts.

Several Russian media outlets have published open letters asking President Vladimir Putin to end the "state campaign" against independent journalism in recent days. After initially rejecting their demands, the Kremlin said it would review a list of amendments to Russia's "foreign agent" law proposed by independent news media.

Russia's registry of "foreign agent" media lists a total of 22 news outlets, 10 of which have been added in the past six months. The "foreign agent" list now includes widely read independent outlets like Meduza and Dozhd.

At least two dozen individual Russian journalists have also been designated "foreign agents" following a December 2020 broadening of Russia's nearly decade-old "foreign agent" law.

Kremlin critics and analysts describe the increasing number of "foreign agent" tags in recent months as an attempt to crack down on independent journalism ahead of the Sept. 17-19 parliamentary elections.

The "There Are No Foreign Agents, There Are Journalists" campaign was timed to coincide with International Day of Journalists' Solidarity, which has been celebrated every Sept. 8 since 1958.

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