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BBC Russian Journalist Moves Abroad After 'Foreign Agent' Labeling

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Andrei Zakharov said he faced "unprecedented surveillance" following his designation as a "foreign agent." **BBC News / YouTube**

A prominent Russian investigative journalist working for the BBC's Russian service said on Monday he has left the country two months after being labeled a "foreign agent."

In a video published by BBC Russia, Andrei Zakharov said he moved to Britain after facing "unprecedented surveillance" following his designation as a "foreign agent" in October.

Zakharov — seen as one of the most reputable investigative journalists in the country — broke the story on President Vladimir Putin's alleged ex-mistress and their purported extramarital daughter late last year. He also reported on Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections and most recently investigated the Russia-based hacking collective Evil Corp.

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In the video published Monday, Zakharov said he did not know the exact reason why he was being followed, but linked the surveillance to his reporting.

“It is not yet clear what the surveillance was connected with: the fact that I was recognized as a ‘foreign agent,’ or, perhaps, with the work I did about hackers from the Evil Corp group, which I worked on with my British colleagues,” Zakharov said.

Zakharov is the latest in a string of journalists and human rights activists who have left the country in recent months after being labeled as a “foreign agent.”

Russia’s Justice Ministry currently lists more than 100 entities and individuals as “foreign agents,” the majority of which were added to the registry in 2021.

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Labeled individuals and entities must submit regular financial reports and detailed lists of income and spending, as well as prominently display a wordy disclaimer on all articles, social media posts and other publications or face criminal charges.

In the video, Zakharov added that while he regrets leaving Russia, he will continue to follow the rules for “foreign agents.” The BBC said in an earlier statement that they reject the Russian authorities’ decision to designate their journalist as a “foreign agent.”

Putin last week said that Russia’s "foreign agents" laws were more liberal than their Western equivalents, but rights groups have lambasted the “repressive” law and believe it was introduced to penalize Kremlin critics and stifle dissent.

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