The Moscow Times
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Slaps Independent Media Outlet Meduza With 'Undesirable' Label

January 26, 2023



Meduza General Director Galina Timchenko. **Vladimir Gerdo / TASS**

Updates with Timchenko comments

Russia's General Prosecutor's Office has added the independent news outlet Meduza to the country's list of "undesirable" organizations, a sanction designed to force entities to disband and which puts its staff and financial donors at risk of significant jail time.

The General Prosecutor's Office said on Thursday that it believed the activities of Meduza "constitute a threat to the foundation of the constitutional order and security of the Russian Federation."

One of the most popular independent Russian-language news websites, Meduza was founded in the Latvian capital Riga in 2014 by a collective of former employees at the popular Russian news website Lenta.ru.

The journalists who founded Meduza had all just resigned en masse following a decision by

Lenta.ru's Kremlin-linked billionaire owner Alexander Mamut to fire editor-in-chief Galina Timchenko.

Timchenko, who remains Meduza's CEO almost a decade later, told The Moscow Times on Thursday that the decision “was not completely unexpected.”

“Since the start of the war [in Ukraine] we knew it was just a matter of time. So we were prepared and it has not frightened us.”

“Our main concern is our readers. People can still read Meduza, we’ll try to explain this to our audience, but publishing links and comments might be considered administrative offenses and this can affect our readers who remain in Russia,” Timchenko said, adding: “We won’t give up.”

Related article: Russia Declares Independent News Site Meduza a ‘Foreign Agent’

Meduza's legal status in Russia was already complicated after the Russian Justice Ministry labeled it a "foreign agent" in April 2021.

In July, Yevgeny Prigozhin, founder of the Wagner mercenary group, requested that Meduza be labeled an undesirable organization immediately after it published an investigation into the activities of his mercenary group, which Prigozhin described as "provocation disguised as pacifism."

The “undesirable organization” label requires an organization to cease all operations in Russia and allows its funds and assets in the country to be confiscated.

Russians are prohibited from participating in the work of "undesirable organizations," even outside Russia. The penalty for violation is up to four years imprisonment.

Financial contributions to such organizations also carry a penalty of up to five years in prison.

In addition, distributing or referring to materials published by an "undesirable organization" is a criminal offense and can lead to legal consequences, including the blocking of any media outlet citing an "undesirable organization" in Russia.

“The Russian security services are trying to make it difficult for the publication to communicate with their sources. They are trying to intimidate them in this way," political consultant and former Putin speech writer Abbas Gallyamov told The Moscow Times on Thursday, adding that there were "too many leaks through Meduza that were disadvantageous to Russian hawks.”

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