The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Wagner Leader's Troll Factory Expects Takeover – Reports

June 29, 2023



Yevgeny Prigozhin, owner of the Wagner Group. **Prigozhin's press service**

Russian Wagner mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin's troll farm and media outfit are looking for fresh ownership after his aborted rebellion and exile in Belarus, independent media reported Thursday.

After years of denials, Prigozhin confirmed in February 2023 the widely held belief that he was behind Russia's network of troll farms known as the Internet Research Agency. The network expanded in 2019 into the Patriot media group, with a mission to "create a favorable information space" about Russia and Prigozhin appointed chairman of its board of trustees.

Patriot's work has been paralyzed for nearly a week after police raided its St. Petersburg headquarters during Wagner's dramatic march toward Moscow on Saturday, the business news website The Bell reported, citing current and former employees.

Russia has also blocked Prigozhin's main media outlet RIA FAN, which is part of the Patriot media group, after Wagner's short-lived rebellion.

“There’s no more central management,” The Bell quoted an anonymous Prigozhin staffer as saying.

Patriot’s de facto director Ilya Gorbunov was in negotiations with potential buyers earlier this week until his abrupt disappearance, The Bell said.

The private media holding National Media Group (NMG) was identified as one of Patriot’s potential buyers.

NMG was founded by billionaire banker Yury Kovalchuk, a close friend of President Vladimir Putin’s. Its board is chaired by retired Olympic gymnast and Putin’s rumored mistress Alina Kabaeva.

The Bell said all of its sources believed Patriot “will now be directly supervised by the presidential administration” regardless of its formal owner.

“The holding company’s destruction is out of the question. The question being decided is new management,” one anonymous source was quoted as saying.

The FBI placed Prigozhin on its wanted list in February 2021 on suspicion of conspiracy to defraud the United States, interfering in U.S. domestic politics and attempting to influence a presidential election. It offered a cash reward of up to $250,000 for information that could lead to Prigozhin’s arrest.

Russia’s Foreign Ministry said Wednesday that no Russian citizen would be extradited to the United States.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/06/29/wagner-leaders-troll-factory-expects-takeover-reports-a81690