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Kyrgyzstan Says Set to Close U.S.-Funded Media

By AFP

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Kloop journalists at work. **ned.org**

A Kyrgyzstan court said Monday state prosecutors had urged it to close down Kloop, a mainly U.S.-funded media organization, for content allegedly discrediting the government of the Central Asian nation, a Russian ally.

"We have received a complaint from the Bishkek prosecutor for the shutting down of public foundation Kloop.Media," a court spokesperson told AFP.

Kloop, which is mainly financed by U.S. NGOs, stands accused of having "undertaken activities beyond the framework foreseen by its charter," the spokesman said.

The prosecutor's office told AFP the matter was in the hands of the GKNB secret services in the latest case of apparent state pressure being exerted on media organizations, which rights groups have decried.

President Sadyr Japarov earlier this month criticized in an interview with state news agency Kabar "Kloop's so-called journalists" who, he said, "only bring bad and no good to Kyrgyzstan," warning that could not continue.

The state prosecutor alleged that Kloop articles sought "severely to criticize the policies of the current government," that "a majority of them" were "purely negative" and furthermore designed "to discredit representatives of government and local bodies."

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Articles in question covered topics including elections, border tensions with Tajikistan and anything construed to be anti-Russian.

The chargesheet against Kloop noted that GKNB had in 2021 opened a pre-trial procedure over allegations the media organization was looking to foment a coup with publications aiming at manipulating public opinion and undermining public trust in their rulers.

The Kloop case comes just weeks after the government reversed a decision to close the local branch of U.S.-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), the main non-state media operating in the country.

Award-winning Radio Azattyk, which regularly reports on opposition groups and investigates alleged corruption, agreed to remove a video related to border tensions with Tajikistan which authorities had criticized.

Kyrgyzstan enjoys some freedom of speech compared to other Central Asian countries — it ranks 122nd on the Reporters Without Borders global list of 180 states.

But legislators are working on a bill on "foreign agents" similar to the law used by the Russian government to stifle opponents.

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