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Renowned Russian Writer Boris Akunin Labeled 'Foreign Agent'

By AFP

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Boris Akunin. **Mitya Aleshkovsky / Flickr (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 DEED)**

Russia on Friday labeled the exiled writer Boris Akunin, who has spoken out against Moscow's military operation in Ukraine, as a foreign agent.

The Kremlin has intensified its crackdown on dissent since launching its offensive in Ukraine in February 2022 and targeted the arts, with books by authors critical of Moscow disappearing from bookshops.

Akunin is the pen name of Georgian-born writer Grigory Chkhartishvili. That name was added to the "foreign agents" list, traditionally updated every Friday.

"Chkhartishvili opposed the special military operation in Ukraine," Russia's Justice Ministry said.

He is also accused of having "disseminated inaccurate information aimed at forming a negative image" of Russia and its army.

The label, which is reminiscent of the term "enemies of the people" of the Soviet era, requires individuals or groups to disclose sources of funding.

It also compels them to mark all publications — including social media posts — with a "foreign agent" tag.

The 67-year-old was already listed on the "terrorist and extremists" list of Rosfinmonitoring, Russia's main financial intelligence body.

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Akunin is known for his historical detective novels and his longstanding criticism of President Vladimir Putin.

"Russia is ruled by a psychologically deranged dictator and worst of all, it obediently follows his paranoia," Akunin wrote on Facebook the day Putin sent troops to Ukraine in February 2022.

Despite falling out with the Kremlin, Akunin remains one of Russia's most widely read contemporary authors.

He also co-founded a campaign platform called "True Russia" that gathers Russian cultural figures to help Ukrainian refugees and Russians who fled their country.

Many Russian cultural figures have fled the country since the Kremlin's military operation in Ukraine began, with those who stayed facing strict censorship laws.

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