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Russia Blocks Radio Liberty's Central Asia Services – NGO

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The news room of RFE/RL's Kyrgyzstan bureau. **Vyacheslav Oseledko / AFP**

Russia has blocked the websites of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL) five Central Asian bureaus, the independent internet freedom monitor Roskomsvoboda said Friday.

An "unspecified state body" ruled to block the websites more than a year ago, in January 2023, but their domains were restricted inside Russia only on Thursday.

RFE/RL operates in 27 languages in 23 countries, mainly where media freedom is limited.

The five bureaus whose websites were blocked this week provided news coverage both in Russian and in the native languages of the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Related article: Russia Labels Radio Liberty 'Undesirable'

On Tuesday, Russia's Justice Ministry designated RFE/RL as an "undesirable" organization,

making it illegal for individuals and media outlets in the country to republish or share its content.

Roskomsvoboda said it was not immediately clear why exactly Russia blocked the websites of the U.S.-funded outlet's five Central Asian services.

“It’s as likely to be military censorship as it is the Prosecutor General’s Office's obligation to block ‘undesirable’ websites,” the internet freedom monitor wrote.

In 2017, the Russian authorities labeled RFE/RL a “foreign agent,” which carries negative Soviet-era connotations, but the outlet rejected the designation and refused to comply with the requirement to label its materials.

Russian officials have told The Moscow Times on condition of anonymity that the Kremlin is taking a harder line toward media outlets critical of its invasion ahead of the March 15-17 presidential election, which President Vladimir Putin is certain to win.

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