The Moscow Times
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Russian Anti-War News Startup Helpdesk Media Closes

May 20, 2024



Helpdesk Media

The Russian anti-war news startup Helpdesk Media announced Monday that it was closing due to a lack of funding.

Founded by former Meduza publisher Ilya Krasilshchik soon after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Helpdesk Media positioned itself as a service journalism startup that told stories about the war, raised money for its victims, and ran a support hotline for Russians and Ukrainians.

"We no longer have the funds to produce a daily publication. We'll have to close it, and this will happen gradually," the startup wrote on social media, adding that it was unable to secure grants to continue supporting its journalists.

Helpdesk Media's annual financial report for 2023 showed it received 75% of its funding from grants.

The startup said Monday that the decision to close the news side of its operations, which

employed 20 people, would not affect its hotline or fundraising for Ukrainians impacted by the war.

In December, Russia branded the Latvia-based Helpdesk Media Foundation an "undesirable" organization, banning its activities and putting staff at risk of being jailed in the country.

The investigative news website Agentstvo, citing an anonymous media manager, said foundations supporting independent Russian media have recently curtailed funding for startups like Helpdesk Media and are expected to reduce funding further.

"We're sort of a Russian project, although half of us are Ukrainians. For donors, that's like an in-between program: neither Russian nor Ukrainian," Krasilshchik told Agentstvo.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/05/20/russian-anti-war-news-startup-helpdesk-media-closes-a85171