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Russian Newspaper Sobesednik Shutters After 'Foreign Agent' Designation

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A February issue of Sobesednik about the death of Alexei Navalny. **SOTAvision**

The Moscow-based weekly newspaper Sobesednik will cease publication following its designation as a "foreign agent" last week, one of its reporters told independent media on Tuesday.

Sobesednik was declared a "foreign agent" on Sept. 13, with Russian authorities accusing the publication of spreading inaccurate information about government policies and "fakes" about the Russian military, as well as opposing the invasion of Ukraine and sharing content from other "foreign agents."

"With great regret, we must announce that after Sobesednik-Media LLC was added to the Justice Ministry's registry of foreign agents, we are forced to suspend the publication of all Sobesednik Publishing House outlets," said Elena Milchanovska, a correspondent for the newspaper, in a statement quoted by the independent broadcaster SOTAvision.

"We will be challenging the designation of Sobesednik-Media LLC as a foreign agent in

court," the statement added. "We want to extend our heartfelt thanks to all of you for your support and the kind, encouraging words shared with our editorial team."

Founded in 1984 as the Soviet Union's first color newspaper, Sobesednik had been in circulation not only in Russia but also in Latvia, Belarus, Armenia and Israel.

In February, Sobesednik published a two-page spread on Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny four days after his death, including an obituary and coverage of spontaneous vigils held in his honor. The issue featured a large photo of a smiling Navalny with the caption: "But there is hope!"

Milchanovska said circulation of the newspaper would be suspended for at least two to three months while it fights the "foreign agent" designation in court.

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