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U.K. Sanctions 3 Russian PR Firms, Senior Managers

By AFP

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Pelagia Tikhonova / Moskva News Agency

Britain's government on Monday unveiled new sanctions on three Russian public relations firms and their top managers, accusing them of "attempting to undermine and destabilize Ukraine and its democracy."

London said it was targeting Russia's state-funded Social Design Agency (SDA), its partner company Structura and another firm called Ano Dialog, as well as three senior managers from each organization.

British authorities said SDA and Structura had attempted "interference operations" aimed at Ukraine, while SDA had also tried "to incite protests in half a dozen European countries."

Announcing the latest sanctions, U.K. Foreign Secretary David Lammy accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of "resorting to clumsy, ineffective efforts to try and stoke unrest"

to destabilize Ukraine.

“Today's sanctions send a clear message; we will not tolerate your lies and interference, and we are coming after you,” he said in a statement. “Putin's desperate attempts to divide us will fail. We will constrain the Kremlin, and stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes.”

The Foreign Office in London noted the United States, Canada, France, the European External Action Service (EEAS), Germany and Australia would also be “calling out the SDA's underhand activity globally.”

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It added that the three firms and their leadership were responsible for a “vast malign online network, also commonly known as Doppelganger,” which floods social media with fake posts, counterfeit documents and other material.

The U.K. government said this was “part of a coordinated attempt to use deceptive information operations to undermine democracy” in Ukraine and beyond.

The SDA has created a web of at least 120 sites spoofing existing news and government websites which it tries to “deceptively” redirect unsuspecting social media users to, according to the Foreign Office.

The latest British sanctions come less than two weeks after London announced its largest measures to date against Russia's “shadow fleet” of tankers, which it uses to sidestep a Western embargo on oil exports after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

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