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Russia Labels Barents Observer 'Undesirable' After European Court Ruling

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The Barents Observer's team of journalists. **Henry Patton / The Barents Observer**

Russian authorities on Friday designated the Norwegian online news publication The Barents Observer as an "undesirable" organization, a day after Europe's top human rights court ruled against its ban inside Russia.

The Prosecutor General's Office accused the Arctic-focused outlet of publishing "anti-Russian" content written by exiled Russian citizens who are "listed as foreign agents or terrorists and extremists."

"The articles are aimed at stirring dissent among residents of Russia's northern regions, tightening anti-Russian sanctions and increasing NATO's military presence near our borders," the office said in a statement.

Russian authorities also claimed The Barents Observer, which publishes both in English and Russian, is financed by foreign organizations already labeled "undesirable" in Russia, though it did not specify which organizations.

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The designation effectively bans the outlet from operating inside Russia and exposes its employees and affiliates to potential criminal prosecution.

Barents Observer editor Thomas Nielsen linked the decision to Thursday's ruling by the European Court of Human Rights, which found Russia's 2019 decision to block the outlet's website unlawful.

"There is no such thing as coincidence... in regards to actions taken by the Kremlin's repressive authorities," Nielsen told The Moscow Times in written comments. "Yesterday afternoon, The Barents Observer won against Russia in the European Court of Human Rights. This morning, the Prosecutor General labeled us 'undesirable.'"

"The Barents Observer will continue to report... about important developments in the Russian north," Nilsen added.

Russia has used the "undesirable" designation to target independent media, opposition groups and foreign organizations since introducing the law in 2015.

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