

# ‘Today We Celebrate’: Kremlin and Russian Propaganda Rejoice as Trump Guts RFE/RL, VOA

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March 18, 2025



**Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency**

Moscow is elated by President Donald Trump’s moves to gut U.S.-funded media outlets Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Voice of America, high-ranking Russian officials and diplomats told The Moscow Times.

All of The Moscow Times’ sources spoke on condition of anonymity in order to discuss a sensitive political matter.

Founded by the U.S. during the Cold War to counter Soviet propaganda, RFE/RL was banned across the communist bloc, where regimes regularly jammed its signal. As press freedom in modern Russia has grown increasingly stifled under President Vladimir Putin, RFE/RL and VOA have again been deemed “enemy voices” as they were by Soviet leaders.

The Kremlin was especially irritated by RFE/RL's regional affiliates that broadcast in local and Indigenous languages across Russia and former Soviet countries, as they undermined the wartime censorship Moscow imposed after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Two current and two former Russian officials told The Moscow Times that these outlets' reporting had created serious problems for Kremlin propaganda, damaging Moscow's influence in the post-Soviet region.

Trump's administration over the weekend started laying off staff at VOA and other broadcasters including RFE/RL after freezing their funding.

Publicly, the Kremlin issued a brief statement that downplayed the move's significance for Russia.

"These media outlets can hardly be called popular or in demand in Russia; they are purely propagandistic. This is an internal sovereign matter of the United States; it does not particularly concern us," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

But unofficially, the Kremlin is glad to see these outlets go, one current Russian official and a high-ranking Kremlin official who recently resigned told The Moscow Times.

"A dog's death for a dog," said the former Kremlin official, using a Russian phrase [previously used](#) by ex-President Dmitry Medvedev following the murder of a Russian military defector in Spain.

"It was an outdated, stupid tool. But I would pray not to accidentally anger Trump," the ex-official continued, stressing that he supports many of Trump's actions beyond his moves to dismantle RFE/RL and VOA.

Russia's Foreign Ministry has not commented on the Trump administration's dismantling of RFE/RL and VOA.

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One Russian diplomat acknowledged to The Moscow Times that the ministry sees the decision as a positive development from the perspective of Russian foreign policy, especially in the former Soviet states that Moscow considers part of its sphere of influence.

"They undoubtedly caused us harm in post-Soviet countries, as their work was aimed at dividing us and our allies," the diplomat noted.

### **Propagandists celebrate**

Russian propagandists were less coy about their feelings toward the Trump administration's move.

"Today is a holiday for me and my colleagues at RT and Sputnik. This is an awesome decision by Trump!" said Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief of the Kremlin-backed RT network and the Rossiya Segodnya news agency and a vocal cheerleader of Putin and the invasion of

Ukraine. "We couldn't shut them down, unfortunately, but America did so itself."

Simonyan also accused VOA and RFE/RL of provoking ethnic conflict in Dagestan, referring to the fall 2023 storming of Makhachkala International Airport by anti-Israeli locals searching for Israeli passengers on a flight arriving from Tel Aviv.

"Everything was calm and normal, so why did some of the youth suddenly run [to storm the airport in search of Israelis]? It was them [RFE/RL and VOA] and foreign agents stirring things up and pouring fuel to the fire," Simonyan said on a Sunday evening news show on the state-run Rossia 1 broadcaster.

"They spread their tentacles across Russian regions like an octopus and brainwash our compatriots," Simonyan added.

VOA started broadcasting in Russian in 1947, and RFE/RL followed in 1953. The Soviet Union had launched its international broadcasting even earlier. Moscow Radio began operating in 1929 and was later rebranded as Voice of Russia and later as Sputnik.

Washington designated Russian propaganda outlets RT and Sputnik as "foreign agents" in 2017. After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, they were blocked in the European Union and subjected to sanctions.

In response, Moscow labeled VOA and RFE/RL as "foreign agents" and later banned them as undesirable organizations, making it illegal to cooperate with them in any way, including by giving interviews to them or sharing their content.

## **Possible consequences**

Trump has touted the funding freeze on RFE/RL and VOA as part of his efforts to slash a "bloated" federal bureaucracy. But supporters warn that their shutdown would take away a lifeline of free information to non-democratic countries and make it easier for adversaries like Russia, China and Iran to spread their message around the world.

Kremlin-linked analysts say Trump's dismantling of U.S.-funded international media outlets signals that Washington may be reassessing U.S.-Russia ties and searching for new areas of cooperation after years of historic lows in relations.

"At the very least, this suggests a search for common ground on which dialogue between the great powers can be built," analysts at the pro-Kremlin think tank EISI [noted](#).

However, Russian lawmakers and officials said the U.S. will not abandon its attempts to influence Russia and its neighbors.

"A new network structure with similar objectives may replace the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM), which included Voice of America, Radio Free Europe and Current Time," [said](#) Vasily Piskarev, head of the lower-house State Duma's Foreign Interference Commission who previously served as deputy head of the repressive Investigative Committee.

Senator Vladimir Dzhubarov, a former KGB officer, [expressed](#) a similar view.

"I have no doubt that funds will be found for Russophobes to continue their work," he said.

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