

Justice Ministry Investigating TV Presenter Urgant Over Alleged Foreign Influence

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Ivan Urgant. **Artur Novosiltsev / Moskva News Agency**

Russia's Justice Ministry is considering adding former late-night talk show host and actor Ivan Urgant to its list of "foreign agents" over allegations of "foreign influence," the state-run news agency TASS [reported](#) Wednesday, citing the ministry's letter to a lawmaker.

Lower-house State Duma member Nikolai Novichkov asked the ministry to designate Urgant a "foreign agent" after Russian state media [reported](#) last month that he had registered as an individual entrepreneur in France last year. Urgant [denied](#) the report.

Responding to Novichkov, a lawmaker from the Just Russia political party, Russia's Justice Ministry reportedly said it was performing "monitoring operations" as part of a 2022 law on "[foreign influence](#)" to determine whether Urgant could be designated a "foreign agent."

On the first day of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Urgant, 46, [posted](#) a black square to

his Instagram account with the caption “Fear and pain. No to war.” His show “Evening Urgant,” which he hosted from 2012 until Feb. 21, 2022, was taken off the air.

Urgant has since remained silent about the war but [hosted](#) live events in Europe and is [scheduled](#) to go on tour in Israel, the South Caucasus and Central Asia this month.

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Russian authorities use the “foreign agent” label, which carries Soviet-era connotations, to target individuals and organizations they view as enemies of the state. Those hit with the designation are required to submit rigorous financial reports to the Justice Ministry, as well as display “foreign agent” disclaimers in publications and social media posts.

Russian courts issue administrative fines for those who violate the “foreign agents” law, after which they face the risk of criminal prosecution for repeated offenses.

Earlier, independent media outlets reported that the number of criminal cases against “foreign agents” in Russia more than doubled in 2023 compared with the previous year, when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

More than 900 cultural figures, journalists, businesspeople, organizations and news outlets, including The Moscow Times, have been branded “foreign agents” since Russia introduced the label under a 2012 law.

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