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Legal Rights Group Avtozak Live to Shut Down Amid Funding Shortage

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A Russian police van. **Alexander Shcherbak / TASS**

The exiled Russian legal rights organization Avtozak Live announced on Wednesday that it would cease operations by the end of 2025, citing chronic underfunding that has made its work unsustainable.

The organization, whose name in Russian translates to "police van," said it would fulfill its existing legal commitments before closing. It has stopped accepting new requests for assistance.

"Unfortunately, the project has not been able to find sufficient funding for several years," the group said in a statement.

Founded in 2019 as a protest monitoring channel, Avtozak Live shifted its focus in 2023 to providing legal aid for Russians accused of terrorism, treason and sabotage. It specialized in cases it said were overlooked by other rights groups, taking them on only if there were no victims involved.

The project operated in an increasingly perilous environment following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It closed its physical offices in Russia in June 2022, with most of its team relocating abroad. Then, in May 2024, Russian authorities moved to block its website, accusing it of supporting Western sanctions.

Avtozak Live functioned primarily on donations collected through online platforms and explicitly refused funding from within Russia to shield its donors from potential criminal prosecution.

In its final statement, the organization reported that it had provided help in 23 cases over the past two years, both public and private. It also stated that it still owes approximately 1 million rubles ($12,400) to lawyers working on five ongoing terrorism and sabotage cases.

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