

Ekho Editor in Labor Inquiry, Host Hacked

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Speculation of an orchestrated attack on the country's most high-profile radio station grew stronger Wednesday after Ekho Moskvyy editor Alexei Venediktov said prosecutors had summoned him for questioning and a prominent show host said hackers had taken over his e-mail and blog accounts.

Venediktov said prosecutors contacted him in connection with a month-old complaint from a citizen regarding questions about the radio station's compliance with the Labor Code.

The editor later said that the request had been canceled, but that the timing was suspicious.

"This [complaint] lay one month in the prosecutors' office, and suddenly they decided to use it," Venediktov told Moskovsky Komsomolets.

The complaint had been filed by Alexander Filsher, a Yabloko activist from the southern

Tambov region, who argued that Ekho Moskvyy's editorial statute violates the law by prohibiting its journalists from joining political parties, Gazeta.ru reported.

Venediktov called Filsher a "straw-man complainer" and said the incident evoked memories of 2001, when Gazprom Media took over the NTV television channel.

"The aim is to keep me and my journalists under pressure and make us more afraid," he said.

Meanwhile, prominent blogger and Ekho Moskvyy show host Alexei Plushchev said Wednesday that hackers had taken over his mail, Twitter and Facebook accounts, as well as his blog on the station's website.

"The second attempt to hack into my e-mail was successful," he [wrote](#) on his homepage.

On Tuesday, Venediktov had disclosed a massive dispute with Gazprom Media and announced that he and his deputy were resigning from Ekho Moskvyy's board of directors because the state-controlled media holding, which owns 66 percent of the radio station, demanded a reshuffle.

The nine-member body had been staffed by four Gazprom representatives, three members of Ekho Moskvyy's newsroom, which controls the other 34 percent of the station, and two independent members.

Venediktov told Kommersant that he decided to resign after Gazprom Media insisted on increasing its boardroom members to five, thus leaving the station with a minority of four.

Observers have suggested it is no coincidence that the scandal broke at the height of campaigning before the March 4 presidential election and less than a month after Prime Minister Vladimir Putin assailed Ekho Moskvyy for "covering him in diarrhea."

Gazprom Media CEO Nikolai Senkevich told Kommersant that the holding decided to press for the boardroom changes now because of "heightened attention toward the station from different sides." He refused to elaborate.

Venediktov has pointed out that Gazprom Media issued its boardroom demands on Dec. 30, weeks before Putin's attack.

Analysts speculated that the affair was initiated by overeager officials.

"Somebody wanted to do Putin a service, but it turns out that they did him great harm," said Alexei Mukhin of the Center for Political Information, a think tank.

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