

Media Freedom Rally Held as Several News Websites Blocked

April 13, 2014

The  **Moscow Times**

Opposition activists held a march in support of freedom of speech in central Moscow on Sunday amid increasing concern about a crackdown on independent news sources in Russia.

The march and subsequent rally on Prospekt Akademika Sakharova aimed to support media freedom and an open society. A correspondent for radio station Silver Rain estimated that between 3,000 and 4,000 people attended Sunday's event, which was organized by opposition figures including Novaya Gazeta columnist Dmitry Bykov.

The two-hour march and rally featured speeches and an award ceremony with prizes for poor journalism in categories such as "foaming at the mouth" and "noodle factory," referring to Russian state television's news coverage, particularly of the crisis in neighboring Ukraine.

In promoting the Kremlin line, state television has portrayed the new pro-Western government in Ukraine as a "fascist junta" under the control of the U.S. government and determined to oppress Russian speakers in eastern Ukraine. The broadcasts have taken on a harsh anti-American tone.

The first months of 2014 have seen a number of media freedom-related incidents in Russia, including the replacement of Lenta.ru editor Galina Timchenko with a pro-Kremlin journalist and a move by major Russian cable companies to drop independent television channel Dozhd from their packages following a pressure campaign by pro-Kremlin politicians.

Material from The Associated Press is included in this report.

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