

Russia's Media Watchdog Warns Website Over Photo of Trampled Flag

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Znak editor-in-chief Dmitry Kolezev said his agency will go to court to appeal the Roskomnadzor warning.

Russia's media watchdog has issued a warning to the Znak news website for publishing a photo of Syrian demonstrators trampling a Russian flag in protest against Moscow's air strikes.

The photo from a recent rally in Aleppo showed the “desecration of the state flag of the Russian Federation” — a criminal offense under Russian law, media watchdog Roskomnadzor said in a statement Monday.

In the article last week, Znak included sarcastic messages posted by Russian Twitter users, saying that the “demonstration in Aleppo clearly demonstrates yet another undeniable success of Russia's foreign policy.”

Roskomnadzor said Russian law bans “publishing information, the circulation of which carries criminal or administrative penalties,” and warned Znak about the “unacceptability of

violating the laws of the Russian Federation.”

Russian media outlets that receive two warnings within a year can be shut down by the government.

Znak editor-in-chief Dmitry Kolezev said his agency will go to court to appeal the Roskomnadzor warning, and argued that publishing the photograph constituted nothing illegal, independent Ekho Moskvyy radio reported.

After Russia's initial claims that its air strikes in Syria, which began on Sept. 30, were aimed against Islamic State militants and other “terrorists,” Putin has conceded that the operation sought to bolster the government of Syria's President Bashar Assad.

Western officials and analysts have said from the start of the Russian military campaign that the air strikes targeted Assad's opponents in an attempt to strengthen his regime.

“Our task ... is to stabilize the legitimate power and create conditions for a search for a political compromise,” Putin told state-run Rossiya television in a program broadcast Sunday night.

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