

Russia Declares Independent News Site Meduza a 'Foreign Agent'

Individuals and groups labeled as foreign agents are required to report their activities and face heavy financial audits.

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Meduza began publishing out of Latvia in 2014. **Meduza.io**

Russia has declared the leading independent news website Meduza a “foreign agent,” the Justice Ministry [announced](#) Friday amid what critics call the Kremlin’s continuing crackdown on free speech.

A statement on the ministry’s website said the decision, which also includes the Moscow-based Pismi (“First Anti-Corruption Media”) news site, was made “in compliance with the requirements of Russian law.”

Meduza said it rejected the decision and would challenge it in court.

"Earlier today, the Russian authorities designated Meduza as a “foreign agent” media outlet.

We reject this decision categorically and intend to challenge the designation in court," the full statement said.

Related article: [U.S.-Funded RFE/RL to Move Staff Out of Russia Over Crippling 'Foreign Agent' Fines – BBC](#)

Meduza began publishing out of Latvia in 2014 after its then-chief-editor Galina Timchenko fell foul of the authorities and was forced out of Russia. Timchenko's exile was seen in the West and by the Russian opposition as a [blow to independent media](#), with stridently nationalist state-run outlets stepping up what was widely seen as an information war over the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

Russia's 2012 foreign agent law initially targeted media outlets and civil society groups. It has in recent years been expanded to include individual journalists and any foreign-funded persons or entities.

Individuals and groups [labeled](#) as foreign agents are required to report their activities and face heavy financial audits. Other media outlets are also required to clearly label the designated entities as "foreign agents."

Another "foreign agent," the U.S.-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty news website, is facing \$33 million in fines for violating Russia's foreign agent labeling requirements.

Meduza's "foreign agent" designation comes ahead of parliamentary elections this fall in which the ruling pro-Kremlin party is seeking to maintain its supermajority.

Russian lawmakers are also considering legislation banning foreign agents from running for federal office.

Meduza [said](#) on its website that it plans to appeal its inclusion in the list of 19 "foreign agents."

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