

[RU] Limiting freedom of the media in times of war

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On 24 February, Russia's media watchdog, Roskomnadzor (see IRIS 2012-8/36), issued a general instruction to all media outlets, when reporting on the "special operation" in Ukraine, to use information only from official Russian sources. It reported, that "in recent hours, the number of cases of dissemination by the media and other information resources operating on the Internet of unverified and unreliable information has significantly increased." This general warning, in particular, referred to Article 49 ("Duties of a Journalist") of the 1991 Statute on the Mass Media, requiring checking authenticity of information prior to its dissemination.

Roskomnadzor informed media and information resources, that when preparing their materials and publications regarding the conduct of the "special operation", they were obliged to use information and data received by them "only if it comes from official Russian sources". "We emphasise that it is Russian official information sources that have, and disseminate, accurate and topical information," Roskomnadzor concluded. In its further statements, Roskomnadzor said that upon the requirement of the Prosecutor General's Office it had started to block Internet resources that hosted false information. These resources were blocked without specific warnings or explanations of what exactly was to be considered false. Roskomnadzor noted that the Investigative Committee of Russia would be provided with "materials on such cases" in order to determine the criminal liability of the owners of such media resources. The only specific example given by Roskomnadzor was the use of words "attack", "invasion", and/or "a declaration of war" instead of the official label of a "special operation". Dissemination of information about the shelling of Ukrainian cities and the death of civilians in Ukraine as a result of "actions of the Russian Army", as well as "mass losses" of the Russian military personnel was also considered illegal.

In accordance with Art. 15.3 of Federal Law No. 149-FZ "On Information, Information Technologies and Information Protection" (see IRIS Extra 2021, pp. 15-16), the online resources of Ekho Moskvyy radio, InoSmi, Mediazona, New Times, TV-Dozhd, Svobodnaya Pressa, Krym.Realii, Novaya Gazeta, Journalist, Lenizdat, and other media outlets were blocked.

Roskomnadzor also launched an administrative investigation into the dissemination of unreliable, publicly significant information by the listed media.

The offence is punishable with a fine of up to RUB 5 million (about EUR 62,000 at the then exchange rate) and Roskomnadzor warned that it would promptly block dissemination of such reports online.

In her public statements on these developments, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media stated that the actions of Roskomnadzor amounted to the introduction of censorship. “Taken together, these measures lead to an establishment of a state monopoly on information in the Russian Federation,” she said.

Вниманию средств массовой информации и иных информационных ресурсов

<https://rkn.gov.ru/news/rsoc/news74084.htm>

Attention of media outlets and other information resource

Роскомнадзор предупреждает владельцев российских интернет-ресурсов об ответственности за распространение рекламных сообщений с недостоверной информацией

<https://rkn.gov.ru/news/rsoc/news74120.htm>

Roskomnadzor warns the owners of Russian Internet resources about the responsibility for the dissemination of advertising messages with false information

Установлены факты распространения недостоверной информации в СМИ

<https://rkn.gov.ru/news/rsoc/news74112.htm>

Established were facts of dissemination of false information in the media

OSCE Media Freedom Representative: “Russian authorities should stop further jeopardizing media freedom and safety of journalists

<https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/513334>

OSCE Media Freedom Representative strongly denounces Russian authorities’ restriction on freedom of the media and freedom of information

<https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/512950>

