



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of
Russian Government Actions and U.S. Policy

Russia Reform Monitor No. 2515

March 14, 2022 **Ilan I. Berman, Sydney Duckor, Vlada Kirilenko**

Related Categories: Cybersecurity and Cyberwarfare; Europe Military; Public Diplomacy and Information Operations; Russia; Ukraine

WESTERN NEWS OUTLETS CLOSE UP SHOP...

U.S. broadcaster *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* has announced that it is shutting down its operations inside Russia. On March 5th, the broadcaster suspended work in Russia after local tax authorities initiated bankruptcy proceedings against RFE's Russian office. The new proceedings were the culmination of a long-running campaign against the outlet by the Kremlin designed to impede and interrupt its functioning.

RFE is hardly the only Western media outlet to withdraw from Russia amid the ongoing war in Ukraine and growing Kremlin pressure on independent media, however. On March 8th, the *New York Times* announced that it was pulling its news staff out of Russia in the wake of the Russian government's passage of a draconian new law making it punishable with up to 15 years in prison to disseminate what it considers to be "false information" about the new conflict. "Russia's new legislation seeks to criminalize independent, accurate news reporting about the war against Ukraine. For the safety and security of our editorial staff working in the region, we are moving them out of the country for now," the paper said in an official statement.

Others are following suit. To date, *The Moscow Times* has documented, the *BBC*, *CNN*, *Bloomberg*, *ABC News*, *CBS News*, Canada's *CBC* and *Radio Canada*, Spain's *EFE* and *RTVE*, Italy's *RAI*, and Germany's *ARD* and *ZDF* have all suspended their operations inside Russia. The *Washington Post*, meanwhile, has announced that its stories from within Russia will run without a byline or dateline, to protect its contributors inside the country. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 6, 2022; *New York Times*, March 8, 2022; *The Moscow Times*, March 8, 2022)

...AS THE KREMLIN TARGETS RUSSIAN MEDIA

The exodus of Western media outlets from Russia has been mirrored by the shuttering of independent Russian journalistic publications and channels. To date, the *Dozhd* TV channel has been blocked and closed down. So has the influential *Ekho Moskvy* radio station. Meanwhile, internet sites like *Meduza* and *Mediazona* have been blocked, with access to them restricted for ordinary Russian citizens. (*The Moscow Times*, March 8, 2022)

THE BIRTH OF RUNET?

For years, the Kremlin has touted the idea of a "sovereign internet," in which Russian websites and online content are disconnected from the broader World-Wide Web. Now, it appears that the war in Ukraine has accelerated those plans. Russia's deputy digital minister, Andrei Chernenko, reportedly issued a letter in early March ordering Russian websites and online portals to transfer their domains to Russian servers by March 11th. The letter "stated that all Russian state-owned web services must make sure they have switched to domain name system (DNS) servers located on Russian soil by Friday, meaning any web services which do not do so would be cut off," London's *Express* has reported. The development has led observers to speculate that the launch of Russia's sovereign internet, colloquially known as RuNet, could be mere weeks away. (*Express*, March 8, 2022)

AN ATTEMPTED RUSSIAN EXODUS

Worries over the possibility of the Russian government imposing martial law or the imposition of a military draft for men of fighting age are causing more and more Russians to attempt to leave the country. However, they face both economic and practical constraints to doing so. With a growing number of countries imposing sanctions on Russia, the price of airline tickets has skyrocketed. Meanwhile, an expanding list of destinations is no longer accessible to Russian-origin flights, as countries shut their borders to commerce with – and travel from – Russia. (Reuters, March 3, 2022)