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## **LATVIA: Broadcasting permit canceled for exiled Russian broadcaster Dozhd TV**

### **Broadcasting permit canceled for exiled Russian broadcaster Dozhd TV**

[Committee to Protect Journalists](#) (08.12.2022) – Latvian authorities must reverse their decision to cancel the broadcasting permit of independent broadcaster Dozhd TV (TV Rain), the Committee to Protect Journalists said Thursday.

On Tuesday, December 6, the Latvian National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP), the country's media regulator, canceled the outlet's broadcasting authorization "due to a threat to national security and public order" and accused the broadcaster of violating the country's media law, according to [multiple media reports](#), [a statement](#) by the regulator, and its [official decision](#).

The regulator ordered the channel to stop broadcasting on Thursday, December 8, and ordered its programming on YouTube to be blocked in Latvia as well, those reports said.

Dozhd TV was based in Russia until March 3, when it was forced to [suspend its work](#) and flee the country amid a crackdown on coverage of Russia's war on Ukraine. The channel resumed operations from exile in July after obtaining a broadcasting permit from Latvian authorities, [news reports said](#).

"As a country that has been through the process of building vibrant independent media, Latvia knows well that this process is hardly smooth and easy. Latvian authorities should ensure that any regulatory violations by media outlets are handled proportionately, and that outlets' licenses are only revoked as a last resort," said Carlos Martinez de la Serna, CPJ's program director, in New York. "Authorities should reverse their decision to strip Dozhd TV of its broadcast authorization, and should continue hosting the media outlet and its journalists, who could otherwise become even an easier target for Russian authorities."

Because Dozhd TV's Latvian license granted the channel

broadcast rights to other European countries, the cancellation will also result in the broadcaster being taken off-air in Estonia and Lithuania, according to [media reports](#) and the [Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission](#). CPJ was unable to immediately confirm the other countries where the broadcaster may be barred from broadcasting.

Before canceling the broadcaster's license, the NEPLP cited Dozhd TV for multiple alleged violations. In November, the NEPLP fined Dozhd TV 4,000 euros (US\$4,200) for failing to provide a Latvian-language soundtrack to its programming, according to the regulator's December 6 [decision](#), published on its website.

Dozhd TV chief editor Tikhon Dzyadko told CPJ via email and messaging app that the channel had appealed that decision as unfounded, given that Dozhd's application for a Latvian license stated that the channel would not be able to provide a Latvian soundtrack before 2023.

"We had no desire to break the laws, but with the relaunch, we were not able to implement everything at once," he told CPJ. He said the NEPLP had accepted the outlet's application which stipulated that the channel would feature Latvian subtitles for its 2022 programming and its archives, but added that Dozhd TV had fallen behind on producing those.

On December 2, the NEPLP fined Dozhd TV 10,000 euros (US\$10,500) for having shown a map that labeled Crimea as part of Russia and for referring to the Russian military as "our army," according to [media reports](#) and the regulator's

decision.

Also on December 2, the Latvian State Security Service [launched](#) an investigation into Dozhd TV after journalist Aleksei Korostelev [made comments](#) during a broadcast the previous day that implied that the broadcaster had assisted the Russian military in Ukraine.

Korostelev, who was [fired](#) on December 2, later [explained](#) that he had poorly phrased his comments and did not support the invasion. The investigation concluded that those comments were “directed against the interests of Latvia’s national security,” according to [a statement](#) by the State Security Service.

The final December 6 decision to cancel Dozhd TV’s licence was made based on Article 21.3.8 of the Latvian [Electronic Media Act](#), which empowers the regulator to cancel the broadcast permit of any outlet that “threatens national security or significantly threatens public order or security,” judging that Korostelev’s comments were calls “to support a country, recognized as a state supporting terrorism,” according to regulator’s decision.

The two fines were also considered when reaching that decision, NEPLP Vice-Chair Aurēlija Ieva Druviete told CPJ via email.

Dzyadko also [wrote on Telegram](#) that the channel “had never, is not, and will never” help the Russian army with equipment.

During a [live broadcast](#) on Tuesday, he compared the ban in Latvia with the channel [being taken off air](#) in Russia in 2014.

In that broadcast, Dzyadko said that no Dozhd TV representative was invited to the NEPLP meeting that decided the outlet's suspension, and the outlet was unable to argue on its behalf. The regulator wrote in its decision that the "urgency" of the situation allowed it to decide without hearing from the channel's management.

NEPLP President Ivars Āboliņš [wrote on Twitter](#) that Dozhd TV's management "did not understand the nature and gravity of each individual violation" of Latvia's regulations.

In a statement reviewed by CPJ, Āboliņš added that Latvia had accepted "a large number" of Russian media outlets and journalists into the country, who had not violated the country's laws. He said that Dozhd TV had "systematically, significantly and unequivocally violated the regulatory acts and has been punished accordingly."

Dzyadko told CPJ via email that he believed the suspension was "absurd and unjustified," and said the broadcaster's staff "strongly oppose the accusations."

In a [statement](#), Dozhd TV said it will stop broadcasting on cable in Latvia, but would continue its work on YouTube. The station's general director Natalia Sindeyeva [told](#) independent news website Meduza, and Dzyadko confirmed to CPJ, that about 20% of the station's revenue comes from its cable

broadcasting.

Dozhd TV has one month to appeal the decision, and Dzyadko told CPJ that the channel was “considering options.”

CPJ emailed the Latvian State Security Service for comment, but did not receive any reply.

*Photo credits: Reuters*

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