

ALERT

Two Russian Media Operatives Indicted for Conspiracy to Violate FARA

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On September 4, 2024, two employees of the Russian state-funded media outlet RT (formerly known as Russia Today) were indicted in the Southern District of New York for conspiracy to violate the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) and conspiracy to commit money laundering. The indictment alleges that the two covertly funded and directed a U.S. company to produce content that furthered Russian interests.

Kostiantyn Kalashnikov and Elena Afanasyeva, the individuals charged, are accused of funneling nearly \$10 million into a Tennessee-based company to create and distribute thousands of videos intended to influence U.S. audiences. These videos reportedly promoted pro-Russia narratives and divisive content, aiming to shift American public opinion in favor of Russian geopolitical goals.

RT is a state-controlled media outlet funded directly by the Russian government. Through RT, Kalashnikov and Afanasyeva allegedly operated out of Moscow using shell companies, fake personas, and covert communication channels to push pro-Russian agendas through an online, Tennessee-based company ("U.S. Company-1"). Posing as outside editors to U.S. Company-1, Kalashnikov and Afanasyeva published content that directly aligned with the goals of the Russian government. Wire transfers show that RT sent \$9.7 million to U.S. Company-1. Neither Kalashnikov, Afanasyeva, nor U.S. Company-1 had registered under FARA or disclosed its foreign funding.

"Covert attempts to sow division and trick Americans into unwittingly consuming foreign propaganda represents attacks on our democracy," FBI Director Christopher A. Wray said in a statement released by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). "Today's actions

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Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA)
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show that as long as foreign adversaries like Russia keep engaging in hostile influence campaigns, they are going to keep running into the FBI. We will continue to do everything we can to expose the hidden hand of foreign adversaries like Russia and disrupt their efforts to meddle in our free and open society.”

This most recent indictment underscores the broad scope of FARA, which is far more than just a foreign lobbying law. Indeed, FARA is a transparency statute that targets not only traditional lobbying activities on behalf of foreign governments and other foreign interests, but also a broad range of other political and quasi-political activities within the United States. These activities include acting as an “information service employee” or “publicity agent” on behalf of a foreign interest, as well as engaging in “political activities” on behalf of a foreign interest. Notably, each of these terms is broadly defined under the statute. The charges against Kalashnikov and Afanasyeva also underscore ongoing concerns about foreign media and other influence campaigns targeting the United States, particularly in an election year, as well as DOJ’s heightened efforts to ensure that covert information dissemination operations are brought to light.

Please contact the FARA attorney listed on this alert for any questions.

View Wiley's FARA Handbook [here](#)

Maddie Van Aken, a Legislative and Reporting Coordinator at Wiley Rein LLP, contributed to this alert.