

Lawmakers Demand Probe of Watchdog

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Golos, the country's only independent elections watchdog, came under fresh attack Wednesday as three lawmakers from different political parties demanded an investigation into whether it received U.S. financing and its closure if it had violated the law.

The lawmakers from United Russia, the Liberal Democratic Party and A Just Russia have lodged a request for an investigation with the Prosecutor General's Office, Interfax reported Wednesday.

One of the signatories, Anton Belyakov of A Just Russia, accused Golos of working with foreign money for Russia's geopolitical rivals with an aim to reduce the investment appeal of Russia and discredit it.

"In Golos ... we see those who hate for money," Belyakov told The Moscow Times.

Belyakov said he didn't want Golos to be closed but wanted the public to know its sources of financing.

Another signatory, Andrei Nazarov of United Russia, said in an interview that Golos was not needed because Russia has "a lot" of independent organizations monitoring elections and "we are able to control our elections ourselves." He said he was not ready to identify any of the other independent organizations.

Nazarov added that the State Duma elections law bans elections monitors from receiving financing from abroad.

However, the 2005 law, posted on the web site of the Central Elections Commission, only bans foreign organizations from "activities contributing to or obstructing electoral administration," and from "agitating" for and financing a candidate.

Earlier elections laws from 1995 and 1996 regulate nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations but don't ban them from receiving foreign financing.

Golos has never hidden its donors, which include the European Union, the British Embassy in Moscow and the American USAID, but insisted that foreign funding does not bias its activities.

A request for comment submitted to the Prosecutor General's Office went unanswered Wednesday.

But Golos deputy head Grigory Melkonyants [told](#) Dozhd TV that his group would complain to the Prosecutor General's Office about the appeal for an investigation.

A Just Russia leader Sergei Mironov also took issue with the decision of his party member to sign the appeal, saying Belyakov would be reprimanded, Dozhd reported.

Golos has traditionally helped opposition parties fight electoral violations, and the attack by A Just Russia and the Liberal Democrats raised suspicions that some of their members are covertly working together with the Kremlin, Kommersant FM said.

Also Wednesday, the editor and owners of news site Gazeta.ru removed a link to a Golos project, an interactive map of elections violations, prompting one of its editors, Roman Badanin, to resign, Lenta.ru reported, citing a letter by Badanin to his colleagues.

Gazeta.ru editor-in-chief Mikhail Kotov told Lenta.ru that the picture had been removed "for purely commercial reasons," but Badanin said in the letter that his supervision of elections-related coverage had "ceased to satisfy the bosses and owners."

Gazeta.ru's owners include structures connected to billionaires Alisher Usmanov and Alexander Mamut, neither of whom commented on the story Wednesday.

The [link](#) to the Golos project has been relocated to the web sites of Slon.ru and The New Times.

Attacks on Golos started late last week with NTV television reporters approaching the group's activists uninvited over the course of three days to question them on camera about their financing and employers.

NTV said Wednesday that it would air an investigative report about Golos at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Gazeta.ru [reported](#).

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