

Justice Ministry Refuses to Check Golos Election Watchdog

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The Justice Ministry has refused to conduct a check into election watchdog Golos' compliance with recently passed legislation requiring foreign-funded organizations to register as "foreign agents" despite over 100 requests to do so.

The ministry received 120 requests to recognize Golos as a foreign agent, and 350 such requests for the Levada Center, RIA-Novosti reported Monday.

Tatyana Vaghina, the ministry's deputy director of the department for non-profit organizations, explained the move by saying that an organization must show both "signs of being a foreign agent and signs of extremism" for an unscheduled check to be opened. She said that none of the requests received by the ministry contained references to extremism.

The official added that "there were reasons to believe these requests were sent as provocation" because they were sent by e-mail and included no contact details for the

senders.

She also noted that the ministry has not yet received any requests from Russian authorities to check organizations, and that it had not performed a single unscheduled inspection since the passing of the NGO law.

If the ministry detects signs of foreign funding, she explained, it first sends out a warning letter to the organization, and only after that does a court determine whether or not the organization is a "foreign agent."

Vaghina's statement follows accusations by State Duma deputy Vladimir Ovsyannikov last week that Golos had received over \$300,000 in foreign funding. Ovsyannikov sent a request to the Investigative Committee and the Prosecutor General's Office to investigate the election watchdog over the allegations.

Lilia Shibanova, the head of Golos, said the organization last received a grant from the British Embassy in 2012, and that it currently does not accept funds from abroad.

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