

Lugovoi Submits Bill Raising Pressure on 'Foreign Agents'

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The  **Moscow Times**

State Duma deputy Andrei Lugovoi submitted a bill on Friday that would allow the Justice Ministry to impose the politically charged "foreign agent" label on non-commercial organizations, Russian media reports said.

A law passed in 2012 obliges all nongovernmental organizations that receive foreign funding and engage in "political activity" to register as "foreign agents" with the ministry. So far, nearly all NGOs have refused to register because they fear that they will be persecuted if they accept the tag, which they say carries connotations of spying.

Some NGOs have been fined for refusing to register.

Lugovoi's bill would effectively take the decision out of the NGOs' hands, though they could still appeal the ministry's decision to include them on the "foreign agents" register in court, the RIA Novosti state news wire reported.

The bill would also give the Russian authorities more power to carry out inspections

on unregistered NGOs without providing prior notification, Itar-Tass reported.

The government has said that the 2012 "foreign agents" law was needed to reduce the influence of foreign governments on Russian politics, but critics say its sole intention was to put pressure on civil society and limit dissent.

Lugovoi, a member of the Liberal Democratic Party, told Gazeta.ru that his bill is not an attempt to repress NGOs, but to provide greater transparency. "Russians must know who is financing organizations that are engaged in political activities" in Russia, he said.

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