

Russian Authorities Call for Probe of Khodorkovsky's Pro-Democracy Organization

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Mikhail Khodorkovsky

The Justice Ministry has requested that Russia's Prosecutor General probe Open Russia, a pro-democracy organization founded by Kremlin critic and former oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, to determine whether it is operating within the bounds of the law, the Vedomosti newspaper reported Wednesday.

In 2012, Russia adopted legislation requiring nongovernmental organizations that receive foreign funding to register as "foreign agents" if they engage in vaguely defined political activities. The Justice Ministry was later given the power to unilaterally impose the label on NGOs reluctant to register as such.

United Russia lawmaker Alexander Sidyakin reportedly had requested that prosecutors look into the organization's compliance with the law. According to an unnamed source in the State Duma cited by Vedomosti, social organizations like Open Russia are not required to register

themselves with the government but must comply with a series of state regulations.

The organization, whose stated aim is to unite discordant political forces and return Russia to a pro-European development path, has also claimed that its activities do not require it to register with the authorities.

Open Russia's Moscow office was raided by police last month during President Vladimir Putin's annual call-in show, slipping under Russian media's radar. According to documents from the Interior Ministry, the raid had been prompted by the organization's suspected possession of protest-related materials containing alleged calls for extremism. The organization, whose electronic equipment was seized during the raid, has denied the accusations made against it.

Khodorkovsky, jailed for a decade on fraud charges viewed by critics as politically motivated, launched Open Russia in 2001. The organization was closed between 2006 and 2014, only to be relaunched after Khodorkovsky's release from prison in December 2013.

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