

Indignant Over 'Foreign Agent' Label, 2 Russian NGOs Shut Their Doors

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Dmitry Zimin, creator of the Dynasty foundation, attends the PolitProsvet awarding ceremony, which highlights achievements in the sphere of political and civic education, in Moscow, May 27.

Two Russian NGOs announced they would close down Wednesday rather than continue working under the contentious “foreign agent” label with which they have been branded.

The Committee Against Torture and prominent science foundation Dynasty both made the announcements after being ordered by Russian authorities to register as “foreign agents.” Under Russian law, NGOs that receive funding from abroad and engage in loosely defined “political activities” can be declared “foreign agents,” a term slammed by critics as having connotations of Cold War-era espionage.

The council of Dynasty — which has helped finance the research projects of many young academics — took the final decision Sunday to close its doors, according to a one-sentence

statement published Wednesday on its website.

The foundation's founder and head, Russian telecoms magnate Dmitry Zimin, said last month that his organization would probably close, soon after it was declared a "foreign agent" and fined 300,000 rubles (\$5,600) for failing to register as one.

Zimin, a Russian national, says that the "foreign funding" Dynasty was accused of accepting was in fact funds from his own personal bank accounts that he keeps abroad.

The liquidation of the Committee Against Torture was announced by its chair Igor Kalyapin, who told the Slon news website that the NGO was not willing to put up with the label of "foreign agent."

Kalyapin said he did not have the authority to make a final decision on his own, and that a meeting would be held by members of the organization. They will support the decision to close down the organization, he was cited by Slon as saying.

The Committee Against Torture, headquartered in the city of Nizhny Novgorod, tried to fight the "foreign agent" label in court, but on Wednesday the court rejected its appeal to overturn the decision to include the organization in the controversial list.

Being labeled as a "foreign agent" does not require an organization to close. However, they must openly display their status, and are subjected to heightened government inspections.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov expressed regret over Dynasty's decision to close its doors, but said that being on the list of "foreign agents" did not preclude organizations from continuing to function.

"We are sorry that the foundation's management decided to liquidate it," he was quoted by the Interfax news agency as saying Wednesday.

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