

Russian Justice Ministry Proposes Further Checks to 'Foreign Agent' NGOs

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A woman surveys the work of a graffiti artist, who has painted the words "Foreign Agent" on the side of a building.

The Justice Ministry has proposed legal amendments that would set a procedure for the government to shut down nongovernmental organizations deemed "foreign agents," state-run news agency TASS reported.

The bill would require NGOs designated as "foreign agents" to supply the Justice Ministry with thorough accounts of their projects or events, TASS reported Tuesday.

The groups should provide "programs and other documents that serve as grounds for holding events that are financed through [or] conducted with the involvement of foreign sources, and a comprehensive report about their use," an explanatory note to the bill read, TASS reported.

Groups that repeatedly fail to comply with the Justice Ministry's paperwork requirements

could be shut down under the bill, the report said.

The “foreign agent” label is required by Russian law to be attached to all NGOs that receive funding from abroad and engage in vaguely defined political activity.

On Tuesday, the Rostov region's Don Women rights group became the latest addition to the list of NGOs deemed “foreign agents,” the Justice Ministry said in an online statement.

The organization had not reacted to the announcement on Wednesday but in an old post on its Facebook page, the organization asked people not to believe “the flood of lies and slander,” stating it “is not, never was and never will be a foreign agent.”

Many respected NGOs have chosen to close their Russian offices rather than carry the label, which carries connotations of Soviet-era espionage.

The bill, which the Justice Ministry presented for review to the presidential Human Rights Council, would also ban government officials from holding leadership positions within NGOs designated as “foreign agents,” and from taking overseas trips funded by foreign governments, organizations or citizens, or by Russian groups that receive funding from abroad, TASS reported.

The presidential Human Rights Council discussed the bill at a Tuesday meeting, the report said, without providing any discussion details.

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