

Russia Labels Pussy Riot Activists, Satirist ‘Foreign Agents’

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Nadezhda Tolokonnikova during a 2019 Pussy Riot performance. **ZUMA Wire / TASS**

Russia has [added](#) members of the Pussy Riot art activist collective, a prominent satirist and an independent journalist its registry of “foreign agents” Thursday.

The designations close a year in which Russia labeled nearly every major independent domestic news outlet, as well as dozens of individual journalists and activists, a “foreign agent.”

Founding Pussy Riot member Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and fellow member Nika Nikulshina have been added to the Justice Ministry’s “foreign agents” registry.

Tolokonnikova, 32, was among the Pussy Riot members who were sentenced to prison for their 2012 protest performance in central Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral that criticized the Russian Orthodox Church's close ties with President Vladimir Putin.

Anti-Kremlin satirist Viktor Shenderovich; Taisiya Bekbulatova, chief editor of the

independent Holod news website; and art collector and former Kremlin advisor Marat Gelman have also been added to the list.

"These people systematically distribute materials to an indefinite circle of persons, while receiving foreign funds," the Justice Ministry's statement said.

The ministry's registry now includes more than 100 entities and individuals, most of which were added in 2021.

Rights advocates denounce the country's "foreign agents" law, saying it seeks to silence groups and individuals that dissent from state narratives by branding them with a label that carries dark connotations from the Soviet era.

Labeled individuals and entities must submit regular financial reports and detailed lists of income and spending, as well as prominently display a wordy disclaimer on all articles, social media posts and other publications — or else face criminal charges.

But officials [defend](#) the law, pointing to what they say are harsher equivalent laws in Western countries.

On Monday, prominent BBC Russian investigative journalist Andrei Zakharov [said](#) he left the country two months after being labeled a "foreign agent," saying he faced "unprecedented surveillance" following his designation.

And Russian courts this week [ruled](#) to liquidate the two main structures of Memorial, Russia's leading human rights group and a key pillar of its civil society, citing repeated violations of the "foreign agent" law.

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