

NGOs Face 'Foreign Agent' Harassment

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A Memorial worker examining the "foreign agent" graffiti Wednesday. The NGO called it an insult to gulag victims.

On the day that a much-criticized "foreign agent" law came into force, at least four nongovernmental organizations that spearheaded the opposition against it were harassed with graffiti and pickets Wednesday.

The Memorial civil rights group and the For Human Rights organization said they found "Foreign Agent" and a heart symbol followed by "USA" sprayed in white paint outside their offices Wednesday morning.

Also on Wednesday, the Young Russia pro-Kremlin youth movement held a picket outside the offices of the Russian branch of Transparency International. Activists handed out a leaflet in which they demanded that the anti-corruption watchdog "come out of the shadows" and officially register as a foreign agent, Transparency representative Gleb Gavrish said.

The picket included some 60 activists wearing sunglasses and carrying flashlights under

the motto "night watch," according to an entry on Young Russia's VKontakte [page](#).

The same day, Young Guard, the ruling United Russia party's youth wing, staged a protest outside the U.S. Russia Foundation, which supports legal reform, RIA-Novosti reported.

The NGOs have said they would boycott the law, which obliges them to register as "foreign agents" if they use any foreign grants for political activities, because they deem it unconstitutional and insulting.

Memorial said in a blog [post](#) that its position remained unchanged and that the graffiti was a "conscious insult" to the millions of gulag victims. The organization is devoted to recording and publicizing Soviet crimes against humanity.

For Human Rights director Lev Ponomarev said he discovered similar graffiti on his office door, a photo of which spread around social networks Wednesday. He told The Moscow Times that he had notified the police.

The new law stipulates that nongovernmental organizations affected by the law must register online with the Justice Ministry. However, the corresponding section of the ministry's [website](#) was inactive as of late Wednesday. Reached by telephone, a ministry spokeswoman could not say when the registry would appear.

Daria Miloslavskaya, a Public Chamber member and NGO law expert, said she expected the registration to become possible only within a few days. She added that she had not heard of any organization that would register voluntarily.

Miloslavskaya said that while the ministry could investigate organizations' compliance with the law, that would probably not happen before late December or January.

But she said the legal situation remained murky as long as there was no clear definition of political activity. "The only definition seems to be a lack of definition," she said, explaining that this could lead to the law being implemented arbitrarily.

The Agora human rights organization said Wednesday that it was suing the ministry for failing to explain the law since it was published four months ago.

"They have not given a single explanation since July 23," Agora lawyer Ramil Akhmetgaliyev told Interfax. Many NGOs, including business lobby groups, have expressed fear that they will be affected by the law because lobbying can be interpreted as political activity.

Meanwhile, the presidential human rights council said a working group devoted to the case of deceased lawyer Sergei Magnitsky would continue to work under the council's new format. The working group would also look at other "decisive cases," Council chairman Mikhail Fedotov said Wednesday, Interfax reported.

Magnitsky died in pretrial detention in 2009 after being arrested on suspicion of fraud. His supporters say the charges were fabricated because the lawyer had investigated a multimillion-dollar tax fraud scheme.

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