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NGO First to Test Foreign Agents Registration Rule

By The Moscow Times

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A regional human rights organization has become the first NGO to voluntarily submit an application for being registered as a foreign agent to better understand the practical implementation of the new law regulating activities of nongovernmental organizations that receive foreign funds.

Human rights organization Shchit i Mech, or Shield and Sword, registered in the Chuvashia republic, filed an application with the Justice Ministry to be included in the list of NGOs getting foreign financing, Kommersant reported Friday, citing the organization's chairman, Alexei Glukhov.

The move is aimed at "studying the new law from inside" and create a law enforcement practice that would help other NGOs avoid being shut, Glukhov said.

He said that Shield and Sword formally meets the criteria for NGOs required to register as

foreign agents: it fights against human right violations and receives funding from the human rights organization Agora, which is financed by the international fund Internews.

According to Russian law, NGOs getting financial support from domestic organizations financed from abroad fall under the foreign agents criteria.

Glukhov said the Justice Ministry, which is responsible for compiling the list of foreign agents, turned out to be unprepared for such applications, since his organization faced difficulties while filling in the form on the ministry' website.

If Shield and Sword makes it on the list, other NGOs will be able to fight against the law more effectively, Agora chief Pavel Chikov told Kommersant.

The Justice Ministry told the newspaper that it hadn't received any application from Shield and Sword or any other organization. An organization can be included into the foreign agents list 10 days after its application is received, the ministry said.

The much-debated foreign agents law went into effect late last month and has been contested by prominent human rights activists who announced that they would boycott the initiative.

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