

Justice Ministry Requires Approval for Use of 'Foreign Agent' Law

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The Justice Ministry called on its regional branches to get approval from the central office before applying the controversial law on foreign agents.

The move was prompted after the Saratov branch issued a warning to a local nongovernmental organization that the central office considered “not fully lawful,” Vedomosti reported Monday, citing Vladimir Titov, head of the ministry’s department on NGOs.

The warning, issued to No to Alcoholism and Drug Addiction in December, marked the first time the ministry had attempted to apply the law, which obliges any organization receiving foreign grants and engaging in political activity to register as a “foreign agent.”

The ministry’s Saratov branch reportedly demanded documentation on where the NGO had got monetary donations in 2011, before the law came into effect. The NGO filed a complaint

over the matter.

The ministry's central office responded with a letter saying that the "foreign agent" law was not retroactively applicable and that the warning had not been issued in connection with the foreign agent law but another law requiring organizations to disclose the sources of their funding.

Justice Minister Alexander Konovalov said earlier that the ministry would not participate in determining the sources of NGOs' funding, saying the task should be left up to agencies that deal with financial monitoring.

The law, which came into force in November, was met with a great deal of criticism and mockery for what many saw as a blatant display of political repression and a return to Cold War antics.

The law also sparked many protests and prompted some NGOs, including the Moscow Helsinki Group, to cease taking foreign grants.

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