

Unannounced Checks of NGOs Persist

By [Natalya Krainova](#)

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Transparency International's local director, Yelena Panfilova, speaking on the phone in her office on Wednesday. **Ivan Sekretarev**

Prosecutors on Wednesday continued performing unannounced inspections of nongovernmental organizations, checking the Moscow offices of three prominent groups and summoning two human rights leaders for questioning.

Officials have inspected about 2,000 NGOs nationwide in the past month, Pavel Chikov, head of the Agora human rights group, said by telephone. On Wednesday, the Moscow offices of Human Rights Watch, Transparency International Russia and the Civic Assistance Committee were inspected.

Yelena Panfilova, head of Transparency International Russia, and Svetlana Gannushkina, head of the Civic Assistance Committee, linked the checks to the recently enforced law obliging NGOs that receive funding from abroad and are involved in political activities to register as "foreign agents."

No such foreign agents have been registered since the law took effect in November, and many NGOs have publicly refused to abide by it, including 11 that complained about the law to the European Court of Human Rights.

Panfilova suggested to The Moscow Times that "there is probably a list" of NGOs that "hypothetically can turn out to be foreign agents." Authorities are checking "the most prominent and the most active organizations," she said.

On Monday, the Moscow offices of Amnesty International, Memorial and the Public Verdict Foundation were inspected. Memorial's office was also inspected last Thursday and Friday and this Tuesday.

"The regime has changed. [President Vladimir] Putin has come, and now they can behave outrageously," Gannushkina said by telephone. "We have to thank Vladimir Vladimirovich [Putin]. They hinder our work greatly."

Gannushkina said the foreign agent law was a "signal" for authorities to act "illegally" toward NGOs.

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton on Tuesday issued a statement voicing concern over the checks of NGOs by authorities in Russia. She said such inspections were "conducted on vague legal grounds" and seem to be aimed at further undermining civil society in the [country](#)."

Agora's Chikov and the head of the Moscow-based For Human Rights movement, Lev Ponomaryov, have been summoned for questioning, Ekho Moskvyy reported. They have called the checks illegal.

The Prosecutor General's Office on Wednesday shrugged off the accusations about illegal checks, saying they were "based on the work plan" of the agency, spokeswoman Marina Gridneva told Interfax.

Ponomaryov was summoned for his refusal to hand prosecutors some documents during an unexpected check of his Moscow office on Monday, he told [Ekho Moskvyy](#).

Ponomaryov may be charged with an administrative offense over not providing the papers, [he said](#).

For Human Rights provided all the documents required by law to the Justice Ministry during a routine check of its activities early this year, Ponomaryov told the radio station.

Prosecutors have asked Agora to provide information about the money it received from foreign sources in 2011 and 2012, as well as copies of documents related to the group's foundation and its activities, the names of its staff, and information about the sources of the group's property and its items of property, said Agora's online mouthpiece, Openinform.ru.

Chikov is scheduled to be questioned [Tuesday](#).

Several NGOs have filed lawsuits against the Prosecutor General's Office in connection with the surprise inspections, Ekho Moskvyy [reported](#) Wednesday, citing Agora.

Contact the author at n.krainova@imedia.ru

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