

U.S. Voices Concern Over Fine of Golos

By [The Moscow Times](#)

April 28, 2013

The  Moscow Times

The United States has voiced concern over Russia's decision to declare independent election monitor Golos a foreign agent in the first such ruling under a law requiring certain groups receiving funding from abroad to register as "foreign agents."

"We're very concerned that the election monitoring NGO Golos has been declared a foreign agent and fined thousands of dollars — the first conviction under Russia's 2012 law on NGOs," U.S. State Department spokesman Patrick Ventrell said at a press briefing in Washington on Thursday, according to a transcript on the State Department's website.

"We're troubled by this and other recent laws that impose restrictions on NGOs in Russia and have been used to justify hundreds of raids on civil society groups and other organizations since early March," Ventrell said.

He noted that due to legal restrictions on the work of NGOs in Russia, the U.S. had to close the office of the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID, and abandon several programs in the country.

Golos was fined 300,000 rubles (\$10,000) on Thursday for failing to register as a foreign agent. A Moscow court ruled that Golos received \$65,470 as part of an award from the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, money the group said it returned. The organization said it would appeal the fine.

Golos reported dozens of voting violations as well as evidence of falsifications during parliamentary elections in December 2011 and the presidential election in March 2012, and state officials have called it a political tool of Western governments.

Fellow NGO Human Rights Watch also criticized the fine of Golos, expressing concern over the authorities' clampdown on civil society.

Rachel Denber, deputy Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch, said in a statement that the decision was "a shot across the bow at Russian civil society and a terrible precedent."

"Russian authorities should withdraw the case against Golos and welcome NGO work, not hinder it." Denber said.

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