

NGOs Find Loophole in 'Foreign Agents' Law

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A nongovernmental organization in Russia has found a way to bypass the law requiring NGOs to register as "foreign agents," a news report said Thursday.

An official at the unidentified NGO told Kommersant that his agency was planning to set up a commercial organization that would officially receive foreign grants. The main NGO will stop receiving financing and will therefore be in compliance with the law. The official's identity was not disclosed.

The NGO law signed by Putin in July of last year obliges all organizations involved in "political activity" that receive funding from abroad to register as "foreign agents" with the Justice Ministry. Many critics say the law is one in a series of steps by the Kremlin to suppress opposition to Putin's rule.

Grigory Melkoyants, deputy director of elections watchdog Golos, told Kommersant that the

law on foreign agents was a "forced measure" introduced by the government and that his organization would do whatever it could to avoid registering. "But if there is a desire to put pressure on us, it doesn't help," he added.

Golos was among the first NGOs to come under attack from law enforcement officials when one of its regional organizations was fined 300,000 rubles (\$10,000) in April for failing to register as a "foreign agent."

The majority of Russian nongovernmental organizations have so far refused to comply, saying their activity is not linked to politics but to human rights issues.

On Thursday, Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich said he would welcome changes to the "foreign agents" bill, news agencies reported.

Many senior officials have appeared visibly uncomfortable with enforcing the law.

Officials have raided hundreds of groups under the law since March. Prosecutors and courts have dubbed 57 NGOs, ranging from vote-monitoring organizations and independent pollsters to a crane sanctuary, "foreign agents," according to legal NGO Agora, which was one of the 57.

Material from The Associated Press is included in this report.

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