

First 'Foreign Agent' NGO Registers Under New Law

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The Justice Ministry has registered the first nongovernmental group under a polarizing law requiring organizations that receive foreign funding and conduct "political activity" to register as "foreign agents."

The organization, called Assisting the Development of Competition in CIS Countries, became the only group to be put on the "foreign agents" list since the law was signed by President Vladimir Putin last July.

Its addition to the list came at the end of a difficult week for some of the country's NGOs. On Tuesday, independent elections watchdog Golos was ordered by the Justice Ministry to cease all its activities for six months, while the group For Human Rights was ordered to vacate its central Moscow office in the wake of a violent nighttime raid carried out last weekend.

The NGO that joined the "foreign agent" list Friday works in the sphere of promoting competition and assisting state agencies with the implementation of anti-trust legislation. It cooperates with foreign agencies and organizations working in the same field, including the European Commission and the Federal Anti-Monopoly Service as well as agencies specializing in competition law in the U.S., Europe and other countries.

It is made up of six partners, each representing one of the jurisdictions in which it carries out its activities, namely Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Armenia and Moldova. The group was initially registered by the Justice Ministry on Dec. 23, 2009, according to its website.

Vasily Rudomino chairs the Moscow-based organization, whose partners consist of professional legal experts and economists specializing in anti-trust legislation. No one at the organization was immediately available for comment on being added to the "foreign agents" list.

Numerous NGOs have protested against the "foreign agents" law since its passage last year, saying that the term "political activity" is vaguely defined and that the label "foreign agent" unfairly connotes that an organization spies for foreign governments.

Putin defended the law last week during a visit to Finland as a measure designed to protect Russia's domestic policy from foreign influence. He also noted that under the law, organizations are not barred from conducting "political activity" while receiving foreign funding, but simply must adopt the label "foreign agent" if they combine the two.

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