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# Justice Ministry Wrong Over NGO Refusal, Says Prosecutor

By The Moscow Times

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The Prosecutor's General's Office has accused the Justice Ministry of exceeding its own authority in its refusal to register the human rights organization Shchit i Mech, or Shield and Sword, as a "foreign agent," Kommersant reported Thursday.

Under the terms of the controversial law that came into force last November, NGOs that receive financial backing from abroad and engage in political activity are required to register as foreign agents.

Shchit i Mech appears to meet those criteria, as it is dedicated to protecting the victims of law enforcement agencies and is indirectly financed by the international fund Internews.

Deputy Prosecutor General Alexei Zhafyarov said in a letter that there is no legal basis for the organization's exclusion and that the ministry had breached its own powers.

The Chuvashia-based organization had volunteered to register with the ministry to understand the inner workings of the new law and to help people fight against it.

The necessary documents were submitted by the group last December, but the ministry rejected the application on the grounds that it does not take part in political activity. The group then asked the first deputy prosecutor, Alexander Buksman, to look into the lawfulness of the decision.

Pavel Chikov, head of the human rights organization Agora, said that Zhafyarov's letter could be a sign of brewing tensions between the two agencies.

"The Justice Ministry has always taken a more cautious stance on the NGO law. They were clearly not happy when the prosecutor's office began a widespread check-up of NGO organizations and tried to help as little as possible. Zhafyarov's letter is a sort of of revenge for that," Chikov added.

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