

Authorities Suspend Golos Branch

By [The Moscow Times](#)

October 01, 2013



The suspension follows the independent elections watchdog's eviction in August.

The Justice Ministry has suspended the activities of a regional branch of independent election watchdog Golos for three months over its failure to register as a "foreign agent" in line with a heavily criticized law on nongovernmental groups that came into force last year.

The organization, which is a division of Russia's main independent election watchdog of the same name and is likewise based in Moscow, has been ordered to suspend its activities until Dec. 30, Interfax reported, citing a Justice Ministry representative.

Those who oppose the NGO law, which obliges groups to register as "foreign agents" if they receive funding from abroad and are involved in "political activity," have linked it to the repressive policies of Soviet authorities during the Cold War, and many prominent organizations have refused to comply with the rule.

The Justice Ministry asked a court in May to fine the regional Golos branch, citing a report by the Federal Financial Monitoring Service that said the organization received more than 4

million rubles (\$124,000) in foreign funding in December 2012. The branch was ordered to pay a fine of 300,000 rubles (\$9,260) by Moscow's Basmanny District Court in early June.

The suspension of the regional branch came as the national Golos on Tuesday announced plans to scrutinize the results of the Sept. 8 Moscow mayoral election, which was won by pro-Kremlin candidate Sergei Sobyenin with just more than 51 percent of the vote. Opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who received just over 27 percent, is appealing the results, alleging that violations helped Sobyenin break the 50 percent barrier needed to avoid a runoff.

The national Golos association saw its work suspended by the Justice Ministry for six months in late June over its failure to comply with the NGO law. Golos employees relaunched the watchdog's activities in early July in the form of a "movement" under the same name but with a different website.

A news report last month said the head of the formerly registered Golos, Lilia Shibanova, was planning to leave Russia amid the turmoil, but current board member Grigory Melkonyants denied this to The Moscow Times, saying Shibanova was abroad to organize the monitoring of foreign elections. "This [report] benefits those who want to discredit Golos by creating an impression that it is no longer active," Melkonyants said.

For more articles on Golos see:

[Election Monitor Golos Evicted Again](#)

[Audit Says Golos Owes 2.3M Rubles in Black Taxes](#)

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/10/01/authorities-suspend-golos-branch-a28161>