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Deputy Prime Minister Backtracks on Charity Criticism

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Deputy Prime Minister Olga Golodets backtracks on charity criticism.

A top government official has backtracked on her earlier criticism of charities providing medical treatment abroad for sick children, a blogger undergoing cancer treatment reported.

Deputy Prime Minister Olga Golodets personally called Anton Buslov, an astrophysicist who has undergone treatment in the U.S., on Tuesday to ensure him no crackdown on medical charities was on the cards a day after he published an appeal to her, challenging her claims about the quality of Russian high-tech medical care.

"I never spoke about administrative pressure on charities and, believe me, did not consider it," Golodets was cited on Buslov's blog as saying.

She also said the government is increasing its collaboration with medical charities.

Golodets said Sunday that charities often needlessly send children for treatment abroad,

bypassing the allegedly improved domestic health care system.

She called for the monitoring of charities involved in such work, as well as of state-employed medics endorsing overseas treatment for young patients.

Golodets did not elaborate on what kind of monitoring she had in mind, but the government has been known to mire undesirable NGOs in red tape.

A prime example are independent rights groups and vote monitors, many of which were labeled "foreign agents" and swamped with work-crippling paperwork in 2012.

Charity representatives interviewed by The Moscow Times said earlier this week that Golodets' initial statement could make doctors on the ground more reluctant to approve sending sick children abroad, with potentially lethal consequences.

They also blamed her criticism of charities on the government's isolationist policy of recent years and general distrust of grassroots activism after the opposition street protests from 2011 to 2013.

Golodets was not the only one to attack charities: The head of the State Duma's Health Protection Committee, Sergei Kalashnikov, said Monday that many foundations are frauds.

"They cheat people and discredit the country ... the majority of them are con artists," Kalashnikov told Kommersant, much to the outrage of charities.

He has not publicly backtracked on his statement and could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

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