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Bill Proposes Softening NGO 'Foreign Agent' Law

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A woman surveys the work of a graffiti artist, who has painted the words "Foreign Agent" on the side of a building.

A legislative commission has approved a bill reducing fines for non-governmental organizations that fail to register with the Justice Ministry as so-called "foreign agents," the government said in a statement Wednesday.

The bill, conceived after the Ministry received complaints from the country's human rights commissioner, proposes halving the minimum penalty for officials from 100,000 rubles ($2,500) to 50,000 rubles ($1,300), and reducing the fine for legal entities down to 100,000 rubles from the initial 300,000 rubles ($7,500).

Russia adopted legislation in 2012 requiring NGOs to register themselves as "foreign agents" with the Justice Ministry if they receive foreign funding and engage in loosely defined "political activity."

In June 2013, the legislation was amended to authorize the Justice Ministry to impose

the "foreign agent" label on NGOs at its discretion.

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