The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Soldiers' Mothers NGO Loses Appeal to Get 'Foreign Agent' Tag Removed

By Anna Dolgov

November 12, 2014



The Justice Ministry in Moscow.

The Justice Ministry has refused to remove the "foreign agent" label it applied to the St. Petersburg branch of the Soldiers' Mothers non-governmental organization, saying it had no procedure for reversing the ruling, the group said.

The organization, which defends conscript soldiers' rights and uncovers military abuses, will appeal at a St. Petersburg city court, its spokesman Alexander Peredruk said Tuesday, the Interfax news agency reported. No hearing date has been set yet, he added.

The Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg appealed to the Justice Ministry earlier this fall to remove the highly loaded "foreign agent" label, arguing that it was no longer merited because the group had stopped receiving funding from abroad.

"We have received a response from the Justice Ministry saying that we will not be removed

from the list of foreign agents," Peredruk was quoted by Interfax as saying. "They are basing it on the fact that there is no such technical possibility — no procedure is envisaged for leaving that list."

A Russian law, passed two years ago and widely criticized by human rights groups, requires any NGO that receives funding from abroad and engages in vaguely defined political activities must register as a "foreign agent." The term had been widely used in the Soviet Union where it meant a spy.

The soldiers' rights group was slapped with the "foreign agent" label after its chairwoman, Ella Polyakova, suggested in comments to independent television channel Dozhd that Russian troops were fighting alongside pro-Moscow separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Polyakova, who is also a member of the Kremlin's human rights council, told Dozhd that more than 100 injured Russian soldiers had been transported to a St. Petersburg hospital from an undisclosed location, suggesting the location may have been Ukraine.

Moscow has long denied accusations from Ukraine and Western governments that it is sending weapons and fighters to Ukrainian separatists. As evidence of Russian involvement continues to mount, Moscow has conceded that a number of Russian troops are helping the separatists as "volunteers."

President Vladimir Putin said at a gathering known as the Valdai Club in late October that the "foreign agent" label may have been erroneously applied to some NGOs that "do not engage in politics."

"This was a mistake. It definitely needs to be corrected," Putin said.

He did not specify whether the label should be removed from organizations that the government considers to be involved in politics but does not rely on foreign funding.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/11/12/soldiers-mothers-ngo-loses-appeal-to-get-foreign-agent-tag-removed-a41258