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Russian NGOs Could Get Stuck With 'Foreign Agent' Tag Permanently

By The Moscow Times

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The Justice Ministry in Moscow.

Nongovernmental organizations designated as "foreign agents" may be stuck with the label permanently after the Justice Ministry said it had no plans to amend the law and write up a procedure for removing the tag.

Even if NGOs stop receiving the funding from abroad that caused their initial registration as a "foreign agent," there is no existing procedure for removing the label, nor are there plans to introduce one, the ministry said in a statement, Interfax reported Thursday.

"Currently, the Justice Ministry of the Russian Federation is not developing any bill that would envisage a mechanism for striking nongovernmental organizations from the registry of organizations that fulfill the functions of a foreign agent," the ministry was quoted as saying.

The statement followed an unsuccessful appeal earlier this week by the St. Petersburg branch of Soldiers' Mothers to remove its "foreign agent" label.

The group, which defends conscripts' rights, argued it was no longer receiving funding from abroad but the Justice Ministry responded by saying there was no procedure to remove their "foreign agent" tag, the NGO's spokesman said.

Russian human rights advocates have denounced the law, which requires any NGO receiving funding from abroad and engaging in vaguely defined political activities to register as a "foreign agent." The term had been widely used in the Soviet Union where it meant a spy.

Several prominent human rights groups in Russia have been targeted under the law, which was introduced in 2012.

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