

Putin Allocates \$74.5 Million to NGOs

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Russian President Vladimir Putin (C) chairs a meeting with members of the government at the Novo-Ogaryovo state residence outside Moscow.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is allocating 4.2 billion rubles (\$74.5 million) this year to nongovernmental organizations that defend human rights or perform other socially significant services, according to a decree released Thursday by the Kremlin.

That figure is almost twice the size of the 2.7 billion rubles that Putin allocated last year.

This year's decree says that the funds will be given out to NGOs based on the results of three competitions to determine which NGOs are worthy of the financial support.

The winners of the competitions will be decided by seven approved organizations that focus on different social spheres, such as for pensioners', women's and children's issues.

The first competition will take place by July 1, the second by Oct. 20 and the third by Dec. 7, says the decree, posted on the government's legal information website.

Last year hundreds of NGOs in Russia were fined an average of 10,600 rubles amid

a government crackdown for violations of legislation regulating such organizations' activities, according to a statement by the Justice Ministry.

The ministry conducted some 7,000 planned and surprise inspections of NGOs last year and issued nearly 37,000 warnings.

Russia has strict laws regarding NGOs, including an obligation for organizations that receive foreign funding and engage in loosely defined "political" activities to register as "foreign agents."

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