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Memorial NGO Fined for Noncompliance With 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 Moscow court has fined the Memorial human rights organization 600,000 rubles ($8,900) for not complying with the controversial "foreign agents" law, news agency TASS reported Friday.

Memorial was warned at the end of June that two articles on its website should include the "foreign agent" label. Memorial, an NGO that advocates the rehabilitation of victims of Soviet repressions, argued that the two articles were published by its sister organization that was not declared a foreign agent and were thus exempt from the law.

The Justice Ministry insisted that the relationship between the two organizations requires that their materials be labeled, the Vedomosti newspaper reported Friday.

President Vladimir Putin signed the so-called foreign agents law in 2012, requiring that all NGOs which receive funding from abroad and are engaged in political activity to declare that

their materials were produced by a “foreign agent,” a term widely associated in Russia with espionage. The law has been broadly criticized for its loose definition of what constitutes “political activity.”

As of Friday, 88 NGOs have been declared foreign agents, according to the Justice Ministry's registry.

Memorial was founded in 1989 as a historical and civil rights society that concentrated on recording and publishing the totalitarian history of the Soviet Union. It operates in numerous Russian regions as well as across former Soviet states.

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