

Putin Promises to Rewrite 'Foreign Agents' Law

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Putin's promise followed the speech of Lyudmila Alexeyeva, the prominent human rights advocate and the founder of Moscow Helsinki Group.

President Vladimir Putin met with the presidential Human Rights Council on Thursday and promised to rewrite the so-called "foreign agents" law requiring that all NGOs which receive funding from abroad and are engaged in political activity to register as "foreign agents," a term widely associated in Russia with espionage, the Kommersant newspaper reported.

The law has been broadly criticized for its loose definition of what constitutes "political activity," and Putin assured the council's members that within three months suggestions on how to refine this exact definition would be introduced.

"The definition of political activity shouldn't be loose, shouldn't be elastic, it should be unified for understanding," the president was cited by Kommersant as saying Thursday.

"This definition, if formulated unclearly, shouldn't in any case be customized for authorities, the Justice Ministry or anyone who sees fit," he said.

Putin's promise followed the speech of Lyudmila Alexeyeva, the prominent human rights advocate and the founder of Moscow Helsinki Group. Alexeyeva asked him to abolish the law.

"You said many times that this law is executed incorrectly. It means it's written incorrectly, and it's unlikely it can be corrected. [You should] abolish this harmful law," she was cited by Kommersant as saying.

The law was adopted in 2012. Since then several prominent NGOs that had little to do with politics had to shut their doors, facing the prospect of either being labeled foreign agents or being stripped of their funding.

In July, Russian human rights organization the Committee Against Torture has formally decided to close its doors, citing its refusal to accept the label of "foreign agent."

Its closure came on the heels of another one — of prominent science foundation Dynasty that shut down after being ordered by the authorities to register as a "foreign agent," and was ordered to pay a fine of 300,000 rubles (\$5,600) for failing to do so.

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