Russian Branch of Bellona Ecology NGO Closes Over 'Foreign Agent' Status

October 13, 2015

During an unscheduled inspection, officials identified political activity within a Bellona Murmansk report on industrial pollution in Russia's northern Barents region, Russian media reported.

Bellona Murmansk, a Russian branch of the Norwegian environmental organization, has closed down but hopes to re-establish itself soon in a new legal form, the NGO said on its website this week.

"Bellona Murmansk will continue its work under a different kind of bureaucratic structure that will free it from the yoke of being branded a foreign agent," Bellona's executive director Nils Bohmer was cited as saying.

The Murmansk branch was declared a "foreign agent" in March 2015 by the regional Justice Ministry under a 2012 law that requires all NGOs to label themselves as "foreign agents" if they receive funding from abroad and engage in vaguely defined political activities.

During an unscheduled inspection, officials identified political activity within a Bellona Murmansk report on industrial pollution in Russia's northern Barents region, Russian media

reported.

The "foreign agent" status was questioned soon afterward by Russia's Civic Chamber secretary Alexander Brechalov. In a June interview with the Kommersant newspaper, he said the chamber was looking into whether regional authorities were attempting to use the "foreign agent" label to influence Bellona Murmansk's activities.

Bellona was founded in Norway in 1986. Its office in Russia's northwest city of Murmansk opened in 1994, and soon after found itself at the center of an espionage scandal after it published a report on the radiation dangers presented by decaying Russian nuclear submarines.

One of the report's authors, retired submarine officer Alexander Nikitin, battled espionage and treason charges for several years before he was finally acquitted.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/10/13/russian-branch-of-bellona-ecology-ngo-closes-over-foreign-agent-status-a50230