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Russian Justice Ministry Accuses NGO of Plotting Government Overthrow

By The Moscow Times

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On July 21, 2014, the Memorial human rights center was included on the register of organizations that perform the functions of a “foreign agent.”

Russia's Justice Ministry has accused the Memorial human rights organization of seeking to overthrow the Russian government, Russian media reported Tuesday.

Memorial received a letter from the Justice Ministry on Nov. 9 accusing them of “undermining the constitutional order of the Russian Federation, calling for the overthrow of the current government and changing the country's political regime," chairman of the NGO's board Alexander Cherkasov wrote on the Memorial website on Tuesday.

The Justice Ministry's 15-page letter and any further action that may be taken against them will be challenged in court, Memorial board member Oleg Orlov said, Interfax reported Tuesday.

"Not a single example was given of a call to overthrow the government, but there are examples of our criticism of the authorities and our disagreement with them, our utterances. Apparently, now criticism of the authorities is equivalent to calling for the overthrow of the government," he said.

Orlov does not know what the consequences of the letter may be, but he does not rule out the possibility that the government will seek to close Memorial, Interfax reported.

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A 2012 law requires NGOs to label themselves "foreign agents" if they receive funding from abroad and engage in vaguely defined political activities. The term has been slammed by critics as suggestive of espionage and NGOs across the country have fought to rid themselves of the label.

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