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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Memorial May Face Prosecution For 'Plotting Government Overthrow"

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About 100 cultural and other public figures had signed an open letter in support of Memorial as of Thursday, the Kommersant newspaper reported.

Following accusations of “undermining the constitutional order” against the human rights organization Memorial, Russia's Justice Ministry has passed on the results of a recent inspection of the NGO's work to the Prosecutor General's Office.

According to an online statement by Alexander Cherkasov, chairman of the NGO's board, the ministry sent Memorial a 15-page letter accusing the organization of “calling for the overthrow of the current government and changing the country's political regime.”

The letter, received on Nov. 9, cited Memorial's online publications critical of Russia's involvement in the Ukraine crisis, as well as of guilty verdicts for activists involved in the anti-government protests on Bolotnaya Ploshchad in May 2012.

Memorial board member Oleg Orlov responded by saying that “not a single example had been given of a call to overthrow the government,” Interfax reported Tuesday.

He added that any further action that may be taken against the organization will be challenged in court.

Russia's Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights has launched an independent investigation into the evidence presented by the ministry. It is set to present its conclusions within two weeks, the head of the council Mikhail Fedotov was quoted as saying by the Vedomosti newspaper.

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The rights group had previously come close to closure, with a motion to liquidate it based largely on a technicality debated in Russia's Supreme Court in December 2014.

In October this year, Memorial filed for bankruptcy after its refusal to register as a "foreign agent" — a label slapped on all NGOs which receive foreign funding and engage in vaguely defined political activity by a law from July 21, 2014 — resulted in fines totaling 900,000 rubles ($14,000).

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