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Orthodox Church Receives Majority of Russian Government Grants

By The Moscow Times

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The Orthodox Church has been the biggest beneficiary of presidential grants given to non-governmental organizations, or NGOs, in Russia over the past several years, a study published Monday revealed.

According to the report prepared by the Center for Economic and Political Reforms, the organizations controlled by the Moscow Patriarchate or close to the Russian Orthodox Church, received at least 63 presidential grants worth 256 million rubles ($3.6 million) between 2013 and 2015.

Among other large recipients of government grants are are pro-Kremlin youth organizations, which received more than 100 million rubles over the same period, the study found out.

Another big beneficiary of presidential grants are NGOs promoting an Eurasianism ideology that supports anti-Western sentiment and the idea of a multipolar world.

In the three years between 2013 and 2015, such organizations received dozens of grants worth more than 90 million rubles ($1.2 million), according to the study.

The study also reveals that since 2012, the total amount of grants awarded to non-commercial organizations has been constantly growing.

In 2013, 2.5 billion rubles ($35 million) were granted to NGOs, 2.5 times more than in 2012. In 2014, the amount of grants increased to 3.6 billion rubles ($50.7 million), followed by 4.2 billion rubles($59 million) allocated in 2015.

The authors of the study attribute the sharp increase of the spending on NGOs to the tense climate in Russia's domestic and foreign policy.

The government was forced to spend more money on NGOs because of the tightening of control over foreign funding of non-commercial organizations because of the so-called foreign agents law, the report said.

In 2012, Russia passed a legislation requiring all NGOs that receive foreign funding and are engaged in political activity, to register as “foreign agents”, a Soviet term for spy. A number of prominent NGOs have decided to shut down rather than accept the label of "foreign agent."

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