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Pro-Kremlin Group Want Levada Pollster Investigated as 'Foreign Agent'

By Ed Crowther

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The pro-Kremlin "Anti-Maidan" movement has written to Russia's Justice Ministry demanding that the independent pollster Levada Center be investigated as a "foreign agent," the Lenta news website reported Monday.

The group has accused Levada of receiving over $120,000 from the U.S. government since 2012.

Russia's 2012 law on foreign agents requires NGOs who receive funding from abroad and engage in loosely defined political activity to register as "foreign agents," incurring additional police scrutiny and checks.

A number of NGOs have shut down, unwilling to work under such conditions. Others have given up foreign funding and suffered bankruptcy. There are currently over 80 NGOs listed as foreign agents in Russia.

Levada has already been threatened with being forced to register as a foreign agent. In 2013, following an investigation and facing pressure from authorities, the pollster suspended all foreign funding.

Now, in a statement on its website, Anti-Maidan have claimed that "commissioned by the U.S. military, this Russian investigative service [Levada] gathered information in Moscow and Russia's regions."

The group also claim that "Wisconsin University acted as an intermediary between the Pentagon and the Levada Center."

The Levada Center's director Lev Gudkov responded by accusing the Anti-Maidan movement of slander, Lenta reported.

"We don't have the right to receive grants or direct financing but we can fulfill commercial contracts to carry out investigative work," he said.

"This isn't against the law."

He confirmed that the Levada Center received money from the U.S. for a project on living conditions for Wisconsin University.

"This is an important part of our work as we are not state funded," Gudkov said.

Russia's nationalist Anti-Maidan movement was founded in 2015, nominally to fight against "illegal" political change and "color" revolutions, such as the events in Kiev's Maidan square which led to regime change in Ukraine in 2014.

Last week Anti-Maidan wrote to the General Prosecutor accusing the pro-opposition television channel Dozhd of repeatedly breaking broadcasting laws on extremism.

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