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Russian Prosecutor General Rejects Presidential Human Rights Council's Proposal to Soften Law on 'Foreign Agents'

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Vladimir Putin meets with the Presidential Human Rights Council in August 2012. **Kremlin Press Service**

The Russian Prosecutor General's Office has condemned a new legislative proposal by the Presidential Human Rights Council, characterizing it as an attempt to create loopholes in federal laws against so-called "foreign agents," according to a report by the news website Meduza.

According to prosecutors, the new proposal is a clear effort to exclude non-governmental watchdog work from definitions of "political activity," which foreign-funded groups in Russia currently cannot perform without being labeled "foreign agents" and incurring crippling regulations.

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Human rights advocates on the Presidential Council say Russian police should only consider organizations' watchdog activity to be "political" if the group in question is a political party or an association with openly political aims.

According to the Prosecutor General's Office, however, the purpose of watchdog work is to influence state policies and the decisions made by the public authorities, and allowing NGOs to accept money from abroad and conduct this kind of work, the office says, would open the door to meddling by foreign interests in Russia's domestic affairs.

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Russia's 2012 law on foreign agents requires NGOs that 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 more than 80 NGOs listed as foreign agents in Russia.

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