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Prominent Anti-Racism NGO Sued Under Russian 'Undesirables' Law

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The Moscow Prosecutor's Office **Moscow Prosecutor's Office Press Service**

The City Prosecutor's Office is suing a prominent anti-extremism monitoring think-tank under Russia's infamous 2015 "undesirable organization" law, the group said in an online post on Thursday.

The SOVA Center — a group that researches nationalism, xenophobia and racism in Russia — said Moscow city prosecutors have summoned its director Alexander Verkhovsky to press charges for links to two blacklisted U.S.-based institutions on SOVA's website.

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the Open Society Foundation of George Soros (OSF) were declared "undesirable organizations" under the so-called "foreign agents" law passed by Russia in 2012. SOVA said that links to their websites were included in the center's "About Us" section, listed as "donors from previous years."

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SOVA argued in their Thursday statement that the links did not “spread the material directly” but “adhered to online etiquette” by allowing users to familiarize themselves with the organizations. “In the current situation, the SOVA Center is forced to remove these links,” the group said. The OSF and NED remain listed on the center’s website on Thursday.

Russia’s Justice Ministry blacklisted the SOVA Center as a “foreign agent” in December 2016. The 2012 law requires politically engaged NGOs that receive funding from abroad to register under the label, which has Soviet-era connotations of espionage.

It implies additional and often crippling scrutiny from law enforcement and, under a 2015 amendment, allows prosecutors to shut down "undesirable" foreign non-profit groups without judicial scrutiny.

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