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Russia Blacklists Progressively Fewer 'Foreign Agent' NGOs, Justice Ministry Says

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Russia has blacklisted NGOs at a progressively slower rate since an infamous foreign agent law was signed in 2012, the Justice Ministry has said in an annual report.

President Vladimir Putin observed last year that the sharp decline in "foreign agents" resulted from organizations turning down foreign funding. The law has been denounced by activists who claim it seeks to silence groups critical of the Kremlin's human rights record.

Related article: 'Foreign Agent' NGOs Are Turning Down Foreign Funding, Says Putin

Five times fewer "foreign agent" NGOs were blacklisted between 2015 and 2017, the Vedomosti business daily cited the Justice Ministry's annual report as saying on Thursday.

The 2016-2017 period saw a threefold decrease in new "foreign agent" additions.

"We must gradually come to a situation where only those who have submitted an application for inclusion remain in the registry," Vedomosti cited the head of the Presidential Human Rights Council, Mikhail Fedotov, saying.

In 2017, 38 "foreign agent" NGOs received 603.5 million rubles ($9.7 million) in funding from abroad, mostly from the United States, Switzerland, Germany and Britain.

In the same time period, the 4,700 NGOs that are registered in Russia received a total of 69.4 billion rubles ($1.1 billion).

The foreign agent NGOs performed a range of political activities, including calling on the government's resignation and calling for street protests against draconian anti-terrorism laws, Vedomosti cited the Justice Ministry's report as saying.

The European Court of Human Rights is processing cases for scores of Russian NGOs that were branded as foreign agents, including the human rights group Memorial, on claims that the 2012 law violates citizens' rights to freedom of speech and assembly.

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