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Czech Humanitarian Group Declared ‘Undesirable’ in Russia

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Russia’s Justice Ministry has declared a Czech humanitarian relief group “undesirable” three years after the group was kicked out of a pro-Russian self-proclaimed state in eastern Ukraine.

The People in Need NGO, which helps people affected by wartime crises and natural disasters, ended its eastern Ukrainian operations in 2016 after separatists in the Donetsk People's Republic did not renew its accreditation. The group, which says its work in Russia supports citizens' democratic and human rights, has been operating in the country since 2009.

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Russian prosecutors last week determined that People in Need violates Russian citizens’ rights and freedoms, the Justice Ministry said in a short statement Tuesday.

“For the safety of our Russian partners, we have decided to temporarily suspend all activities in Russia,” People in Need announced after Russia’s decision.

People in Need is the 19th foreign group to be labeled “undesirable” in Russia and the fourth in 2019. Moscow slapped the designation on the Canada-based Ukrainian World Congress, the U.S.-based Free Russia Foundation and the Atlantic Council think tank this summer.

A 2015 law allows Russian prosecutors to limit or halt the work of “undesirable” foreign groups, punishing violators with fines or prison terms up to six years.

The first person to face prison time under the law, Open Russia pro-democracy group coordinator Anastasia Shevchenko, is awaiting sentencing following her arrest early this year.

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