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Moscow Deputy Asks Putin to Block Homeless Shelter

By Daniel Kozin

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Ivan Zaytsev / homeless.ru

A Moscow deputy has called for President Vladimir Putin to block a prominent homeless NGO from opening a shelter in Russia's capital, warning of the organization's foreign backing and the spread of diseases.

The Nochlezhka homeless charity, founded in St. Petersburg in 1990, has faced strident criticism from Muscovites opposed to its plans to open a project in the Russian capital, where stigma against the homeless is high. Experts estimate that Moscow has an estimated 50,000-100,000 homeless people.

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"The residents of the Begovaya district are categorically against the opening of a shelter and

center for social help in our neighborhood, as it will worsen our living conditions and violate our legal rights and interests," Moscow municipal deputy Zoya Andrianova wrote in a letter addressed to the Russian president last week, a screenshot of which she posted on Facebook.

Nochlezhka has denied the allegations directed against it by Andrianova and said it has not received any requests for information from the authorities since the letter was sent.

"We are a charity that helps homeless people and we don't participate in any political activities, so we do not fall under the foreign agent law," Nochlezhka's spokesperson Ekaterina Cheremisina told The Moscow Times by phone.

"If we are asked for additional information, we will respond," she said.

In the letter, Andrianova warned that Nochlezhka's shelter would lead to an influx of homeless people suffering from alcoholism as well as "infectious and parasitic diseases" in a district that is only five kilometers away from the Kremlin.

She asked the president to order an investigation into Nochlezhka's possible non-compliance with Russia's "foreign agent" law — which forces Russian NGOs that receive financing from abroad to register as foreign agents and undergo additional inspections.

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Andrianova accused Nochlezhka of receiving foreign financing while "having an active interest in politics" by advocating for the establishment of voting booths for Russian citizens who do not have registration.

Dozens of Russian NGOs have been fined or shut down under the foreign agent law after complaints from pro-Kremlin activists. They have included NGOs that helped diabetic patients, indigenous groups and prisoners.

Cheremisina said Nochlezhka remains undeterred in its plans to open a 20-person homeless shelter and social help center in Moscow's Begovaya district, with a scheduled opening for March of next year.

The NGO is hosting a charity concert in Moscow on Monday evening featuring popular young artists to raise funds for the project.

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