

Russia Labels First Individual 'Foreign Agents' Amid Worries of Clampdown

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Lev Ponomarev, 79, was the longtime head of the For Human Rights movement before it was disbanded in November 2019. **Valery Sharifulin / TASS**

Russia [has labeled](#) a prominent human rights activist, three journalists and an artist-activist as “foreign agents” on Monday, the first time that individuals, not organizations, have been given the designation amid worries of a renewed clampdown on dissent.

Veteran human rights activist Lev Ponomarev; Radio Svoboda and MBKh Media journalist Lyudmila Savitskaya; Pskovskaya Guberniya newspaper editor-in-chief Denis Kamalyagin; 7x7 news website journalist Sergei Markelov and St. Petersburg-based artist and activist Daria Apakhonchich have been added to the Justice Ministry's registry of “foreign mass media performing the functions of a foreign agent.”

Related article: [Russian Activists Condemn New 'Foreign Agent' Bill](#)

The ministry did not give an explanation for why these individuals were added to the registry.

Ponomarev, 79, was the longtime head of the For Human Rights movement, of one of Russia's oldest human rights organizations. The group was included in the foreign agents registry twice and in November 2019 was [disbanded](#) by the Supreme Court at the Justice Ministry's request.

He [told Interfax](#) he was surprised to see his name on the list as he doesn't work in journalism except for occasional blog posts for the Echo Moskvy radio station that he writes for free. He called on the other individuals on the list to unite and form a new organization called "Foreign Agents for Human Rights."

"I think there are other bloggers who are much more active in commenting on the situation in the country," he told Interfax.

Russia's "foreign agent" law passed in 2012 requires labeled organizations to report their activities and face financial audits. Activists have denounced the law, saying it seeks to silence groups critical of the Kremlin's human rights record.

Russia has gradually expanded the law, which initially targeted NGOs, to include "[undesirable](#)" organizations and media outlets. A December 2019 law also [expanded](#) the "foreign agent" label to encompass individual journalists and bloggers.

The new additions to Russia's foreign agent registry come days after lawmakers in both houses of parliament passed legislation expanding the "foreign agent" label to any politically active, foreign-funded individual. Failure to comply could lead to up to five years in prison if President Vladimir Putin signs the controversial proposals into law.

Critics say the latest expansion to the legislation is meant to further limit Russia's opposition ahead of next year's elections for the State Duma.

AFP contributed reporting to this article.

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