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Russia to Require Candidates to Self-Report 'Foreign Agent' Status Under Newly Passed Law

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The latest update to Russia's "foreign agents" law comes ahead of this fall's State Duma elections, where the Kremlin seeks to maintain the ruling, pro-Kremlin United Russia party's majority. **State Duma / Moskva News Agency**

President Vladimir Putin has signed a law Tuesday that will require electoral candidates who receive any amount of financial support from abroad to label themselves as "foreign agents."

Russia's "foreign agents" law, first passed in 2012, has been gradually expanded in recent years to apply to any politically active individual or organization receiving funding from outside the country. Critics say the law's rigorous auditing requirements for branded entities and steep fines for violations have a chilling effect on Russian civil society.

Related article: Putin Signs Controversial 'Foreign Agent' Law Expansion

Under the new law, candidates with the "foreign agent" designation will be required to indicate their status on all campaign materials, including websites, pamphlets and signs.

Candidates affiliated with organizations on Russia's “foreign agents” registry are also required to label themselves as “affiliated with a foreign agent.”

The law expands the list of “foreign agent” entities prohibited from campaigning for or against a candidate to include unregistered NGOS, foreign media and Russian entities.

Additionally, political parties will be required report any of their members labeled "foreign agents" or affiliated persons in their campaign materials. This information must take up at least 15% of the campaign material’s surface area.

Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation was branded a ”foreign agent” in 2019, a move the group says is aimed at hindering its investigations into corruption.

FBK lawyer Lyubov Sobol, one of Navalny’s closest allies, has previously announced her intent to run in this fall’s State Duma elections.

Last week, a Moscow court found Sobol guilty of criminal trespassing by appearing outside the apartment of an alleged FSB agent involved in Navalny’s poisoning and sentenced her to one year of community service. The conviction doesn’t bar her from running for office, however.

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