

Russia Opens First ‘Foreign Agents’ Cases Against Individuals

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Activists have staged single picket protests against Russia's "foreign agents" laws. **Evgenij Razumnyj / Vedomosti / TASS**

Russia has launched its first lawsuits against individual journalists and human rights activists for what it deems as noncompliance with the country's controversial "foreign agent" law.

An administrative case was opened against veteran human rights activist Lev Ponomaryov, 80, for failing to include a mandated disclaimer announcing his status as a "foreign agent" on a series of social media posts, the independent Novaya Gazeta newspaper [reported](#) Tuesday.

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Russian authorities also opened a case against Siberian journalist Stepan Petrov, former editor of the "Yakutia — Our Opinion" regional news site, which was liquidated after it was named a "foreign agent" earlier this year, according to a human rights [organization](#) representing Petrov.

The two are the first lawsuits of their kind known to have been launched against individuals designated “foreign agents” by Russia’s Justice Ministry. The label has been heavily criticized by independent media outlets and human rights activists inside Russia and abroad, who say it is part of the Kremlin’s campaign to eliminate critical voices and opponents to the regime.

One of the social media posts Ponomaryov is accused of not attaching the lengthy disclaimer to was a repost congratulating Novaya Gazeta editor Dmitry Muratov of winning the Nobel Peace Prize last Friday.

Both Ponomaryov and Petrov face administrative fines of 10,000 rubles (\$140). Ponomaryov was the first individual in Russia to be designated a “foreign agent” in December 2020 under new rules which gave authorities the right to use the label against individuals, and not just organizations.

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The Justice Ministry has since designated dozens of media outlets and individual journalists “foreign agents,” a label which carries Cold War-era connotations and has a high level of stigma in Russia.

Labeled individuals and entities must submit regular financial reports and detailed lists of income and spending, as well as prominently display a 24-word disclaimer stating the material was “created and/or distributed by a foreign media performing the functions of a foreign agent, and/or by a Russian legal entity performing the functions of a foreign agent” on all articles, social media posts and other publications.

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