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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Labels Wives of Mobilized Soldiers Group ‘Foreign Agent'

By AFP

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Members of Put’ Domoi during a protest on Victory Day. **Put’ Domoi / Telegram**

Russia on Friday labeled a women's organization campaigning for the return of mobilized men from Ukraine and a former pro-peace presidential candidate "foreign agents."

Moscow uses the label, heavy in Soviet-era connotations, on Kremlin critics to silence dissent.

Russia's Justice Ministry included the Put’ Domoi (Way Home) movement, which has organized women-led protests in Moscow to bring mobilized men back from Ukraine, in its list of "foreign agents."

Put’ Domoi has been made up of wives of Russian men mobilized to fight in Ukraine.

The Justice Ministry said it had worked to create a "negative image" of Russia and the Russian army and called for illegal protests.

It also labeled one of the movement's leaders, Maria Andreyeva, as a "foreign agent."

She had become the face of the grassroots movement, which became increasingly uncomfortable for the Kremlin.

"I do not agree with this," she told AFP of the label, adding: "I will protest this."

Russian authorities had previously appeared unwilling to target the movement in an apparent bid not to anger relatives and wives of soldiers fighting in Ukraine.

The women had earlier this year staged rare protests in central Moscow.

Moscow also included Yekaterina Duntsova, who had tried to run against President Vladimir Putin in a March presidential election, as a "foreign agent."

Duntsova, who had filed documents to register in the race as an independent candidate, had campaigned on a platform of ending the war in Ukraine.

She was slapped with the "foreign agent" tag more than two months after the vote, which saw Putin cruise to a fifth term in office unchallenged by any meaningful opposition.

Duntsova told independent media SOTA — also labeled a "foreign agent" Friday — that the move was "expected" but that the timing was odd.

"It could have been done during the presidential campaign," she said.

Duntsova said she will not give up efforts to create a political party but that "it will become a bit harder with self-expression."

As a "foreign agent," she now cannot run for any office.

Russia also labeled the media project SOTA, one of the few independent media reporting from Russia, a "foreign agent."

It said the media had criticized the war in Ukraine and that its employees included "foreign agents" living abroad.

Marina Litvinovich, a rights campaigner, was also included in the "foreign agent" list.

Russia has hugely cracked down on dissent since sending troops to Ukraine in February 2022.

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