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Russian Prosecutors Label Prisoner Rights Group as 'Undesirable'

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Olga Romanova, founder of Russia Behind Bars. **zekovnet.ru**

Authorities in Moscow on Thursday designated the prisoner rights group Russia Behind Bars and three of its affiliates as "undesirable," making their work illegal in Russia and putting staff members at risk of jail time.

Russia's Prosecutor General's Office banned the German non-profit Russland hinter gittern — Russia Behind Bars' legal entity — the MRR-Fund gemeinnützige, as well as the Czech prisoner rights group Za vaši a naši svobodu and the human rights festival Kulturus.

The law enforcement body said it had "established that these organizations operate under a common leadership," accusing them of "discrediting" the country's armed forces and "demonizing" Russia and its history.

Russia Behind Bars founder Olga Romanova, who lives in exile in Germany, said all four of the banned organizations "are very directly related" to her, adding that she was "proud" following the "undesirable" designations.

Russia introduced its “undesirable” list in 2015 to crack down on foreign NGOs and ban Russians from working with or donating to them. Authorities have since used the law on “undesirable” organizations to target independent news outlets, human rights groups, environmental organizations and educational institutions.

Recent amendments also empower Russia’s Justice Ministry to label any state-sponsored entity as “undesirable,” imposing similar criminal penalties as those for NGOs.

The Justice Ministry labeled Russia Behind Bars a “foreign agent” in 2018.

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