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Putin Signs Law Making It Easier to Prosecute 'Foreign Agents'

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Vladimir Putin. **Kremlin Press Service**

President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday signed a law that makes it easier for authorities to bring criminal charges against individuals and organizations designated as "foreign agents," further tightening restrictions on dissent in Russia.

Under the revisions, a single administrative violation of "foreign agent" regulations will now be enough for authorities to seek criminal prosecution. Previously, criminal charges could be pressed only after two administrative violations within a year.

Now, those labeled as "foreign agents" can face up to two years in prison for failing to meet reporting obligations or for other violations of the law regulating their activities.

Lawmakers proposed the changes in July, citing what they described as widespread noncompliance with existing rules. The new law is part of a broader effort to expand penalties and financial constraints on those designated as "foreign agents."

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Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the scope of the "foreign agent" designation has widened to include anyone receiving not only financial assistance but also non-financial support from abroad, or even helping others gather information related to the military. Those listed as "foreign agents" can be barred from receiving state funding or engaging in educational or public outreach work.

Earlier this year, the Finance Ministry proposed imposing a 30% flat income tax on "foreign agents" and denying them access to most tax deductions and benefits.

Nearly 1,000 individuals, organizations and media outlets, including The Moscow Times, have been designated as "foreign agents" since the law was introduced in 2012. Those listed are required to submit detailed quarterly financial reports to the Justice Ministry and attach prominent disclaimers to all publications and social media posts.

The label, which carries Soviet-era connotations, has been widely used to target independent journalists, activists, artists and NGOs accused of receiving foreign support or simply criticizing the authorities.

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