The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Justice Ministry Designates Memorial Rights Group's Swiss and German Successors 'Undesirable'

February 18, 2026



A Memorial supporter holds a poster that reads 'We are Memorial' outside the Russian Supreme Court in 2021. **Yuri Kochetkov / EPA / TASS**

Russia's Justice Ministry has designated the international successors of the Memorial human rights group as "undesirable" organizations, extending a yearslong crackdown on one of the country's most prominent civil society networks.

Memorial long served as a pillar of Russian civil society, best known for documenting Soviet-era political repression and preserving the memory of its victims.

Russian authorities dissolved Memorial and a related group focused on contemporary human rights abuses in 2021. Since then, other Memorial-linked entities and individuals have been targeted under Russia's "undesirable" and "foreign agent" laws.

On Monday, the Justice Ministry added the International Memorial Association and the

Zukunft Memorial to its list of “undesirable” organizations. The International Memorial Association was founded in Switzerland in May 2023, while Zukunft Memorial was established in Germany in June 2022.

The designation effectively bars the organizations from operating in Russia. Under Russian law, individuals affiliated with an “undesirable” organization face up to four years in prison, while those accused of organizing its activities can be sentenced to up to six years.

Memorial did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

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Russia’s Justice Ministry also designated Arctida, an organization producing research and investigative reporting on the Russian Arctic, as “undesirable.”

In a statement on Wednesday, Arctida said it would fully withdraw from Russia to protect those still in the country from possible criminal prosecution and would reassess whether to continue its work.

Other organizations blacklisted this week include Japan’s International Cooperation Agency, the U.K.-based Henry Jackson Society and the Georgian Civic Initiative for Democratic and Euro-Atlantic Choice.

Russia introduced its “undesirable” law in 2015, using it to crack down on independent media, opposition groups and foreign-funded organizations. Hundreds of organizations are currently blacklisted, including The Moscow Times.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2026/02/18/justice-ministry-designates-memorial-rights-groups-swiss-and-german-successors-undesirable-a91984