

Putin signs “Undesirable NGOs” Bill into Law on the Grounds of Russia’s “National Security”

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Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a bill, enabling the designation of foreign and foreign-funded NGOs as undesirables after the bill passed both the Lower and Upper House of Parliament.

The bill authorizes the designation of foreign and foreign funded non-profit as well as for profit NGOs as “undesirables” on grounds of “national security.” The bill passed the second reading in Russia’s Lower House of Parliament (State Duma), last week and was approved by the Upper House of Parliament, the Federation Council.

The bill had been proposed by legislators of the governing United Russia party of President Vladimir Putin, The passing of the bill in both houses of parliament and the signing of the bill by Putin was no surprise since United Russia has a majority in both chambers.

The bill has been heavily criticized by foreign, particularly western media, western politicians and primarily western-based or funded NGOs, including [Human Rights Watch](#), [Amnesty International](#), among many others. One of the NGOs that is certain to fall under the provisions of the bill is [USAID](#).

Amnesty International issued a statement, saying that the bill was “the last chapter in the unprecedented repression against non-governmental organisations.”

The new law follows up on a law that was adopted in 2012 that obliged foreign-funded non-governmental organizations to register as “foreign agents”.

The law provides for declaring foreigners and foreign-funded NGOs as “undesirable”. Persons who are violating the newly adopted law could face a fine up to 10,000 dollar to be paid in local currency and up to six years imprisonment.

Supporters of the bill are referring to the risk that foreign-funded NGOs could pose to the Russian Federation’s national security while critics maintain that the wording of the legislation and especially the term “undesirable” is ambiguous and opens the floodgates for the abuse of the law to crack down on legal and legitimate dissent.

Critics are also stressing that the new legislation could target organizations such as [Doctors Without Borders](#), [Amnesty International](#) including the Russian Chapter of Amnesty International, [Greenpeace](#), [Human Rights Watch](#) and others. The legislation could be used against non-profit as well as against for-profit organizations.

Weaponizing NGOs, including UN Organizations: A growing International Problem.

While the wording and the use of “undesirable” is ambiguous and does pose legal problems as much as it opens the floodgates for the abuse of the legislation, there may be a good reason for keeping the wording ambiguous.

Internationally acting NGOs have increasingly become “weaponized”; That is, that they have increasingly been utilized as tool for everything from supporting legitimate dissent to the organization of political violence and coup d’état. Another disturbing fact is that this pattern includes UN organizations such as the [UN Interagency Framework Team for Preventive Action](#) (Framework Team).

Examples? [Doctors Without Borders \(MSF\) played a key role in accusing the Syrian government for the use of chemical weapons, stating MSF sources](#). Later on the NGO had to admit that it had no staff in Damascus and exclusively relied on statements by “partners” in “rebel-held territories”.

In 2014 Doctors Without Borders has also been sharply criticized for strongly biased statements with regards to its activities in Myanmar after the [Burmese government refused to prolong the NGOs permit due to “unethical conduct”](#).

✖ Amnesty International for its part issued a report about alleged war crimes committed during NATO’s bombing of Libya in 2011. A 2012 report by Amnesty International claimed that Operation Unified Protector, authorized by UNSC Resolution 1973 has resulted in 55 documented cases of named civilian casualties, including 16 children and 14 women that were killed in air strikes in the capital Tripoli and the towns of Zliten, Majer, Sirte, and Brega. The low figure is utterly inconsistent with casualty figures provided by local NGOs as well as documented eyewitness reports.

Two things are worth considering with regard to the Amnesty report. During the first night of the operation NATO forces launched over 100 cruise missiles into Tripoli alone.

✖ [The Director of Amnesty International at that time was Suzanne Nozzel, who also worked as adviser on U.S. government – NGO relations for the then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton](#).

Greenpeace is, arguably, one example for how the new legislation can both be productive as well as counterproductive. In 2013 the Russian government cracked down on Greenpeace activists who launched an action against the [“Prirazlomnaya”](#) oil rig.

Russian media touted the Greenpeace action as part of “the West’s” war against Russian interests while Western media and politicians denounced the Russian authorities “crackdown”. Greenpeace is, however, also protesting against U.S. plans to drill for oil and gas in the Arctic. The proposed Russian legislation’s ambiguous wording, arguably, increases the risk that well-intentioned activists become instrumentalized as pawns in geopolitical chess-games.

While [Human Right Watch](#) does, indeed, engage in justified human rights advocacy, it has also been engaged in issuing strongly biased reports, in politicizing that “representatives are denied entry to e.g. Egypt”, while failing to mention that proper visa procedures had not been followed, and so forth.

The most disturbing NGO may, however, be the UN Framework Team for Preventive Action.

The Framework Team is largely privately funded with George Soros as one of the primary sponsors. The NGO under UN cover is “coordinating UN, governmental and non-governmental initiatives”.

✖ The UN organization could undoubtedly be useful but it has also been sharply criticized for [“fanning the flames” of the inter-communal violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine State](#), and for its [active role in creating rather than preventing ethnic and sectarian disputes and violence in Nepal](#). In both the case of Myanmar and in the case of Nepal it is easy to establish ties between the Framework Team and Western or Western allied intelligence services.

Criticism of the ambiguous wording of the new Russian legislation is, in other words, as justified as criticism of NGOs who prostitute themselves and the best intentions of the members at their base as pawns in geopolitical chess-games.

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