2.2.2. Foreign agents

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The authorities have expanded the scope of the ‘foreign agent’ legislation, initially introduced in 2012, numerous times.168 Under the 2022 law ‘On control over the activities of persons under foreign influence’,169 the definition of a ‘foreign agent’ was broadened to include any individual deemed to be ‘under foreign influence’ or receiving any form of foreign support.170 The amended law also prohibited ‘foreign agents’ from holding public office, financing or organising public events, working in jobs with access to state secrets, teaching in state and municipal educational institutions, and participating in public procurement.171 In October 2023, the law was further amended to allow the authorities ‘to conduct unscheduled inspections of any party potentially connected to “foreign agents”, based on complaints from any individual or organization, regardless of nationality.’172 In March 2024, new restrictions prohibited advertising in media labelled as ‘foreign agents,’ aiming to cut off their advertisement-based income.173 In April 2024, a new law allowed the MoJ to label individuals as ‘foreign agents’ for assisting ‘foreign organisations “acting contrary” to Russia’s interests’ and barred ‘foreign agents’ from participating in any type of teaching activities.174

Experts interviewed by the EUAA in October 2025 noted that the list of ‘foreign agents’ continues to grow,175 highlighting that the ‘foreign agent’ legislation is one of the major methods of repression against government critics176 and activists.177 The ‘foreign agent’ label imposes significant legal obligations,178 including mandatory reports on activities and expenditures and the requirement to add the ‘foreign agent’ label on all publications. Non-compliance can result in prosecution, fines, and imprisonment of up to two years.179

On 24 June 2025, President Putin signed a law allowing for the prosecution of ‘foreign agents’ in absentia ‘for administrative offences committed abroad.’180 The law also increased ‘fines for not complying with the government-mandated labelling requirements for content produced by ‘foreign agents’ from 30 000 to 50 000 rubles [307 - 512 euros] for individuals and from 300 000 to 500 000 rubles [3 075 – 5 125 euros] for legal entities.181 In October 2025, the ‘foreign agent’ legislation was further tightened, introducing criminal liability after the first administrative offence, whereas previously criminal prosecution had been initiated after two administrative violations within a year,182 which made criminal prosecution of people added to the list of ‘foreign agents’ easier.183

As of 24 October 2025, the register of ‘foreign agents’ maintained by the MoJ, contained nearly 1 099 entries, including the names of people and entities removed from the register.184 In 2024, 169 individuals and organisations were added,185 followed by 133 between 1 January

2025 and 18 July 2025.186 As noted by OVD-Info to the EUAA, for several years, most newly designated ‘foreign agents’ have been individuals rather than NGOs or entities. Moreover, while earlier listings involved high-profile and/or media-affiliated people, many current designations are based on individuals’ ties to certain organisations. For example, many members of human rights organisation Memorial were recognised as ‘foreign agents’ in their personal capacity.187 Besides human rights defenders, journalists are also frequently targeted by the foreign agent’ legislation,188 with 327 journalists and media outlets designated as ‘foreign agents’ as of October 2025.189

In 2024, the authorities significantly increased legal pressure on ‘foreign agents’, with a total of 150 politically motivated criminal cases initiated against them.190 According to OVD-Info, the same year, there was also ‘a sharp increase’ in criminal prosecutions of ‘foreign agents’ for not complying with evasion of the duties of a ‘foreign agent’ (Article 330.1 of the Criminal Code), with at least 32 people facing charges as of 9 December 2024. Of these, 29 cases were initiated in 2024.191 In addition, the number of administrative cases under charges for not complying with the obligations of a ‘foreign agent’ (Article 19.34 of the Code of Administrative Offenses) rose by 1.5 times compared with 2023.192

As noted by a human rights defender in an interview with the EUAA, the authorities have simplified the prosecution of individuals designated as ‘foreign agents.’ Inclusion in the register triggers monitoring of a person’s public activities. According to the source, each professional group – such as writers, artists, musicians, clergy, human rights defenders, political opposition figures, bloggers – is tracked by designated observers within the Federal Security Service (FSB), increasing the likelihood of administrative, and eventually, criminal prosecution. The source further noted that, as of October 2025, 25-30 % of ‘foreign agents’ faced criminal charges, with the number expected to increase further. For example, in September – October 2025, Moscow courts alone registered around 140 new cases against ‘foreign agents’.193

As noted by Mediazona, since January 2025, Russian courts have begun issuing fines for mentioning or quoting a ‘foreign agent’ without indicating their status (Article 19.5, part 42 of the Code of Administrative Offences). By mid-April 2025, at least eight people in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Kazan were fined for posts on Telegram, X, and VK that quoted a person or an entity designated as a ‘foreign agent’. Reportedly, some of those fined received no prior warning from the MoJ, and similar cases have been filed across Russia.194

In October 2024, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that Russia’s ‘foreign agent’ legislation was overly broad and unpredictably applied.195 The ‘foreign agent’ regulations have led to the closure of numerous independent media organisations and NGOs.196 At the end of October 2025, Russia’s leading domestic violence support centre *Nasiliu.net* (‘No to Violence’) announced its closure due to intensifying government pressure and a loss of resources caused by its ‘foreign agent’ status.197

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