



October 18, 2016

Alexander Konovalov
Justice Minister
Ministry of Justice of Russia
The Russian Federation

Dear Mr. Konovalov:

We write on behalf of the members of our national and international scholarly and academic associations to express our concern regarding the recent decision of the Ministry of Justice to designate the Yury Levada Analytic Center as a foreign agent operating in the Russian Federation. We strongly believe this decision will negatively impact the advancement of sociological science in Russia, and will curtail the work of the Levada Center, an internationally respected independent scientific center that has helped raise the global stature of Russian sociology.

The legislative act governing “the Activities of Non-profit Organizations Performing the Functions of a Foreign Agent” identifies two criteria for placing a nonprofit organization operating on Russian territory into the foreign agent registry: funding of its operations from abroad, and engagement in direct political activities. Following the passage of this statute, the Levada Center terminated all funding from abroad. The Levada Center does not now, nor has it ever, endorsed a political party or engaged in political advocacy. The Center’s work is confined to the unbiased, independent analysis and dissemination of scientific polling data stemming from its surveys. The Center *does* continue to take part in international scientific research projects, but such pursuits are explicitly exempted from the provisions of the Foreign Agent law.

Under the leadership of Dr. Lev Gudkov, the Levada Center has earned a national and international reputation as a premier scientific research organization. Its findings and publications are respected and closely followed by experts around the world. If required to operate as a “foreign agent” in Russia, the center’s position as an independent and unbiased scientific organization would be fundamentally compromised and it almost certainly would be forced to close. This would represent a true loss for the people of Russia and would damage Russia’s stature in the international scientific community.

As scholarly scientific societies, we are committed to promoting freedom of research, international cooperation, and the dissemination of sociological knowledge. We urge the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation to reconsider its designation of the Levada Center as a foreign agent.

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