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Extremism Probe Into Russian NGO Director Closed After Record Fine Paid

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Anna Sharogradskaya

Russian authorities have decided not to open an extremism case against the director of St. Petersburg's Regional Press Institute, a day after she paid the highest-ever fine for failing to register her NGO as a "foreign agent."

Anna Sharogradskaya, 73, was told in court last November that she could face charges of inciting hatred — a crime punishable by up to four years in prison — based on materials confiscated from her at St. Petersburg's Pulkovo Airport earlier that year.

Her lawyer Ivan Pavlov said Tuesday that Russia's Investigative Committee had not found any reason to pursue a criminal case against Sharogradskaya.

"An investigator showed us the official decision not to open a criminal case," Pavlov wrote in a post on Facebook.

Customs officials at Pulkovo Airport detained Sharogradskaya for five hours last June as she was heading to the United States. They confiscated her laptop computer, iPad and several flash drives that contained articles she had prepared for lectures at the University of Indiana.

"All the items confiscated from her during the customs inspection and kept by various law enforcement agencies for the past 10 months have been returned to her," Pavlov wrote Tuesday.

Sharogradskaya paid 400,000 rubles ($6,800) Monday for boycotting a Russian law that obliges NGOs that receive foreign funding and engage in political activities to register as a foreign agent. She denies that the Regional Press Institute, which aims to promote independent media in Russia, is engaged in "political activity."

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