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Memorial Human Rights NGO: Russian Librarian Is Political Prisoner

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Books by Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko are displayed at the Library of Ukrainian Literature in Moscow, Russia.

Russia's leading human rights group Memorial has designated the Russian director of the Moscow-based Library of Ukrainian Literature a political prisoner, following her detainment while her home and offices were raided by Russian police over claims of "Russophobia."

The criminal case against Natalya Sharina, a Russian citizen, has "taken place against the backdrop of an anti-Ukrainian campaign, which has been going on since the spring of 2014 in [Russia's] state media and in the remarks of officials holding top government offices in the Russian Federation," Memorial said in a statement Monday.

"The campaign includes opening criminal cases against citizens who publicly express their position on what is happening in Ukraine, [voicing views] that are different from the official account," Memorial added.

Natalya Sharina was placed under house arrest on Oct. 30 and is accused of “inciting hatred,” according to Memorial's report published Monday.

The house arrest came two days after police raided the library, seizing books and files, and detaining the director.

The search was prompted by claims that the library was storing newspapers that “distort historical facts” and exhibit a “Russophobic nature,” news reports said, citing unidentified officials.

Ukraine's Foreign Ministry lodged an official protest against the library raid, saying that the search was a “crude and unmotivated” move by Russian authorities.

Police also searched Sharina's apartment and the apartment of Valery Semenenko, co-chair of the Ukrainians of Moscow NGO, the library's longtime partner, and seized books and papers from both.

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