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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Activists in France and U.K. 'Expropriate' Oligarch Properties

They propose housing Ukrainian refugees in vast mansions.

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A group of squatters display banners and a Ukrainian national flag on the facade of a mansion supposedly belonging to Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska in Belgrave Square, central London. **TOLGA AKMEN / AFP**

Activists in the West are taking sanctions into their own hands — at least with properties they believe are owned by Russian oligarchs close to the seat of power.

In France Sergei Savelyev, a human rights activist wrote on Facebook, "While the authorities in the U.S., England and France look for ways to pressure [Russia] economically, we are instituting our own measures." He and a blogger from the Svoboda Liberté Association named Pierre Lapurdi — *nom de plume* Pierre Haffner — then broke into a villa in Biarritz. The eight-bedroom villa called Alta Mira is believed to belong to Kirill Shamalov, former husband of Katerina Tikhonova, Vladimir Putin's daughter.

The two allegedly found and photographed a copy of Shamalov's passport documents and

other documents with signatures of Gennady Timchenko and Kirill Shamalov. Gennady Timchenko is a close associate of Vladimir Putin who headed the oil-exporter Gunvor Group and now heads the Volga Group, a major shareholder of the Novatek gas giant. The news outlet "Insider" writes that the property registry in France shows the in 2007 the property belonged to Timchenko, who transferred it to Shamalov in 2012.

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Lipurdi and Savelyev said the newly named Villa Ukraine should be used to house refugees from Ukraine — once the Biarritz city hall and police granted permission. However, before that could happen, they were arrested.

Vladimir Osechkin, founder of Gulagu.net, a human rights group that tracks and exposes abuse in Russian prisons, wrote on his Facebook page that they had already been released by the police.

Meanwhile in London, four squatters broke into the mansion of Oleg Deripaska early Monday morning and went out on the balcony to unfurl banners reading "This property has been liberated" and an obscenity directed at Vladimir Putin.

The activists said that they wanted to open the mansion to Ukrainian refugees. After negotiations with police, the squatters finally left the property. The four squatters and another four activists outside the mansion were arrested.

The group, which included activists from the Baltic states, said that they were "doing the government's work for them and... doing it for free," after Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government said the oligarch's homes ought to be expropriated for refugees fleeing the war.

Oleg Deripaska is head of Rusal, one of the world's largest producers of aluminum. He was recently sanctioned by the U.K. government.

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