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Kremlin Says 'Not Following' Criminal Case Against U.S. Journalist

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Alsu Kurmasheva in court in Kazan. **Alina Faizrakhmanova / TASS**

The Kremlin said Friday it is not aware of the criminal case against the Russian-American journalist for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty who was arrested Wednesday on charges of failing to register as a foreign agent.

Alsu Kurmasheva was temporarily detained at an airport in central Russia on June 2, where both her U.S. and Russian passports were confiscated and she was fined for failing to register her American passport with the authorities.

She now faces up to five years in prison if found guilty of violating Russia's law on foreign agents.

"Unfortunately we're not aware and we're not following at all" the legal proceedings against Kurmasheva, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

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Peskov denied that Moscow was pursuing a campaign to persecute U.S. citizens after Kurmasheva became the second U.S. journalist held by Russia in less than a year.

Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich has been held in Moscow since March on espionage charges, which his lawyers and employer reject. The United States has designated Gershkovich as wrongfully detained.

"There are U.S. citizens who violate the law and legal measures are taken against them. There's no other kind of campaign and it's inappropriate to talk about one," Peskov said.

Kurmasheva, who lives in Prague, entered Russia on May 20 for a family emergency.

She is an editor with the U.S. Congress-funded outlet RFE/RL's Tatar-Bashkir service which covers ethnic minorities in the Russian republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan.

The Justice Ministry in 2017 labeled RFE/RL and several of its affiliates, including the Tatar-Bashkir service, as "foreign agents" in response to the U.S. requiring the Kremlin-funded RT broadcaster to register as a "foreign agent." Kurmasheva herself is not a designated "foreign agent."

The Sovetski court in Tatarstan's capital Kazan ruled Friday to extend Kurmasheva's pre-trial detention until Monday, Oct. 23.

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