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49 Russians Targeted in Soviet-Style Punitive Psychiatry – Memorial

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Psychiatric Hospital in Moscow. **Alexandra Krasnova / TASS**

At least 49 Russian citizens are currently being held in mental hospitals as a form of punishment against opposition and other activists, the human rights group Memorial said Thursday. The practice of punitive psychiatry in Russia dates back to the Soviet Union.

"Russian authorities use mental health issues as a pretext for repression against anyone 'undesirable' — from activists and Muslims to scientists and musicians," Memorial said in a social media post marking World Mental Health Day.

Political prisoners subjected to punitive psychiatry describe humiliating treatment, including beatings and injections with "strong drugs," Memorial said.

Compulsory treatment is forced on the activists until their "full recovery," which Memorial notes often amounts to indefinite confinement.

Yakutian shaman Alexander Gabyshev, who was arrested five and a half years ago on his

singular mission to “exorcize” President Vladimir Putin from the Kremlin, is among the Russians who have been subjected to psychiatric treatment for the longest: three years and eight months.

During the Soviet period, punitive psychiatry was so widespread that one-fourth of dissidents accused of political crimes were declared “mentally ill.”

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