

Navalny Fined Over Magnitsky Allegations

By [Jonathan Earle](#)

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Anti-corruption blogger Alexei Navalny was convicted on Monday of slander in a lawsuit filed against him by a businessman linked to the death of Hermitage Capital lawyer Sergei Magnitsky.

Moscow's Lyublinsky District Court ordered Navalny to pay a fine of 100,000 rubles (\$3,200) and disavow several statements claiming that Vladlen Stepanov was a beneficiary of fraudulent tax returns that Magnitsky was trying to expose, Navalny [wrote](#) on his Twitter.

Magnitsky claimed that Stepanov's wife Olga, in collusion with other officials, authorized an illegal tax refund worth \$230 million in exchange for a cut in the profits. The lawyer was then detained on the order of officials whom he had tried to expose and died in pretrial detention in 2009. No one was prosecuted over his death.

Magnitsky's supporters have since released a three-episode video about the officials

implicated in the alleged swindle. The third episode, detailing lavish properties in Dubai, Montenegro and Arkhangelsk acquired by the Stepanovs after Olga Stepanova authorized the tax refund, was released in April and [posted](#) by Navalny on his blog.

Stepanov dismissed all allegations, claiming that he divorced his wife in 1992 and that he bought his real estate with legally obtained income from his business ventures. He sought 1 million rubles in damages, but the court slashed the sum.

"Apparently, the 8 kilograms that Stepanov had lost made an impression on the court," Navalny wrote on Twitter on Monday. He added that he would appeal the court's decision.

Oddly enough, Stepanov made no attempt to sue the authors of the video, which include Magnitsky's former colleague Jamison Firestone.

The ruling United Russia party has denied media reports that it hired a PR agency and set aside 10 million rubles (\$320,000) for a massive smear campaign against Navalny.

A party official told RIA-Novosti that the claims, which originally [appeared](#) in Novaya Gazeta on Sunday, were a "provocation." He did not elaborate.

The blogger famously dubbed United Russia "the party of crooks and thieves." Novaya Gazeta said a double of Navalny was to be filmed in compromising situations as part of the campaign.

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