

Wanted: RosPil Chocolates

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Somebody has been sending chocolates to Alexei Navalny, the temporarily jailed anti-corruption blogger, who once inspired a box of chocolates himself.

Those chocolates, which were not Navalny's idea, are on sale at Shokobox.ru for only 200 rubles (\$6).

On the cover of the box is an eagle with two heads and two legs. Held in the talons of each leg are two saws, a reference to Russian slang about sawing, i.e. stealing, government money. "A Sweet Slice of the Budget" is written under the eagle.

Inside are a dozen or so smaller chocolates with drawings on them related to different examples of alleged government corruption.

Returning to Navalny's other chocolates. They are piling up in the detention center in Moscow. Photos on the web already show the room where he and other prisoners live — there are what looks like a pile of chocolates on one bed.

They are in a detention center for those convicted of administrative offenses, but a small slice of the reality of the Russian prison system can be seen in comments made by Navalny's lawyer, where he asked that no more chocolate be sent. Seven kilos has been sent. If you want to send something, send kielbasa. Make sure it is cured, not boiled.

It's a request that might seem a bit fussy, will he ask for Italian salami and some parmesan next, but it is instead to do with the arcane and complex set of rules that govern what kinds of food can be passed on to prisoners and what food they really need. Anyone who finds themselves with somebody inside has to deal with that system, and there are plenty of forums and advice sites.

Prison food is "such that after an hour you don't remember if you ate or not," writes one former prisoner who compiled a long, long list of advice on what food to send and how to send it. If you don't choose the right food or the right packaging, it won't get in.

Cured sausage can be sent; boiled sausage is not allowed. Grains that need long boiling are not allowed. Sugar is limited to prevent the making of samogon, or illegal alcohol. Honey is a better option anyway, and it works in "fighting against tuberculosis."

With no fridges, think of long-life products; rendered butter or chicken fat is better than ordinary butter. Send onions and garlic, as they also "help fight off colds that spread like wildfire in the quarters of a jail."

Cigarettes are essential. Send some even if the person does not smoke, for they work as the main currency inside. If your lawyer is coming to see you, he should pretend to be a smoker too, then he can slip you some packs when you meet.

Beware that things can be refused anyway. As one person wrote on a forum, "Why didn't they allow me to send salt? Am I a complete idiot?"

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