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# Navalny Denies Plan for Communal Services Project With City

By Alec Luhn

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A high-ranking federal official said Wednesday that Moscow City Hall would cooperate with opposition leader Alexei Navalny's communal services project RosZhKKh, even while Navalny dismissed the announcement as "nonsense."

Open Government Minister Mikhail Abyzov made the announcement at the Open Public Management conference, part of the Open Government initiative started in February by then-President Dmitry Medvedev to take public figures' and experts' opinions into account in making policy.

"As part of the Open Government, an agreement on cooperation in the communal services sector will soon be signed between the Moscow city government and Alexei Navalny's RosZhKKh," Abyzov said, Interfax reported.

The Open Government initiative will work with projects that seek to raise citizens' quality

of life and housing conditions, he said, noting that such projects "do not have political overtones."

Navalny quickly denied the report of a cooperation agreement, however, calling it "some sort of nonsense" on Twitter.

The prominent opposition activist and blogger started RosZhKKh in November to battle poor service and corruption in the communal services sector, which includes the utilities and maintenance of public spaces paid for by apartment owners. The project's website allows residents to report problems using fill-in-the-blank forms, which the project then files with officials.

An October survey by the state-run VTsIOM pollster found that the situation with communal services remains Russians' top concern, with 57 percent of those surveyed calling it the country's biggest problem.

The cost of electricity, gas and water went up 15 percent on July 1 in a measure meant to transfer some actual costs in the long-subsidized sector to households.

The hike was initially supposed to have come into force on Jan. 1 but was delayed until well after the March presidential election, won by Vladimir Putin.

In a video uploaded to the Open Government YouTube channel, Deputy Mayor Anastasia Rakova said city hall had given RosZhKKh an agreement that "they want to sign in the near future." She could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Abyzov's press secretary Alyona Zhukova said that the director of RosZhKKh had approached Abyzov on Tuesday seeking support for the project but that she did not know the details of the proposed agreement with the city.

RosZhKKh coordinator Dmitry Levenets wrote a tweet apparently mocking the report of the joint project.

"RosZhKKh signed a cooperation agreement with @Varlamov," Levenets wrote, linking to a photo of popular blogger Ilya Varlamov holding a RosZhKKh flier as Navalny spokeswoman Anna Veduta gave him bunny-ears behind his head.

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