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Navalny Hit With 3rd Criminal Case

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In addition to the latest set of charges, the opposition leader stands accused in two other criminal cases: the case of KirovLes and another fraud case in which Navalny and his brother are alleged to have organized a scheme for the theft and laundering of 55 million rubles. **Nikita Batalov**

A third criminal investigation was opened against opposition leader and anti-corruption lawyer Alexei Navalny on Monday, with the Investigative Committee claiming he stole money from a political party in 2007.

The committee said in a statement that Allekt, a company headed by Navalny in 2007, had received 100 million rubles ($3.3 million) from the Union of Right Forces party for the provision of advertising services then transferred the funds to shell companies.

"No document confirming the fulfillment of the conditions of the contraction has been presented to investigators," the statement said.

The investigators' decision to open the case was met with criticism from both Navalny and former representatives of the party who said they had no complaints about Navalny

and the charges were no more than a demonstration of political pressure.

"The Investigative Committee has a right to request documents that prove that the conditions of the contract with Allekt were met," Leonid Gozman, who in 2007 was deputy head of the party's federal political council, said by phone. "The fact that they didn't do that only proves incompetence and political bias."

Navalny, who was banned from leaving the country, called the case absurd and said he was not going to cease his activity and leave the country anyway. He denied any involvement in any criminal cases brought against him and said his political activity was the reason for investigators' accusations.

"It demonstrates that total lawlessness and new legal reality have taken place," he said in comments carried by Interfax, referring to the new case against him.

According to the Criminal Code, an embezzlement case — which Navalny is accused of — cannot be opened without a complaint from an affected party. "The Investigative Committee can't just violate the law, which means there was a complaint from someone in the party," a source close to Navalny told The Moscow Times on condition of anonymity.

"The same situation happened when Navalny was charged last week with fraud and money laundering, and it was unknown until he was finally charged that the Yves Roche company made a complaint to the Investigative Committee," the source said.

On Dec. 20, investigators accused Navalny and his younger brother, Oleg, of stealing 55 million rubles ($1.8 million) from a foreign company.

The Union of Right Forces was ceased to be a political party in 2008 and transformed into a civil movement the following year.

"This further criminal case against Navalny is the funniest one. No victims, no complaints, no Union of Right Forces party. But the case is still here. Awesome," Ilya Yashin, Navalny's colleague in the opposition's Coordination Council, said on Twitter.

Kirov region Governor Nikita Belykh, a former head of the Union of Right Forces, declared his position on checks into Navalny and the party in his blog on Ekho Moskvy's website back in October, when it was revealed that the Interior Ministry had begun checks into correspondence between him and Navalny.

"I'm sure there weren't any violations. The party was closed down, all financial reports were submitted to the Central Elections Committee and the Justice Department on time. If anybody remembers what was the attitude of authorities toward the Union of Right Forces in 2007, then you may be sure that if there were any violations, they would be found back then," he wrote.

Navalny faces 10 years in jail for the Union of Right Forces case, as well as 10 years for a case involving Belykh and two years for the case involving his brother. These charges, however, may be not the last for Navalny.

The Investigative Committee announced on Dec. 18 that it was conducting checks into the

possible involvement of Navalny in yet another case into the sale of a distillery in the Kirov region.

Navalny said in comments carried by Interfax that criminal cases could be limited only by investigators' imagination. "They can call any operation, made by an anti-corruption fund or by me, or by any firm that I ever headed, a fraud," he said.

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