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# Opposition Figures' Legal Woes Mount

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January 20, 2013




Opposition leader Alexei Navalny

Two opposition figures saw their legal troubles mount on Friday, as investigators pressed ahead with an embezzlement charge against protest leader Alexei Navalny and opened a criminal case into allegations that leftist activist Leonid Razvozzhayev falsely maligned them.

Investigators presented the final version of a charge against Navalny that was nearly identical to one announced in July and carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison.

Between May and September 2009, Navalny, then an adviser to Kirov region Governor Nikita Belykh, organized the theft of 10,000 cubic meters of timber from the state-owned Kirovles company, investigators said in a statement on the Investigative Committee's website.

As in the past, Navalny dismissed the charges as "absurd" and mathematically impossible. He said the case was a government attempt to derail his political activities, including a possible run for elected office, Interfax reported.

“If calculators could read, they’d read these accusations and explode, sending shards of solar panel flying in all directions,” he wrote on his LiveJournal blog on Friday.

The Kirov region government reportedly lost 16 million rubles ($529,000) as a result of the scheme, allegedly carried out with two accomplices, Pyotr Ofitserov, director of a local timber company, and Vyacheslav Opalev, general director of Kirovles.

A Kirov court convicted Opalev in December of his role in the alleged scheme and sentenced him to four years in prison. Ofitserov has denied wrongdoing and received revised charges Friday.

Navalny, who rose to prominence in recent years as an anti-corruption whistle-blower, often uncovering suspicious state tenders, joked about the resources that had been allocated to his case. “Now there are 11 investigators [on the case]. Enough for a soccer game,” he wrote.

The investigation is in its final stage, the Investigative Committee said in the online statement. Two separate criminal cases are pending against Navalny involving alleged embezzlement from a political party and a 55 million ruble fraud. The opposition leader has denied the charges.

Meanwhile, a criminal investigation was opened into “knowingly false” statements made by Leonid Razvozzhayev, a leftist activist currently under arrest for allegedly plotting to incite mass disorder, who has accused government agents of kidnapping and torturing him last year.

Razvozzhayev has said he was seized in Kiev by masked men who drove him over the Russian border and handed him to another group of men who held him for more than two days in an unknown location near the Ukrainian border, where he was subjected to death threats and forced to write a confession.

Investigators have concluded that the story was false, saying Razvozzhayev illegally crossed the border into Russia in a taxi and then turned himself in.

He now faces up to three years in prison for repeating the claim at a court hearing on Dec. 12, and again on Monday at a detention center in the Irkutsk region.

“First, we absolutely don’t agree [with the charge]. Second, we think it’s illegal. And third, we regret that the Investigative Committee, an agency that should objectively investigate all sides of this case, is turning into an interested party,” said Dmitry Agranovsky, a lawyer for Razvozzhayev.

Agranovsky said the government was keeping Razvozzhayev in the Irkutsk region, far away from his lawyers, to pressure him to confess to organizing violent clashes between protesters and riot police at a demonstration on the eve of President Vladimir Putin’s inauguration in May.

In an odd development, doctors at the Siberian detention facility where Razvozzhayev is being held discovered a 20-year-old bullet lodged in his back during an examination, a spokeswoman for the Prosecutor General’s Office said Friday.

A close ally of Left Front leader Sergei Udaltsov, Razvozzhayev faces up to two years in prison for illegally crossing the Russia-Ukraine border, 15 years for robbery for reportedly stealing fur hats from a Siberian fur trader and 10 years for plotting mass riots.

The riots charge stems from allegations made in a documentary-style television program broadcast by state-controlled NTV television last year. "Anatomy of a Protest 2" appeared to show Razvozzhayev, Udaltsov and a third activist, Konstantin Lebedev, plotting riots with a senior Georgian politician.

Razvozzhayev's lawyers will appeal the terms of his arrest at a hearing on Jan. 21, Agranovsky said.

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