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United Russia Declines Offer to Debate Navalny

By The Moscow Times

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United Russia has turned down an offer from Kommersant FM to debate opposition blogger Alexei Navalny after he made allegations that prompted a United Russia deputy to step down, saying he should first respond to the criminal charges brought against him.

A statement released by United Russia on Wednesday night said: "We advise Alexei Navalny to go to discussions with investigators instead of discussions on radio stations."

The statement went on to request that Navalny "respond to the widely discussed claims brought against him in the KirovLes case and contracts with Russian Post ... and tell us how exactly he acquired the status of a lawyer.'"

Navalny is under investigation in two separate cases: for an alleged embezzlement scheme that cost the Kirov regional budget up to 16 million rubles and signing fraudulent contracts valued at 55 million rubles with foreign investment companies.

"Until he responds to investigators' accusations, any dialogue with him is out of the question," the statement concluded.

Navalny has denied all accusations and said the charges brought against him are tied to his opposition activity.

Talk of a debate between the two sides erupted after the resignation of Vladimir Pekhtin, former Head of the Duma's Ethics Committee. Pekhtin surrendered his seat in the Duma immediately after Navalny published information on his blog claiming Pekhtin owned undeclared property in Miami.

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