

Charges Against Navalny 'Baseless,' Rights Council Members Say

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Navalny preparing to speak to the media outside a courtroom Wednesday. **Alexander Zemlianichenko**

Several members of the Kremlin's human rights council have signed a statement in support of opposition activist Alexei Navalny, who is currently under investigation on suspicion of fraud, news reports said Wednesday.

In the statement, the council members say that the accusations against Navalny are punishment for his political activity and that any criminal prosecution of him would be baseless, Kommersant reported.

Investigators say Navalny defrauded the Kirov region of 16 million rubles (\$520,000) by stealing 10,000 cubic meters of timber when he served as a gubernatorial adviser in 2009.

Navalny and his brother Oleg are also suspected of defrauding the local branch of Yves Roche of 24 million rubles by overcharging for the services of a company the brothers established.

Navalny faces up to 10 years in prison if found guilty of stealing timber and 10 years on the charges of defrauding Yves Roche. He has denied all wrongdoing in the cases.

It is unclear whether Navalny asked the council to study his cases. Kommersant said the petition was written at his request, but Vedomosti cited one of the petition's authors, Pavel Chikov, as saying the effort was unsolicited.

Vedomosti said five council members were behind the petition, while Kommersant put the number at 20. Some of the members, such as Kirill Kabanov, disagreed with the conclusions that were drawn. Kabanov said the council had to hear all sides of the issue before making any conclusions.

Council chairman Mikhail Fedotov declined to comment to the newspapers, saying the council had not yet arrived at a definitive conclusion on the issue.

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