

New Charge Makes Five Against Navalny

By [Jonathan Earle](#)

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A day after opposition leader Alexei Navalny's landmark embezzlement trial kicked off in Kirov, investigators slapped the Kremlin foe with yet another criminal charge — his fifth — accusing him and his brother of defrauding a state-owned company of 3.8 million rubles (\$120,000) in 2008.

Investigators said Alexei and Oleg Navalny tricked the Multi-Industry Processing Company (MPK) into signing a disadvantageous contract with their phony company and then pocketed the money, according to a statement [posted](#) on the Investigative Committee's website on Thursday morning.

Alexei Navalny, 36, said the government pressured MPK into filing a complaint, implying that investigators needed to lend more weight to an indictment based on an existing charge in which the the Navalny brothers are accused of defrauding a local branch of cosmetics maker Yves Rocher.

"They really needed a second victim to prevent the case from 'unravelling,'" he wrote on [his](#)

[blog](#).

The opposition leader now faces an additional fraud charge in what analysts say is an attempt by investigators to reinforce their case.

Political analyst Pavel Salin agreed, saying investigators had been ordered to assemble an "ironclad" case. "Four charges weren't enough, so they created a fifth," he said by telephone.

Salin also said the government was eager to avoid a repeat of the 2010 trial against former-tycoon and Kremlin critic Mikhail Khodorkovsky, when due to investigators' "seemingly illogical" position, Khodorkovsky was essentially tried for the same crime twice.

Supporters jumped to Navalny's defense on Thursday, with veteran opposition figure Boris Nemtsov and businessman Alexander Vinokurov arguing that the anti-Kremlin blogger's alleged crimes were in fact a normal business practice.

"If you are involved with entrepreneurialism at all, mind this new rule: Sell for less than you buy! Don't mix them up," wrote Vinokurov, co-owner of opposition-friendly Dozhd TV, on his [Facebook](#) page.

Navalny said he found out about the new charge on the train back from Kirov, 900 kilometers northeast of Moscow, where he is on trial for allegedly organizing the theft of 16 million rubles (\$500,000) worth of timber from a state-owned company in 2009.

That trial, the first against such a high-level opposition figure since Soviet times, opened on Wednesday and was promptly adjourned until April 24 after Navalny's lawyers complained that they had not received enough time to study the 29-volume case file.

If convicted, Navalny faces up to 10 years in jail and a ban on practicing law, his primary profession. He could also be barred from running for the State Duma, as required by a sweeping elections reform bill that deputies recently granted preliminary approval.

Navalny has denied the charges and called the case an attempt by the Kremlin to label him a crook.

He has also been charged with stealing 100 million rubles (\$3.2 million) from the now-defunct Union of the Right Cause party and unlawfully privatizing a distillery in the Kirov region.

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