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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Just Russia's Economic Amnesty Amendments Could Free Navalny

By The Moscow Times

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During the State Duma's fall session deputies from the Just Russia party will present a list of amendments to the economic amnesty law passed in early July, news reports said Monday.

The amendments include an extension of economic amnesty to all parts of Article 159 "fraud" and 160 "embezzlement" in the Criminal Code, Izvestia reported.

If the amendments are adopted, blogger Alexei Navalny, who was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for the embezzlement of 16 million rubles ($493,000), could be freed after a few months.

Boris Titov, an ombudsman whose role is to relay the concerns of business to the government, initially proposed the bill in May, RIA Novosti reported. It originally would have released over 10,000 offenders jailed for economic crimes under 50 articles of the Criminal Code.

The list was later shaved down to exclude those with multiple convictions, resulting in no more than 27 articles freeing a potential six thousand convicted businessmen in the final bill, which the lower house passed in its third reading.

The authors of the initiative believe that often innocent businessmen are jailed under the articles of fraud or embezzlement as a result of raids or the actions of competitors, Lenta.ru reported.

A compulsory condition for the amnesty is the convict's return of property and repayment of damages done to victims.

The amnesty applies not only to those currently in prison but to those with sentences that do not include jail time, suspended sentences, deferred sentences and those released on parole, excluding those who committed crimes involving the threat or use of violence.

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