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Kremlin Accused of Forcing Firms to Reject Navalny Ads

By The Moscow Times

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Mayoral candidate Alexei Navalny on Tuesday accused the Kremlin and City Hall of coercing businesses into rejecting advertising agreements that they had already concluded with the opposition leader's campaign.

The radio station Avto Radio, social networking site odnoklassniki.ru and all billboard companies with which the campaign signed agreements have suddenly announced that they can not do business with him, the candidate wrote on his LiveJournal blog.

His blog post exhibits a letter from Avto Radio returning his payment as "mistakenly transferred." Below, a receipt from the previous day clearly indicates that an advertising agreement had been reached.

Navalny also said City Hall had rejected his campaign's application for a rally on Vorobyovy Gory on Sept. 6 ahead of the Sept. 8 mayoral election.

According to Navalny, the authorities began applying pressure when they realized that acting Mayor Sergei Sobyanin was losing ground in the polls.

Citing opinion surveys conducted by his campaign team, the opposition leader said that 44 percent of the electorate is now in favor of Sobyanin and 25 percent plans to support Navalny.

"A second round is practically unavoidable," Navalny wrote. If no single candidate wins more than 50 percent in the first round, Sobyanin and Navalny will go head to head in the runoff.

The results published by polling centers have not been quite so generous to Navalny. Sobyanin is supported by 63.5 percent of Muscovites intending to vote in the election, according to last week's Synovate Comcon poll, which found that Navalny was backed by 19.9 percent of the same group.

Meanwhile, Moscow Elections Commission Chairman Valentin Gorbunov on Tuesday demonstrated a copy of what he said was President Vladimir Putin's legally required permission for Sobyanin to run for mayor, RIA Novosti reported. Earlier on the same day, Navalny filed a lawsuit against his rival, accusing him of failing to provide the document.

The opposition leader and his supporters doubted the validity of the document. Some of them argued that Sobyanin could not have signed it as mayor before the election was appointed, as indicated in the document, and should have signed as acting mayor, while others said it was not a valid document issued by Putin but Sobyanin's application with Putin's signature, according to Navalny's Twitter account.

"This is cool — Navalny made Putin backdate a document," journalist Oleg Kashin tweeted.

This special permission is necessary when a candidate campaigns for an office that they have just left. Sobyanin officially relinquished the post of Moscow mayor in July so as to give himself the opportunity to run for another term.

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