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Commission Keeps Navalny in Race, but With Warning

By Oleg Sukhov

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The Moscow Elections Commission has issued a warning to mayoral candidate Alexei Navalny in connection with allegedly illegal campaign materials, dispelling fears that he would be removed from the ballot.

The commission said there was no evidence that the production of the materials, which were reportedly not paid for by Navalny's campaign, had been organized by the opposition leader but urged his campaign to avoid similar situations in the future, Interfax reported Friday, citing a representative of the commission. The stickers and leaflets in support of Navalny were found on Aug. 13 during a police raid at an apartment on Chistoprudny Bulvar. Navalny's campaign said it had nothing to do with the materials' production and thus was not in violation of any law.

Moscow Elections Commission head Valentin Gorbunov said Thursday that Navalny could be removed from the race due to the alleged violations, while police raided a printing press

where his campaign materials were being made.

Meanwhile, late Thursday speculation about another possible campaign violation grew after Prime published a statement by a Montenegrin tax agency, received by e-mail, saying that the anti-corruption activist had co-founded a company in the Balkan country called MRD in 2007. Pro-Kremlin bloggers argued that this could also serve as a basis for removing Navalny from the Sept. 8 election, since the company had not been declared by the opposition activist. The statement also indicated that the company had never been registered as a taxpayer and had never declared profits or tax liabilities in Montenegro, meaning it existed only on paper.

Some commentators cast doubt on the authenticity of the Prime report, however, arguing that an e-mail without any addresses, names, stamps or signatures could not be considered an official document or press release.

According to Prime, the tax agency denied that its website had been hacked. Navalny's campaign manager Leonid Volkov said Wednesday that Russian authorities could have hacked the site to record information about MRD.

Volkov said in his blog Thursday that in 2007 Navalny and opposition activist Maria Gaidar wanted to buy real estate in Montenegro and register a company for that purpose but subsequently abandoned the idea.

He said Navalny and Gaidar could have given copies of their passports to a local lawyer but then left Montenegro. But the registration process could have proceeded without their knowledge and consent, Volkov added, attributing the situation to a legal mix-up in Montenegro.

Navalny said in a LiveJournal post on Thursday that his team had submitted official requests to Montenegrin authorities and would send a lawyer to the country to clarify the situation.

"I have no idea what's going on in Montenegro," he wrote. "That is a country with a very corrupt and inefficient bureaucratic machine."

He said he had never owned any real estate, bank accounts or tangible assets in the Balkan country.

Gorbunov said Thursday that owning a business abroad would not be grounds for removing Navalny from the election.

"The ban is on having real estate and bank accounts abroad. ... There is no direct ban on having a business abroad," Valentin Gorbunov told RIA Novosti.

Gorbunov added that the Moscow Elections Commission had not received any official complaints on the matter.

Meanwhile, Max Kats, a deputy campaign manager in Navalny's team, said in his blog on Saturday that Russian authorities had pressured all transportation companies with which the campaign was in talks to reject contracts with the opposition leader's team. Katz said Navalny's team needed the companies' services because it planned to expand the number

of his campaign "cubes" to about 140 to 150 per day from the current 20 to 30 and wanted to supply more campaign materials.

Navalny has also accused the Kremlin and City Hall of forcing all billboard companies and the Odnoklassniki social network to reject advertising agreements with his campaign.

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