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Yves Rocher Withdraws Accusations Against Navalny on Eve of Hearing

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French cosmetics firm Yves Rocher has withdrawn its fraud claim against Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, potentially jeopardizing criminal proceedings due to open Thursday, according to the anti-Kremlin activist and blogger.

A scanned copy of a letter purportedly from Yves Rocher to the Investigative Committee was posted on Navalny's blog Tuesday, according to which the cosmetics giant has retracted its claim that a company linked to Navalny defrauded it of 27 million rubles ($750,000).

The case was opened in 2012 against Navalny and his brother Oleg. Investigators accused Glavpodpiska, which they said was linked to the brothers, of defrauding Yves Rocher by providing freight transportation services at above-market prices.

In the letter, whose authenticity could not immediately be verified, Yves Rocher said that Glavpodpiska had provided services at prices that were lower than many competitors and denied that it had incurred any damages.

Navalny said on his blog that the Investigative Committee had forbidden him from commenting on the Yves Rocher case under the terms of his house arrest, which was ordered over the same case. He said the prohibition was intended to prevent him from publishing Yves Rocher's statement and that he was intentionally breaking the ban.

"Now I'm openly and officially saying that I don't give a damn about any bans and gagging orders," he wrote. "I don't give a damn about my house arrest possibly being changed to imprisonment. I won't be silent and, even if I don't prove anything to the court, I'll do my best to prove this to you."

The case, whose first hearing is slated for Thursday, is likely to go ahead, as a second company, MPK, has also filed a complaint against Glavpodpiska.

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