The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Kremlin Critic Navalny Released From Moscow Jail to Face 'New Reality'

March 06, 2015



Alexei Navalny, a Russian opposition leader, walks out of a detention center in Moscow on Mar. 6, 2015.

Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny walked out of a Moscow detention centre on Friday and said Russia's opposition would continue to challenge President Vladimir Putin, uncowed by last week's killing of prominent opposition figure Boris Nemtsov.

But Navalny, who paid a visit to Nemtsov's grave in late afternoon, and other opposition leaders face a tough task marshaling support beyond Russia's small urban middle-class, especially as they are largely excluded from state media and divided among themselves.

Nemtsov's allies say his killing was a political act aimed at intimidating them. Putin has called it a shameful tragedy and says he will do everything possible to ensure the perpetrators are found and punished.

Wearing a dark jacket and jeans, his face unshaven, Navalny was released after serving 15 days for handing out leaflets in the Moscow metro to promote a protest rally.

"There will be no let-up in our efforts, we will give up nothing. This act of terror has not achieved its goal in this sense," Navalny said after leaving the detention centre through a green metal gate, carrying his belongings in a black sports bag.

"I am not frightened and I am sure my associates are not frightened either."

Nemtsov was a liberal who had served as deputy prime minister in the 1990s but became a staunch critic of Putin. He was shot by an unknown assailant last Friday night within sight of the Kremlin walls, becoming the most prominent opposition figure to be killed during Putin's 15-year rule.

The opposition has scheduled a protest rally in Moscow for April 19, said Mikhail Kasyanov, a former prime minister and close associate of Nemtsov.

New Reality

Nemtsov and Navalny were leaders of mass street protests against Putin that swept Moscow and other big cities in 2011 and 2012. But the rallies lost steam as the movement failed to evolve into a force able to compete with Putin.

Putin began a third presidential term in 2012 and has strengthened his grip on power. Actions like the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine have triggered Western sanctions but boosted his popularity, currently running above 80 percent.

Some leaders of the liberal opposition are taken more seriously abroad than they are in their home country. Many have faced court cases and jail.

The opposition is divided into small groups who lack a single leader or program and often disagree on strategy and tactics, resisting efforts to bring them together in one force.

The killing of Nemtsov left activists and sympathizers devastated, deepening the grim view among many of them on prospects for any change in Russia.

Responding to a greeting from Navalny on Twitter after leaving detention, opposition activist Nikolai Levshits tweeted:

"Congratulations on returning to the new reality"

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/03/06/kremlin-critic-navalny-released-from-moscow-jail-to-face-new-reality-a44534