

Navalny Ally Sentenced to Community Service Over Alleged Artwork Theft

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Georgy Alburov

A Moscow court on Tuesday sentenced an ally of opposition leader Alexei Navalny to community service over the alleged theft of a painting.

Georgy Alburov, an employee of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, was ordered to complete 240 hours of community service after he was found guilty of having stolen a painting by a street artist from a fence in the city of Vladimir. Prosecutors had asked for a three-year suspended sentence for Alburov, who maintained his innocence and claimed the accusations against him were politically motivated.

“With a suspended sentence, I would have been eligible for amnesty,” Alburov wrote via Twitter on Tuesday, apparently referring to a large-scale amnesty proposed by President Vladimir Putin last week in honor of the 70th anniversary of the allied victory over Nazi Germany on May 9. “That's why I was given 240 hours of community service.”

Alburov's lawyer, Anna Polozova, was later quoted by the TASS news agency as saying that her client could possibly be eligible under the amnesty, its terms having yet to be finalized.

In June, law enforcement officers seized a painting by street artist Sergei Sotov during a raid of Navalny's apartment. Investigators claimed that the artwork — which they said had been given to Navalny by Alburov and fellow activist Nikita Kulachenkov — had been stolen.

Sotov later said he had not approached police and had no claims to make against Navalny or his associates.

Alburov is not the only activist from Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation to have been targeted by law enforcement over the case in recent months. The home of Roman Rubanov, the foundation's director, was raided in connection with the case in February. The offices of the Anti-Corruption Foundation were also searched for nearly eight hours and its employees summoned for questioning about the painting in January, the Interfax news agency reported at the time.

Navalny was handed a three-and-a-half-year suspended sentence after he was convicted in December of embezzling some 30 million rubles (\$579,000 at today's exchange rate) from two companies, including the Russian branch of French cosmetics giant Yves Rocher.

Navalny, who ran in Moscow's mayoral elections in 2013, has maintained that the criminal cases are related to his political activism.

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