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Russian 'Political Prisoner' Pivovarov Found Guilty of Bribery

By Katie Marie Davies

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Russian opposition politician Andrei Pivovarov has been found guilty of bribery and illegally accessing a police database, the Interfax news agency reported Friday.

Pivovarov, former co-chairman of the Parnas party's St. Petersburg branch, was fined 1.5 million rubles ($23,000) but dodged a jail term.

Police officer Alexei Nikanorov, who helped the activist gain access to the database, was sentenced to three years and nine months in a penal colony with a fine of 3 million rubles ($46,000).

Parnas has claimed that the case is politically motivated, as has human rights group Memorial, who called Pivovarov a “political prisoner.”

Pivovarov had been working for the party as a campaign manager for elections that took place in Russia's Kostroma region in Sept. 13, 2015.

He allegedly gained access to the police database in order to verify signatures that the party had collected in order to participate in local elections in September 2015.

All parties in Russia need a certain number of signatures from residents in order to appear on the electoral ballot. Any signatures that the electoral commission deems not to be genuine are removed from the total, which can result in parties falling under the required limits.

Pivovarov announced on social networks that Parnas had collected 4,431 signatures in Kostroma, out of which 3,009 were submitted to the electoral commission.

“I can't not boast. We found a way of verifying all the signatures, all of them, with reliable data,” Pivovarov wrote on his Vkontakte page on July 21, 2015.

“I can't tell you how we did it, but pass on my heartfelt greetings to the gentleman of the administration.”

He also implied that fraudulent signatures had been added to the list by paid United Russian supporters, writing, “Guys, after this test we were able to pick out your 'undercover boys' as clear as our hands in front of us. Maybe it's time to stop wasting your budget money on these idiots? Just don't send them anymore, okay?”

Pivovarov did not deny accessing the database, but said that his actions did not constitute as a crime.

Parnas was able to participate in the elections, but lost the vote to Russia's ruling party United Russia.

It is not Pivovarov's first brush with the law. In 2010, he was sentenced to a 14-day jail term for staging an unsanctioned rally in St. Petersburg.

Contact the author at newsreporter@imedia.ru

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