

Alexei Navalny Challenges Putin With 2018 Russian Presidential Bid

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Tatyana Makeyeva / Reuters

Opposition activist Alexei Navalny has launched his campaign to run for the Russian presidency in the country's 2018 elections.

The former lawyer made the announcement in an online video statement on Tuesday, presenting a six-point manifesto focused on battling corruption, boosting wages and pensions, and reforming the police and judiciary.

It also advocates for greater powers to be given to regional authorities across Russia, better ties with Europe, and an end to Russia's visa-free regime with countries within Central Asia.

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“Russia should be a rich, free and strong country,” Navalny wrote in his online manifesto. “We have everything we need to make that happen: talented people and natural resources.”

“The presidential elections should prompt a discussion about the development of the country,” he said. “We need an honest conversation, rather than yet another fake television show. I am ready to prove in a live debate that my manifesto is better than that of my rivals.”

Navalny has been barred from holding public office since being found guilty of embezzlement by the Leninsky court in the remote city of Kirov in 2013. He was accused of stealing timber from a state-owned company, Kirovles.

The case, which landed Navalny with a five-year suspended sentence, has been condemned by human rights group as "political" and took place just months after Navalny won 30 percent of the vote in the Moscow mayoral elections.

The Russian Supreme Court overturned the decision in November, opening the way for Navalny's presidential bid. The case now faces a retrial.

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