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Children Paid to Attend Anti-Corruption Rally, Says Kremlin

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Artur Novosiltsev / TASS

The Kremlin has accused opposition politician Alexei Navalny of paying children to attend anti-corruption rallies across Russia on Sunday.

Presidential spokesperson Dmitry Peskov condemned the protests, many of which took place throughout Russia without authorities' permission.

"We cannot respect the kind of people who knowingly mislead minors — children, in fact — with the promise of some monetary award just to make them take part in an illegal rally," Peskov said. "[These children] are risking their safety or even their lives."

Navalny had previously promised to win compensation for arrested protesters from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). In a blog post on Wednesday, the politician announced that his project, the Russian Euro Court, would help demonstrators

“file thousands of appeals” if necessary.

“If you’re detained, then you’re also going to make some money,” he said.

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Peskov also claimed that ordinary Russians had been duped into believing that the protests were legal.

"What we saw in some places yesterday, especially in Moscow, was a provocation and a lie,” he said. Peskov added that event organizers in Moscow had rejected two “alternative venues” in the city's outskirts earmarked for the event by local authorities, instead choosing to hold an unapproved rally in the city center.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov took the opportunity to hit back at governments abroad who condemned Russian police's heavy-handed approach to the protesters, including the U.S. State Department.

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"I remember when similar laws were broken in European capitals and in the United States — when demonstrators gathered where they were not supposed to gather, when they went down routes that they were not supposed to take — I remember how the police in Western nations deal with such violations: with batons and tear gas and whatever."

He also defended the arrest of several Russian and international journalists during the protests, arguing that Russian state television crew had also been detained.

"Our journalists also get into situations like this sometimes," Lavrov said. "Reporters from the RT television channel were stopped when they tried to cover riots which broke out in connection with some demonstration in the United States, just last fall," the minister said.

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