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Council of Europe Says Navalny Should Be Allowed to Run for President

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Alexei Navalny **Donat Sorokin / TASS**

The Council of Europe has called on Moscow to allow opposition leader Alexei Navalny to run in presidential elections next year, the RBC outlet reported Thursday, citing information obtained from the Council of Europe's press service.

Navalny is barred from running in the March 18 elections because of criminal convictions which his supporters say are politically motivated.

The opposition leader has been actively campaigning for the 2018 presidential elections, when Vladimir Putin is likely to seek his fourth term in office.

Navalny was first found guilty of embezzling funds from the Kirovles timber company in July 2013.

The European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) ruled against the conviction in 2016, saying the defendants' rights to a fair trial were violated and awarded the defendants 80,000 euros in

compensation.

In February, a court in the northern Russian city of Kirov reopened the 2013 case, handing Navalny a 5-year suspended sentence. He and a co-defendant were also fined 500,000 rubles ($8,000) each.

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The Council of Europe noted that the Russian authorities didn't compensate Navalny or his co-defendant Pyotr Ofitserov after the ECHR's ruling, RBC reports.

In an online statement published Thursday, the Justice Ministry responded saying Navalny and Ofitserov had been paid in full, adding the Committee's request was an act of "political pressure on the Russian authorities for the upcoming electoral period."

The European Union has on numerous occasions described embezzlement charges against the opposition leader as politically motivated.

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