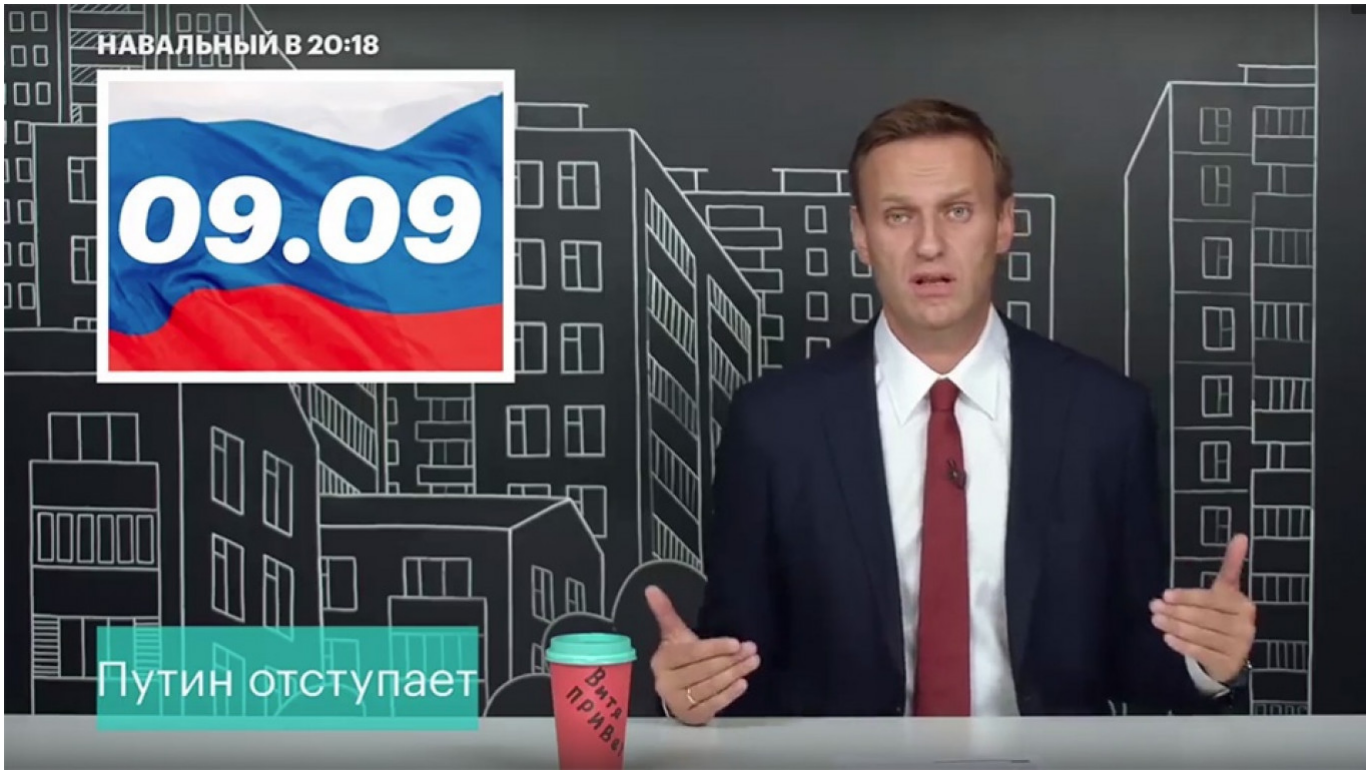
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Russia Accuses Google of Meddling in Upcoming Elections

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Alexei Navalny / Youtube

Russian authorities have accused Google of interference in upcoming regional and municipal elections by allowing opposition leader Alexei Navalny to buy advertising space on YouTube for his videos urging supporters not to vote for officials who are in favor of controversial pension reform.

Voters in several regions go to the polls on Sept. 9 to elect governors, deputies and members of local legislative assemblies. Navalny, who is serving a 30 day jail sentence for participating in anti-government protests earlier this year, has called for election day protests against government plans to raise the retirement age.

The Central Election Commission (CEC), General Prosecutor's Office, and state media regulator Roskomnadzor sent written complaints to Google over Navalny's election-related YouTube ads, local news wires reported Monday.

Google purchased YouTube in 2006.

“Mr. Navalny buys advertising tools from Google to put out information about a political mass event on Election Day, Sept. 9, on YouTube,” said CEC member Alexander Klyukin according to Interfax.

Navalny’s website devoted to the unpopular proposal to raise the retirement age urges viewers: “Don’t vote for officials who support the [pension] reform.”

Related article: Most Requests to Remove Online Content Come From Russia, Google Says

“A lack of a fitting response will be, in effect, considered direct interference in Russia’s internal affairs,” state-run RIA Novosti quoted Roskomnadzor deputy head Vadim Subbotin as saying at a Federation Council meeting.

Deputy Prosecutor General Alexei Zhafyarov noted that Google is not required to respond to the complaints, but warned YouTube’s parent company of possible legal consequences.

Senior Foreign Ministry official Andrei Nesterenko said U.S. media outlets were “inches” from violating Russian election law.

Roskomnadzor temporarily blocked YouTube and other Google services, including Gmail, this spring after the regulator began enforcing a court order to restrict access to the Telegram social media platform.

But Roskomnadzor’s Subbotin told Interfax that the state media regulator does not plan to block YouTube in Russia over the alleged election interference.

Google told The Moscow Times that while it won't comment on particular cases, "Google will consider all valid requests from governmental bodies."

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