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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Germany Says Navalny 'Likely' Poisoned

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Navalny was airlifted from the Siberian city of Omsk to the Charité hospital in Berlin on Saturday. **Markus Schreiber / AP / TASS**

Updated to add Charité hospital statement.

The German government believes that Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny was likely poisoned, Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman said Monday.

Steffen Seibert's comments during a press briefing align with claims from Navalny's aides, who say he was poisoned with a cup of tea at an airport cafe. Navalny, 44, has been in a coma since Thursday, when the de facto Russian opposition leader fell suddenly ill on a flight to Moscow, forcing an emergency landing in Siberia.

Embed:

> The German government believes Russian opposition politician Alexey @navalny was likely the target of a poison attack.

> Angela Merkel's spokesman (@RegSprecher) says Navalny needs protection.
> ⊠#Navalny #Навальный pic.twitter.com/M37lgyewuJ
>
> — DW Politics (@dw_politics) August 24, 2020

“We’re dealing with a patient who fairly likely was poisoned,” Seibert told reporters.

The Siberian doctors who initially treated Navalny said tests showed no traces of poison, an assertion they reiterated at a press briefing Monday.

Navalny was airlifted from the Siberian city of Omsk to the Charité hospital in Berlin on Saturday following a standoff over his evacuation between his aides and Russian doctors. Doctors eventually allowed Navalny’s transfer on a German air ambulance after family and staff demanded authorization to take him out of Russia.

Related article: We Saved Navalny’s Life, Russian Doctors Say

On Monday, the Kremlin said that President Vladimir Putin was not involved in talks on Navalny’s evacuation. Navalny is a fierce critic of Putin’s rule and has published several video investigations alleging corruption and malfeasance in Putin’s circle.

Later on Monday, the Charité hospital issued a statement saying that its doctors' tests indicate that Navalny was likely poisoned with a substance from the "cholinesterase inhibitor" group. The hospital added that he remains in a coma but that there is "no acute danger to his life."

Cholinesterase inhibitors can be found in drugs used to treat Alzheimer's and other conditions, but are also present in pesticides and nerve agents. The hospital said Navalny is being treated with atropine, the same substance used to treat former double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia after they were attacked with the toxic nerve agent Novichok in Britain in 2018.

"The outcome of the disease remains uncertain and long-term effects, especially in the area of the nervous system, cannot be ruled out at this point in time," the Charité hospital said.

Seibert called for a “full and transparent” investigation into the circumstances of Navalny’s hospitalization, according to the state-run TASS news agency.

Following news of Navalny's suspected poisoning last week, both Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron offered him medical treatment in their countries.

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