

Germany Threatens Sanctions Against Russia Over Navalny Poisoning

By [Yacine Le Forestier for AFP](#)

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German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas. **EFE POOL / TASS**

Germany, the current head of the European Union, will discuss possible sanctions against Russia over the poisoning of Alexei Navalny if the Kremlin does not provide an explanation soon, its foreign minister said Sunday.

Russian opposition leader and anti-corruption campaigner Navalny fell ill on a flight last month and was treated in a Siberian hospital before being evacuated to Berlin.

Germany said last week there was "unequivocal evidence" that President Vladimir Putin's top foe had been poisoned using Soviet-era nerve agent Novichok.

"We have high expectations of the Russian government to solve this serious crime," Heiko Maas told German daily Bild. "If the government has nothing to do with the attack, then it is in its own interest to back this up with facts."

If Russia does not help clarify what happened "in the coming days", Germany will be compelled to "discuss a response with our allies," Maas said.

The crime against Navalny was a violation of the international Chemical Weapons Convention and there must be an appropriate response, he said. "When we think about sanctions, they should be as targeted as possible."

Western leaders and many Russians have expressed horror at what Navalny's allies say is the first known use of chemical weapons against a high-profile opposition leader on Russian soil.

The Kremlin has denied responsibility for the attack and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said that Germany is yet to share any findings with Moscow's prosecutors.

Foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova on Sunday accused Germany of stalling efforts to probe the Navalny case.

"Berlin is stalling the process of investigation for which it's calling. On purpose?" she said on Facebook.

Related article: [Maybe the Kremlin Doesn't Know Who Poisoned Navalny. It's Still Responsible.](#)

Maas said there were "several indications" that Russia was behind the poisoning, in the strongest accusations yet from Germany.

"The deadly substance with which Navalny was poisoned has in the past been found in the hands of Russian authorities.

"Only a small number of people have access to Novichok and this poison was used by Russian secret services in the attack against former agent Sergei Skripal," he said, referring to a 2018 attack on the former double agent and his daughter in the English city of Salisbury.

The Skripals spent days in a coma before recovering but local resident Dawn Sturgess died after picking up a discarded perfume bottle allegedly used to carry the poison.

The Navalny case is only the latest in what Berlin has seen as a series of provocations by Putin that have damaged ties and called future cooperation into question.

The poisoning comes a year after the murder in broad daylight of a former Chechen rebel commander in a Berlin park, which German prosecutors believe was ordered by Russia.

Nord Stream 2

German Chancellor Angela Merkel also revealed in May that Russia had targeted her in hacking attacks, saying she had concrete proof of the "outrageous" spying attempts.

On the subject of which sanctions could be discussed by the EU, Maas did not rule out action relating to Nord Stream 2, a multi-billion-euro Russian-German gas pipeline nearing completion that has drawn the ire of U.S. and European partners alike.

"I hope... that the Russians do not force us to change our position on Nord Stream," Maas said, adding that the consequences of any potential cancellation of the project would also need to be weighed, and that the debate on sanctions should not be "reduced" to one point.

The controversial pipeline is meant to deliver Russian gas to Europe, but the German government has faced growing calls to abandon it as tensions with Russia escalate.

Bild slammed Merkel last week for comments that Nord Stream 2 should be judged independently from Moscow's actions.

"Vladimir Putin views the gas pipeline as an important strategic weapon against Europe and as a vital source of funding for his war against his own people," it said.

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