The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Authorities Probe Navalny's Coronavirus Interview for 'Extremism'

December 01, 2020



Navalny is recovering in Germany after recovering from poisoning with the Novichok nerve agent. **Ivan Sekretarev / AP / TASS**

Russian authorities are probing opposition figure Alexei Navalny's comments during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic for inciting extremism, news agencies quoted law enforcement sources as saying Tuesday.

Moscow investigators are reportedly examining whether Navalny's April 27 interview with the liberal Ekho Moskvy radio station contained calls for a violent overthrow of the Russian government. Charges of "public calls for terrorism" carry a prison sentence of five years.

Related article: Navalny Urges EU to Target Putin's Oligarch Backers

In the interview where Navalny proposed coronavirus support measures, a host quipped that the Kremlin would decide against these measures "out of spite."

“If our regime would rather leave 60 million people hungry in order to not please me, then this regime should be overthrown right now, quite possibly even by force,” Navalny retorted.

An Interfax source said they were “unsure” whether the authorities would open a criminal case after completing their probe into Navalny’s comments.

“The statements were probabilistic and experts will find it difficult to label them as incitement,” the source was quoted as saying.

The Kremlin said later Tuesday that President Vladimir Putin “doesn’t take into account positions” adopted by opposition figures in its decision-making process.

Navalny, 44, is recovering in Germany after being poisoned by the Novichok nerve agent in August. Germany and its allies at a global chemical weapons watchdog have asked Russia to investigate the poisoning, which officials in Moscow either deny or blame Berlin for.

Navalny attributed the extremism probe to the authorities’ attempts to keep him out of the country.

“Putin, sitting in his bunker, wishes so desperately for me not to return to Russia after recovering,” he tweeted, “that he decided to add a criminal case for extremism to the threats to jail me for treason.”

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/12/01/authorities-probe-navalnys-coronavirus-interview-for-extremism-a72196