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McKinsey Bans Moscow Staff From Attending Pro-Navalny Protest

By Pjotr Sauer

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Police presence was high at the unauthorised rally. **Valery Sharifulin / TASS**

The Moscow office of leading U.S. consultancy McKinsey & Company banned its staff from attending an unauthorized protest in the capital in support of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny on Saturday and warned them against voicing online support, according to an email sent to McKinsey personnel seen by The Moscow Times.

Russians nationwide took to the streets on Saturday in support of the opposition activist, who was jailed this week on his return from Germany to Russia.

The message, titled "Stay safe, stay neutral, enjoy weekend," was sent to all employees in the office and shared with The Moscow Times by two McKinsey consultants on condition of anonymity.

"There is a call from some oppositionists for nationwide street demonstrations tomorrow

that almost certainly will not be authorized. In line with policy, McKinsey employees must not support any political activity either publicly or privately. This ban does include posts in social media featuring your political views or your attitude to any action with a political flavour. This line of conduct is mandatory. Please make sure you stay away from public areas of gathering around 2pm tomorrow and please refrain entirely from making related posts in any media," the message said.

When asked for comment on the message by The Moscow Times, McKinsey replied, "McKinsey supports its employees' rights to participate legally and in a personal capacity in civic and political activities across the countries we operate. The recognition of these rights is unqualified."

Saturday's protest had not been approved by the Russian authorities.

Related article: As It's Happening: Thousands Rally for Navalny's Release Across Russia

According to McKinsey's official Code of Professional Conduct presented online, "Colleagues must not present their personal political views in ways that could compromise the firm's reputation for political neutrality."

McKinsey has a long-standing relationship with Kremlin-linked companies, some of which are under Western government sanctions. In 2018, McKinsey was hired by VEB Bank, a bank that is fully owned by the Russian state and under U.S. sanctions. It has also consulted for Russian oil company Russneft.

McKinsey has previously been criticized by human rights activists for working for authoritarian states, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey and China.

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