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McKinsey Chief Admits Email Banning Staff From Navalny Rally Incorrectly Reflected Policy

The first email also said the ban included posts on social media "featuring your political views or your attitude to any action with a political flavor."

By Pjotr Sauer

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McKinsey staff criticized the initial message sent to them. **Sergei Bobylev / TASS**

The managing partner of U.S consultancy McKinsey & Company's Moscow office has messaged his staff "clarifying" an earlier email banning them from attending an unsanctioned protest for jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

"Some of you have raised concerns about my email to the office yesterday. I admit that the Firm's policy was incorrectly reflected in that email," Vitaly Klintsov wrote on Saturday.

He added a clarifying statement saying, “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.”

The earlier email sent on Friday and seen by The Moscow Times also said the ban included posts on social media “featuring your political views or your attitude to any action with a political flavor.”

Klintsov’s initial email was met with criticism by current and former staff of McKinsey, according to screenshots of conversations shared with the Moscow Times by employees at the firm. The company also received widespread criticism on Twitter from prominent human rights activists and journalists.

Related article: McKinsey Bans Moscow Staff From Attending Pro-Navalny Protest

Tens of thousands of people took to the streets across Russia on Saturday in a wave of support for the opposition activist, who remains in jail.

The instructions to McKinsey’s Moscow employees caught the attention of U.S. Republican Senator for Florida Marco Rubio, who said in a statement on his website that the email “raises serious questions about McKinsey’s core values and corporate culture.”

“[I]t strains credulity to believe the managing partner of Russia and CIS incorrectly characterized how McKinsey policy sought to interact with the Putin regime in his original email.” Rubio wrote. “It is no secret that McKinsey maintains close business ties to Russian government agencies and Kremlin-linked companies.”

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.

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

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