

Navalny Supporters Abroad Urge West to Get Serious About Sanctions

Anti-Kremlin voices back campaigns for tough personal sanctions on oligarchs and Putin allies.

By [Jake Cordell](#)

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Navalny supporters in London backed plans for the West to levy tough personal sanctions against the Kremlin's inner circle. **Valya Korabelnikova**

Hours after Russia had completed its annexation of Crimea in 2014, while he was sitting under house arrest facing a criminal trial on charges European courts would later brand politically motivated, Alexei Navalny wrote an [article](#) for the New York Times titled “How to Punish Putin.”

It was the anti-Kremlin campaigner's manifesto for the West — a guide to how the world's richest countries “could deliver a serious blow” to the Russian president and his inner circle.

He made two requests. First, freeze the Western assets and property of Russia's leading

oligarchs that Navalny alleges were obtained through corruption. Second, investigate how such “ill-gotten gains” flowed freely into their jurisdictions and financial systems in the first place.

“After all the tough talk from Western politicians,” Navalny wrote, the West’s weak approach on personal sanctions “is mocked in Russia and even seen as a tacit encouragement to Mr. Putin and his entourage, who seem to possess some magical immunity.”

Seven years on — impatient with the [limited visible effects](#) of Western sanctions and fired-up by Navalny’s YouTube [investigations](#) into the alleged corruption of Russian elites featuring luxury mansions, villas and yachts in the West — Navalny’s supporters are once again asking those countries to help them punish Putin.

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Spearheading the campaign are the opposition leader’s supporters abroad — the Russians now living in the West who staged rallies from Sydney to San Francisco last weekend in solidarity with the wave of pro-Navalny demonstrations that swept Russia.

“Bad people should be excluded from the Western financial system and Western countries,” was how Navalny’s longtime ally Vladimir Ashurkov — himself a British-based political exile — summarized the policy in an interview with The Moscow Times.

Last week he [published](#) a list of the eight business and political elites Navalny believes should be the West’s key targets. It included Chelsea-owner Roman Abramovich, technology mogul Alisher Usmanov and Russia’s Health Minister Mikhail Murashko — not the second-tier figures on current U.S. and EU sanctions lists.

'Dirty money'

Grassroots Navalny activists have backed the proposal.

“Those who support the corrupt regime, are associated with political persecution or [military-style violence](#) — as well as those who are spreading propaganda and encouraging all of this — should be under EU sanctions,” said Ekaterina Fedko, a Russian who now lives in Belgium and who organized a rally in Brussels last weekend.

She wants EU countries to get behind plans — [backed](#) by the European parliament in a non-binding resolution last week — for asset freezes and travel bans against more high-ranking and influential Kremlin allies.

“We need more societal awareness, political pressure and lobbying to defend human rights over financial interests,” she added.

That enthusiasm is shared by Navalny supporters across the West who sense that this is their moment to act.

Artem Tyurin, who organized a rally in Amsterdam, said he hopes protests in European capitals will “bring the world’s attention to this problem.” He wants the West to levy

sanctions “that really have an impact” and make foreign businesses “think twice” before doing deals with Kremlin-connected firms and individuals.

In Berlin, where Navalny was treated for his Novichok poisoning, almost 3,000 marched through the city center in his support Saturday, carrying with them a petition calling on Chancellor Angela Merkel to put more pressure on Moscow.

“We demand that Germany and the EU link good economic and diplomatic relations to the release of all political prisoners,” campaigner Konstantin Sherstyuk told The Moscow Times.

Related article: [The West Is Outraged By Navalny’s Novichok Poisoning. That’s No Guarantee of Tough Sanctions](#)

The key role they see the West playing is imposing exactly the kind of tough personal sanctions Navalny first outlined in 2014 — freezing oligarchs’ and high-ranking officials’ assets, stopping them from entering their countries and banning companies from doing business deals with named individuals.

The U.S., EU and U.K. all have the legislative firepower to levy the tough personal sanctions demanded by Navalny, should they choose to.

Powerful so-called [Magnitsky Acts](#) passed in recent years give them that option. The acts are sanctions protocols named after Sergei Magnitsky, a lawyer who died in pretrial detention in the same prison Navalny is now being held in after alleging a multimillion-dollar fraud scheme to plunder Russian state assets.

While [some](#) of the individuals Navalny named in 2014 were eventually placed under U.S. sanctions, critics say the West is still not using the full power of those laws — largely targeting the same kinds of mid-ranking security service operatives and politicians in Crimea and Russian-backed Eastern Ukraine Navalny scoffed at in 2014.

“Governments don’t want to get into individual sanctions,” Ashurkov said. “They’d be going against people who have vast financial resources, lobbying power and lawyers on their side. So it’s difficult to tackle them.”

Faced with these hurdles, a stricter response will only come when “Western publics start to demand that people involved in such blatant crimes are stopped from making inroads into their own financial systems and cities,” he added.

In backing hard-hitting personal sanctions, campaigners are wary of the impact broader economic sanctions could have on Russia.

“I don’t want the Russian economy going down because of sanctions that impact regular people and not high-ranking officials,” Tyurin said.

Anastasia Arkhipova, a 28-year-old Navalny supporter who now lives in the U.K. also draws distinctions between the different sanctions tools governments can deploy.

“I would like the U.K. to help Russian citizens. They can do that by imposing sanctions against

the officials who have made their wealth illegally ... and against those involved in Navalny's poisoning," she told The Moscow Times. "But I definitely don't want ordinary Russians to suffer, through restricting tourist or student visas, for instance."

No quick fix

Targeting high-ranking individuals would also play into how the Kremlin system operates better than sweeping new economic sanctions, said Alexei, another pro-Navalny organizer in Britain who asked for his last name to be withheld.

"Putin is an autocrat, but he's not a military dictator. He stays in power as long as those close to him get paid. But unlike Putin, they don't want to spend the rest of their lives in Russia," so the prospect of travel bans and asset freezes could be a big impetus for change, he said.

"So while we can't join the protests in Russia, we can — and we will — demand that the U.K. imposes these sanctions."

Even if the calls for a tough Western response are answered, most acknowledge they are unlikely to be an instant game-changer.

"The major shift in Russian politics must — and will — come from within," said Kate Antonov, who organized a pro-Navalny demonstration in New York.

Navalny ally Ashurkov agrees that the process will take a while to play out. "There is no silver bullet that anybody — either within or outside Russia — can shoot to put an end to the oppression and corruption that is prevailing now," he said.

But, he stressed, that doesn't mean the West should abandon its role.

Slapping asset freezes and visa bans on Kremlin-connected businessmen would "not only be instrumental in destroying the sense of security that these people enjoy," he said.

"It's also morally right and in the interests of Western countries to put a stop to these flows of dirty money."

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