The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Communist Lawmaker Detained for 'Observing' Navalny Protests

February 08, 2021



Nikolai Bondarenko **Vkontakte**

A regional Russian lawmaker and popular YouTuber from the Communist Party who plans to run for parliament this fall has been detained on charges of violating protest rules at a rally in support of opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

Nikolai Bondarenko's colleagues in the Volga region of Saratov say he had attended the Jan. 31 Navalny protests as an observer. He is among at least 15 people detained in the city of Saratov alone after the mass rallies that resulted in more than 5,600 detentions that day nationwide.

Related article: Navalny Supporters Defy Crackdown to Protest Across Russia

"The authorities have long been preparing for this, seeking out various ways to silence Nikolai," Olga Alimova, the Communist Party's Saratov regional branch leader, wrote on Facebook on Monday.

Alimova linked Bondarenko's detention with his stated plans to run for the lower house of Russia's parliament, the State Duma, in September. He is considered among the strongest challengers to Duma speaker Vyacheslav Volodin, who also stands for re-election from the same region.

"Did they try to clear the political field from a strong rival?" Alimova asked.

Bondarenko faces a fine of up to 20,000 rubles ($270) or 40 hours of community service if convicted on charges of violating protest rules, according to a police officer filmed by Bondarenko at the station where he is being held. Nearly 400,000 out of his 1.23 million YouTube subscribers watched Bondarenko's stream of his arrest.

Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov vowed to defend Bondarenko in court and fight for his release, according to state media.

Bondarenko and fellow Communist deputies displayed a banner saying "No to Political Repressions" during Friday's Saratov regional council session.

Bondarenko has regularly filmed himself arguing with pro-Kremlin deputies during Saratov region Duma sessions and had previously been detained for protesting Russia's controversial move to raise the pension age.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/02/08/russian-communist-lawmaker-detained-for-observing-navalny-protests-a72859