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France Rejected Russia's Request for Navalny Lab Results, Putin Tells Closed Meeting

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The Kremlin has repeatedly demanded evidence from Europe proving that Navalny was poisoned with Soviet-era nerve agent Novichok. **Markus Schreiber / AP / TASS**

France allegedly rejected Russia's offer to examine its scientists' findings that opposition leader Alexei Navalny was poisoned, President Vladimir Putin was reported to have said at a closed meeting Wednesday.

Putin told chief editors of Russian news outlets that he had promised French President Emmanuel Macron that Moscow would "immediately" open a criminal investigation "at the slightest evidence" of poisoning. European scientists concluded that Navalny received a near-deadly dose of Soviet-era nerve agent Novichok during his August 2020 trip to Siberia.

Related article: Navalny May Have Poisoned Himself, Putin Reportedly Tells Macron

Alexei Venediktov, the chief editor of the liberal Ekho Moskvy radio station who said he attended Wednesday's closed meeting, relayed Putin's frustration with Macron rejecting his request to share a French lab's findings on the Navalny poisoning.

Putin allegedly said that Macron also rejected his proposal that Russian medical experts visit the French lab or that French experts visit Russia, Venediktov said.

"If we had found what we hadn't seen, even the slightest evidence [of Navalny's poisoning], then we would immediately open a criminal investigation," Venediktov recounted Putin as saying.

The editor noted in a social media post that Putin personally gave him clearance to share these remarks with the wider public.

French media previously reported that Putin allegedly told Macron in a September 2020 phone call that Navalny — whom the Russian president accused of "simulating illnesses in the past" — may have poisoned himself.

Macron publicly demanded Russia to explain Navalny's poisoning and said the use of chemical weapons breaches a "red line."

The European Union is weighing imposing "concrete" sanctions on Russia at its foreign ministers' Feb. 22 meeting following the top EU diplomat's chastening Moscow visit last week.

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