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Navalny Ally Sentenced to 2.5 Years in Prison For Reposting Music Video

By AFP

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Andrei Borovikov (center right, holding flag) was sentenced to two and half years in prison Thursday. **Twitter.com/borovikov_andre**

A Russian court on Thursday sentenced an ally of jailed opposition politician Alexei Navalny to two and a half years in prison on pornography charges, his lawyer said.

The sentencing came as Russia inches closer to shutting down Navalny's political network, with his regional offices announcing they would disband ahead of a ruling over whether to designate his organisations as extremist.

The court in Arkhangelsk, northern Russia, ruled that Andrei Borovikov, a former coordinator for Navalny's offices, had spread pornography by reposting a music video by the German metal band Rammstein.

Borovikov, 32, had pleaded not guilty to the charge, and his defence team will appeal the

decision, lawyer Andrei Kychin added.

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Opposition news site MBKh Media reported that in 2014, Borovikov had reposted the music video to Rammstein's song "Pussy" on VKontakte, a popular Russian social network similar to Facebook.

The news site said a former volunteer for Navalny's Arkhangelsk offices informed the police about the post in 2019, and charges were brought against Borovikov in September 2020.

One version of the music video depicts Rammstein playing its song interspersed with shots of scantily clad women dancing at a strip bar.

In a second edition, a couple performs sexual intercourse near the end of the clip.

It was not immediately clear which Borovikov had reposted because he has deleted the post.

Amnesty International on Wednesday called the case against Borovikov "utterly absurd.

"It is blatantly obvious that he is being punished solely for his activism, not his musical taste," the group cited its Moscow director Natalia Zvyagina as saying.

The ruling came as a Moscow court deliberates a request from prosecutors to designate Navalny's regional network and his Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) as extremist, putting them on par with the Islamic State group and Al-Qaeda.

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If the request is accepted, FBK activities would be banned, putting members and supporters at risk of lengthy jail time.

The regional network was founded during Navalny's presidential campaign in 2018, even though he was barred from running.

It later supported his graft investigations and the Smart Voting strategy, which directs voters to cast their ballots for candidates best placed to defeat Kremlin-linked opponents.

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