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Russia Seeks to Ban Extremist-Linked Candidates Ahead of Navalny Ruling

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The draft bill's eight co-authors represent both the ruling United Russia party and all three of the State Duma's opposition parties. **Sergei Fadeichev / TASS**

Russian lawmakers have proposed banning people linked to terrorist or extremist organizations from running for office ahead of a landmark ruling to outlaw jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's political and activist groups.

The changes to Russia's election law, submitted in the lower-house State Duma on Tuesday, come days ahead of a highly anticipated Moscow court decision to brand Navalny's nationwide network of some 50 regional offices and his Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) — both peaceful political movements — as "extremist" organizations.

Related article: 'End of an Era': Russia Adds Navalny Political Network to 'Terrorist and Extremist' List

If passed, anyone in the extremist group's hierarchy — including financial donors — who

played any role in the organization one to three years prior to the court ruling would be banned from running for office.

Heads of outlawed organizations would not be allowed to run for the State Duma for five years while employees would face three-year bans, according to the draft bill.

“We’ve seen a lot of ‘laws against Navalny,’ but this is something new,” Navalny’s senior aide Leonid Volkov tweeted.

“If you donated to the FBK over the past year — you can’t run for the State Duma. If you worked as a coordinator at Navalny’s headquarters over the last three years — you can’t run for the State Duma,” he wrote.

Volkov has said that the “extremism” court ruling will not affect the team’s “Smart Voting” strategy that seeks to unseat pro-Putin ruling party incumbents in this fall's key parliamentary elections.

The draft bill’s eight co-authors represent both the ruling United Russia party and all three of the State Duma’s opposition parties.

To become law, their legislative initiative would need three votes of approval in the State Duma and one in the upper-house Federation Council before receiving President Vladimir Putin’s signature.

If passed, the ban would directly affect several Navalny allies who have announced plans to run for the Duma, including his senior aide and FBK lawyer Lyubov Sobol.

Ahead of the court ruling, Moscow prosecutors suspended the Navalny network’s activities and Russia’s state financial watchdog froze its bank accounts. Meanwhile, Volkov announced the network’s dissolution to protect employees from the prison time that they’d risk as members of “extremist” organizations.

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