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Russian Investigators Open New Case Against Navalny

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Alexei Navalny. **Kirill Kudryavtsev / AFP**

Russia's Investigative Committee on Tuesday opened a criminal case against jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny and eight of his closest allies, most of whom have already fled the country.

Navalny, who was imprisoned in February for two and a half years on old fraud charges he calls trumped up after returning from a near-fatal poisoning abroad, could face up to 10 more years in jail on the charges of running an extremist organization.

The opposition figure, along with the former head of his political network Leonid Volkov and the former director of his Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) Ivan Zhdanov, are accused of creating and leading FBK, which was banned in Russia as an "extremist" organization in June.

Both Volkov and Zhdanov fled the country earlier this year to escape criminal prosecution on other charges.

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Navalny is accused of founding FBK in 2014 "with the aim of carrying out extremist activities aimed at changing the foundations of constitutional order in the Russian Federation, undermining the public security and state integrity of the Russian Federation by creating an extremist community and leading it."

Criminal cases were also opened against key Navalny ally Lyubov Sobol as well as activists Georgy Alburov, Ruslan Shaveddinov, Vyacheslav Gimadi, Pavel Zelensky and Rustem Mulyukov for participation in an extremist organization.

Zelensky, FBK's cameraman, is already serving two years in prison on charges of promoting extremism on the internet.

The Navalny headquarters and FBK websites, along with their YouTube channels, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook were used to promote criminal activity on the internet, the Investigative Committee said in a note.

In April, the Investigative Committee opened a criminal case against Navalny, Volkov and Zhdanov for creating a nonprofit organization that infringes on the rights of citizens.

Before its closure this year, FBK had risen to national prominence with its investigations into the alleged hidden wealth of Russia's elite.

In January, FBK's video investigation into President Vladimir Putin's alleged billion-dollar Black Sea palace helped fuel nationwide protests that were followed by a sweeping crackdown on Russia's opposition.

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