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Navalny Ally Flees Russia as Aides Face 'Terrorist' Labels – Reuters

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Violetta Grudina. **violetta.grudina / instagram**

Another activist linked to jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny has fled Russia, Reuters reported Thursday as the authorities' year-long campaign to dismantle his network and label its leading figures "terrorists" showed little sign of slowing.

Violetta Grudina, 32, was blocked from running for local office in the Arctic port city of Murmansk last year after being forcibly hospitalized despite testing negative for coronavirus. Grudina has said she faced an intimidation campaign that included several years of hefty fines and unknown people shooting at her office.

Related article: Navalny Ally Running for Local Office Faces Court-Approved Forced Hospitalization

Despite being barred from leaving the country due to being under house arrest, Grudina told Reuters she fled with her 11-year-old son and dog to a European country she declined to

name.

The uncomfortable journey took several days in December and involved transport by car, plane, bus and on foot, she said.

“In principle, I was ready to stay in Russia and go to jail,” she said.

“[But] I needed to think about my son and leave in order to provide him with a safe future.”

A legal team defending Grudina had said the activist was targeted in a criminal case for “inciting mass violations” of Covid-19 restrictions during the early 2021 pro-Navalny protests.

She joins nearly all of Navalny’s most prominent allies who have fled Russia after authorities jailed the opposition leader when he returned from treatment for a poisoning attack and outlawed his organizations in 2021.

The campaign to silence Kremlin critics extended into 2022, with authorities this week adding Navalny and several of his top aides to the national “terrorist and extremist” register.

Leonid Volkov and Ivan Zhdanov, who are running Navalny's operations from exile and were the first to be labeled “terrorists and extremists” earlier in January, said they have since received anonymous letters threatening them and their families.

“We know where you live. We don't want you and your families to feel safe, we want you to remember this as you go about your work,” the letters reportedly said.

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