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Pro-Navalny Orthodox Priest Flees Russia, Citing Safety Concerns

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Georgiy Sukhobokiy / facebook

A Russian Orthodox priest who was dismissed from his job last year for supporting jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny said Tuesday that he has fled Russia out of concerns for his safety.

Georgi Sukhoboky, a former cleric from the Ulyanovsk region, said he moved to Poland last month after receiving a series of threatening letters following his criticism of the bishop who dismissed him.

"When the Putin regime falls, I plan to return and even serve as a cleric, if there is such an opportunity," Sukhoboky told the Mozhem Obyasnit Telegram channel.

Sukhoboky was dismissed from his post as the Melekes Diocese's press secretary after congratulating Navalny on social media for receiving the European Union's Sakharov Prize for human rights in October.

He then took to social media to criticize the bishop who dismissed him, accusing him of overseeing hypocrisy and financial embezzlement in his diocese — a conflict that led to Sukhoboky being suspended from the monastery for six months.

After receiving a series of threatening letters in response to his posts, Sukhoboky decided to flee to Poland, where he has family roots. While he said he no longer intends to work in the clergy, he plans to keep "providing people with truthful information about the Church."

The departure follows a year of crackdowns on Navalny and his supporters, with a court ruling banning the dissident's groups as "extremist" and authorities jailing his allies.

Navalny is currently serving a 2.5-year prison sentence in a penal colony on charges of violating a 2014 suspended sentence by skipping check-ins with Russia's prison service while recovering from a poisoning in Germany, a plot he blames on the Kremlin.

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