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EU Vows To Hold Putin Accountable at Navalny Widow Meeting

By AFP

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Yulia Navalnaya and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell in Brussels. **Josep Borrell / X**

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell Monday pledged that Russian President Vladimir Putin would be held to account for Alexei Navalny's death after he met the opposition leader and Kremlin foe's widow.

Navalny's death in an Arctic prison last week has shocked Russia's exiled opposition which — along with the West — pointed the finger at the Kremlin.

"We expressed the EU's deepest condolences to Yulia Navalnaya. Vladimir Putin and his regime will be held accountable for the death of Alexei Navalny," Josep Borrell wrote on X.

"As Yulia said, Putin is not Russia. Russia is not Putin. We will continue our support to Russia's civil society and independent media."

Navalnaya addressed foreign ministers from the EU's 27 nations in Brussels after vowing to carry on her husband's fight against Putin's vicelike grip on Russia.

European diplomats said that she reiterated her determination to keep up the struggle and called on the bloc to do more to target Putin's circle — drawing a standing ovation from the room.

She also warned against striking any deals with the Russian leader or hoping that he would change, they said.

The EU in a statement called for an independent "international investigation" into the Kremlin foe's death and threatened sanctions.

Related article: Yulia Navalnaya: 'I Will Continue the Work of Alexei Navalny'

The EU has already imposed unprecedented sanctions on Moscow, including on Putin, over its invasion of Ukraine and officials concede it will be difficult to impose further major pain after Navalny's death.

But Borrell said he expected EU member states to propose fresh sanctions on those directly responsible for Navalny's treatment, including in Russia's prison system.

He said that Brussels would rename its global human rights sanctions blacklist after Navalny in a symbolic move.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said ministers would "initiate further sanctions measures" over Navalny's death.

"The Russian brutal war of aggression... is not just a war against Ukraine, but against freedom itself," she said.

Other ministers said the death of Putin's greatest domestic foe should serve to bolster backing for Kyiv as its outgunned forces struggle to hold back Russia.

"Putin is a murderer. Putin has murdered one person who fought for freedom for democracy, and this is exactly why we have to keep going," said Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna.

"The most clear response would be if we finally do our job. We have to support Ukraine."

That was echoed by Belgian minister Hadja Lahbib who warned that the death of Navalny served to underline the threat the Kremlin poses as it presses its offensive on Ukraine.

"We must be aware of what is at stake today," she said.

"If Russia manages to expand, it is a dictatorship that will expand and move a little closer to the European Union."

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