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Former Navalny Lawyers Sentenced to Prison on 'Extremism' Charges

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A Russian court sentenced three former lawyers of the late opposition activist Alexei Navalny to prison on "extremism" charges, the independent news outlet Mediazona reported Friday.

Vadim Kobzev, Alexei Liptser and Igor Sergunin were arrested in October 2023, accused of facilitating Navalny's political activities from prison by allegedly passing messages between him and his allies.

Investigators claimed the lawyers used their legal status to "plan, prepare, enable and commit extremist crimes." Kobzev and Liptser denied the charges, while Sergunin reportedly pleaded guilty.

The Petushki District Court in the Vladimir region convicted the trio of "participating in extremist activity." Kobzev was sentenced to 5.5 years in prison, Liptser to 5 years and Sergunin to 3.5 years. Additionally, all three were banned from practicing law for three years following their release.

Prosecutors had sought sentences of up to 5 years and 11 months for the lawyers. The trial was closed to the public at the prosecution's request.

Related article: Russian Prosecutors Request 5-Year Prison Sentence for Ex-Navalny Lawyers

Dozens of journalists and supporters attended Friday's sentencing, but they were removed from the courtroom after someone shouted "shame on the junta." Mediazona reported that at least four journalists and one supporter were briefly detained on a train arriving in the town of Petushki, 100 kilometers (60 miles) from Moscow, but were released after the sentencing.

Liptser's defense team announced plans to appeal the verdict.

Following the sentencing on Friday, Navalny's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, wrote on X that the three lawyers "are political prisoners and should be freed immediately."

The convictions come amid a broader crackdown on associates of Navalny. Four independent Russian journalists are also on trial for alleged "extremism" linked to their purported work with Navalny's team.

Navalny's political and activist organizations, including his Anti-Corruption Foundation, were designated "extremist" by Russian authorities in 2021, subjecting employees, volunteers and supporters to criminal prosecution.

Navalny, who was serving a 19-year prison sentence on "extremism" charges, died last February under unclear circumstances while in an Arctic penal colony.

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