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ECHR Finds Russia's 2021 Arrest of Alexei Navalny Illegal

By AFP

February 03, 2026



Alexei Navalny in prison. **Alexander Zemlianichenko / AP / TASS**

Europe's top human rights court ruled Tuesday that Russia subjected opposition activist Alexi Navalny to "inhuman treatment" following his arrest in 2021, three years before his death at an Arctic prison.

Navalny, a prominent anti-corruption campaigner and critic of President Vladimir Putin, was arrested in 2021 after returning to Russia from Germany, where he had been recovering from a 2020 Novichok nerve agent poisoning while campaigning in Siberia.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) said Navalny's jailing was illegal and based on the "activation of a suspended sentence" stemming from a 2014 fraud and money laundering conviction that the court had previously found to be unlawful.

In its ruling, the ECHR said the activist was "simultaneously subjected to a combination of

several forms of ill-treatment," which "reflected a pattern of disregard for his health, well-being and dignity and amounted to inhuman and degrading treatment."

While at one prison, the court said, Navalny had his head shaved, he "was kept under constant video surveillance, and deprived of sleep through hourly or two-hourly security checks."

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Navalny was serving a 19-year prison sentence on multiple charges widely viewed as politically motivated when he died in February 2024 in an Arctic prison under unclear circumstances.

The ECHR allowed Navalny's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, to continue the case on his behalf and ordered Russia to pay 26,000 euros ($30,600) in damages.

Russia left the Council of Europe, which oversees the ECHR, in 2022 following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The court has said Moscow remains responsible for violations committed before its withdrawal, though Russia has repeatedly ignored ECHR rulings.

AFP contributed reporting.

Original url:
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