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Russia Targets Political Prisoner Donors With 'Extremism' Charges

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Andrei Lyubimov / Moskva News Agency

Russian authorities have opened criminal cases against two people who donated to a fundraiser for political prisoners in 2023, the rights group OVD-Info reported Tuesday.

The Federal Security Service (FSB) accused the donors of financing the late Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, which Russia outlawed as "extremist" in 2021. Organizers of the fundraiser said the foundation had no role in the event and that the money went to help political prisoners.

One donor was convicted and given a large fine, OVD-Info said. The other fled Russia and is due to stand trial in absentia. He faces up to eight years in prison if convicted.

The June 2023 fundraiser, called "You Are Not Alone," was organized by the exiled broadcaster Dozhd (TV Rain).

It initially collected donations through the payment service DonatePay, but switched to a

DonationAlerts account belonging to opposition politician Maxim Katz after the original account was shut down following a complaint by an RT commentator.

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OVD-Info said 7,519 ruble transfers were identified as having been made from inside Russia through DonationAlerts during the fundraiser. The payment service is linked to Russian tech company VK, which provides data to law enforcement, the group said.

In making its case, the FSB pointed to links to the fundraiser posted on websites and channels associated with Navalny. It also cited the foundation's website, which lists support for political prisoners among its activities.

Katz said he passed the money collected through his account to TV Rain, which used it to help political prisoners.

The donor who left Russia told OVD-Info that officers detained him on his way to work in October 2025 and took him home, where they seized his electronic devices. The FSB alleges that a 3,000-ruble ($36) donation he made during the fundraiser went to Navalny's foundation.

The man said he gave the money to help political prisoners and that investigators offered to let him go home if he incriminated himself. He said he refused and left Russia soon afterward. Authorities opened a criminal case against him in April.

Ksenia Fadeyeva, who handled communications and fundraising for the event, said all the money raised that day was intended for political prisoners.

"It's impossible to imagine that independent media outlets or opposition politicians like Maxim Katz or Mikhail Khodorkovsky would agree to take part in a fundraiser to finance the Anti-Corruption Foundation," she said.

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