

Navalny Campaign Likely to Survive Balkan Business Claims

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The Moscow Elections Commission has said that mayoral candidates aren't forbidden from owning businesses abroad, as Alexei Navalny's campaign team moves to dispel claims that he co-founded a company in Montenegro.

On Tuesday, [FLB.ru](#) published search results from an open online corporate aggregator showing that Navalny registered MDR Company in the Balkans in 2007.

As the news of Navalny's links to the business raced through the blogosphere, his campaign head Leonid Volkov satirized the claims on LiveJournal and claimed that the Montenegrin tax administration had been hacked.

"Our wonderful 'opponents' went to the trouble of using the weakness of Montenegro's tax administration site to insert information about a firm apparently owned by Navalny. That's what I call 'the level of political discussion,'" Volkov wrote on his LiveJournal [blog](#)

Wednesday.

But on Thursday the Montenegrin tax administration said in a statement that their site had not been hacked and confirmed the existence of the company co-founded by Alexei Navalny on Nov. 20, 2007 in Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro.

The statement also indicated that the company was never registered as a taxpayer and never declared profits or tax liabilities in Montenegro. In other words, the company only exists on paper.

Navalny said that he didn't know what was happening in Montenegro and wrote on his Twitter blog Thursday that his campaign team is "sending lawyers to Montenegro to get to the bottom of everything."

However, the election commission's chairman said that owning a business abroad would not be grounds for removing Navalny from the election.

"The ban is on having real estate and bank accounts abroad. ... There is no direct ban on having a business abroad," Valentin Gorbunov told RIA Novosti on Thursday.

Gorbunov added that the Elections Commission has yet to receive any official complaints on the matter.

In an interview with Interfax on Friday, Volkov said that Navalny and fellow activist Maria Gaidar had in fact started the process of registering a business in 2007 but then decided not to follow through with their plan. The company ended up in the registry because of "a legal mix-up in Montenegro," he said.

Volkov responded to the news Thursday in evident agitation, urging supporters to "keep composure and dispense with hysterics" on his [blog](#).

Navalny himself made light of the situation and told his supporters not to worry.

"Why break the law when it's possible not to. Everything will be sorted out, everything will be ok," he wrote on his blog.

Navalny has been under increasing pressure as the clock ticks down to the election on Sept. 8.

The commission on Thursday threatened to remove him from the race due to suspicions that his campaigners were distributing materials that lacked mandatory labels showing that his official campaign fund had paid for them.

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