

Prosecutors Call for Closure of Navalny Anti-Corruption Vkontakte Group

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The Prosecutor General's Office has asked Russia's Federal Mass Media Inspection Service to block the Vkontakte social network page of the Anti-Corruption Fund, an organization set up by opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

Alexander Sidyakin, a State Duma deputy from the United Russia party, posted a picture on his Twitter account of a letter from prosecutors saying that the group "War with Corruption — support of Alexei Navalny" was to be blocked. He said that the measure was a sanction against "the 5th column."

Sidyakin asked prosecutors earlier this month to block the site for containing extremist material after a post advocated participation in unsanctioned protests and said that President Vladimir Putin was a criminal who should be arrested and executed. Key words in the post were later voluntarily replaced with the hashtag phrase "#censored."

Access to the group, which has more than 269,000 followers, remained open as of Thursday evening. Navalny wrote on his own Twitter account that the community is the largest political group on Vkontakte.

News of the closure request comes the same day that state-funded news channel NTV published a report in which video surveillance footage allegedly showed Navalny asking European Parliament member Guy Verhofstadt for financial assistance in a Moscow hotel. The report also featured a recorded telephone conversation in which Navalny supposedly spoke about having a connection to the CIA.

On Thursday afternoon Navalny confirmed that he had met with Verhofstadt but said that his work with the former Belgian prime minister was very formal and official, only discussing cooperation in terms of rooting out Russian officials' corruption using European legal systems. Navalny said that the taped phone conversation was about a photo shoot for Esquire magazine in which an employee of the publication joked about needing to talk to the CIA, Dozhd reported.

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