

Navalny Associate Asks for Asylum in Britain, Cites 'Persecution' in Russia

By [Howard Amos](#)

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Vladimir Ashurkov is the executive director of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation.

Activist and fundraiser Vladimir Ashurkov, a close associate of arrested opposition leader Alexei Navalny, said Monday that he had applied for political asylum in Britain because of a “campaign of political persecution” against him in Russia.

Ashurkov, 42, was closely involved in recruiting donors to bankroll Navalny's bid for Moscow mayor last year and led high profile anti-corruption investigations into powerful Russian officials.

In May, Russia's Investigative Committee opened a fraud case against Ashurkov relating to alleged violations during fundraising for Navalny's electoral campaign. At the end of July it was reported that a federal warrant had been issued for his arrest.

“I was in the United Kingdom when I learned about the criminal case opened against me and

my colleagues. I fully understood that this is the next step in the campaign of political persecution against myself and other opposition activists. I evaluated my options and decided to seek protection,” Ashurkov told The Moscow Times on Monday in written comments.

Ashurkov, who has been living in London since he flew there from Israel in April for his partner to give birth, joins a long list of Russian political dissidents, including former Kremlin kingmaker Boris Berezovsky, banker Andrei Borodin and former intelligence agent Alexander Litvinenko, who have sought asylum in the U.K.

A number of Navalny's close associates have become entangled in criminal investigations this year in what activists describe as a deliberate Kremlin push to quash Russia's nascent opposition movement. Ashurkov played a prominent role among activists who unsuccessfully attempted to register a political party as a vehicle for Navalny.

Navalny, who won 27.2 percent of the vote in Moscow mayoral elections last year, has been under house arrest on embezzlement charges since February.

Ashurkov announced his decision to seek political asylum on Twitter in the early hours of Monday morning shortly after Russian daily Izvestia, known for its ties to the security services, published a copy of what it said were asylum papers filed by Ashurkov with the British immigration authorities.

Izvestia did not say how it obtained the documents, but a source close to Ashurkov confirmed they were genuine. Ashurkov himself declined to comment.

In the purported request for asylum, filed three months after his arrival in the U.K., Ashurkov said he would face “detention [in] inhuman conditions, torture and unfair judicial procedures” if he returned to Russia.

Ashurkov, a former executive at billionaire Mikhail Fridman's Alfa Group, rose to prominence as an opposition activist following mass protests against President Vladimir Putin in 2011 and 2012. He was a key figure in boosting Navalny's broader credibility and attracting financial support for the blogger turned opposition leader from among senior figures in the business world.

As director of Navalny's Fund for Fighting Corruption, Ashurkov was also in charge of organizing anti-corruption investigations into the personal finances and real estate holdings of top officials as well as probing the financial operations of state-owned companies.

Ashurkov told The Moscow Times on Monday that he was “still involved” in several of the fund's projects, but that “there are people in Russia who have taken over the day-to-day operational responsibilities.”

Contact the author at h.amos@imedia.ru

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