

Russian Prosecutors Back Prison Time for Navalny

February 01, 2021



Navalny faces up to 3.5 years under a years-old fraud conviction in a trial that starts Tuesday. **Alexander Nemenov / AFP**

Russian prosecutors have [supported](#) handing opposition leader Alexei Navalny a prison sentence of up to 3.5 years in a high-profile trial that starts Tuesday.

Navalny was swiftly [detained](#) upon his Jan. 17 return to Russia from Germany, as Russia's prison service accused him of violating his probation in a 2014 fraud conviction by failing to report to his parole officers. The Kremlin critic, who had been recovering from a nerve-agent poisoning in Berlin since August, argues that his whereabouts in Germany were well-known to parole officers.

Related article: [Navalny Kept in Custody Ahead of Sunday Protests](#)

In a statement Monday, the Prosecutor General's Office called the Federal Penitentiary Service's Dec. 29 request to convert Navalny's 3.5-year suspended sentence to a real prison

term “legal and reasonable.”

Prosecutors pointed to Navalny’s upcoming [trial](#) on criminal charges of defaming a World War II veteran during his probation period last summer as a supporting circumstance for sentencing him to prison.

In December, investigators also [opened](#) a criminal probe against him for large-scale fraud, alleging he used more than 356 million rubles (\$4.8 million) of donations to his organizations for personal purposes. The charge is punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

Navalny and his supporters believe all three cases are politically motivated.

The anti-corruption campaigner’s detention prompted two weekends of unprecedented protest across Russia, with tens of thousands calling for his release and rallying against Russia’s ruling elite.

Thousands were detained at the protests, and several of Navalny’s allies and family members have been detained or sentenced to house arrest in connection with the rallies. His allies have called for new protests on Tuesday, the day of his court hearing.

AFP contributed reporting.

Original url:

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93