

Russian court jails three of Navalny's former lawyers for 'extremist' activity

Three lawyers for the late opposition leader Alexei Navalny were found guilty by a Russian court on Friday of participating in an "extremist organisation" and sentenced to years in jail.



Lawyers Igor Sergunin, from left, Alexei Liptser and Vadim Kobzev, who once represented late opposition leader Alexei Navalny, stand in a courtroom in Petushki, east of Moscow, on January 17, 2025. © Pavel Bednyakov, AP

[Russia](#) on Friday sentenced three lawyers who had defended [Alexei Navalny](#) to several years in prison for bringing messages from the late opposition leader from prison to the outside world.

The case, which comes amid a massive crackdown on dissent during the [Ukraine](#) offensive, has alarmed rights groups who fear Moscow will ramp up trials against legal representatives in addition to jailing their clients.

The [Kremlin](#) has sought to punish Navalny's associates even after his unexplained death in an Arctic prison colony last February.

Vadim Kobzev, Alexei Liptser and Igor Sergunin were found guilty of participating in an "extremist organisation" by a court in the town of Petushki.

Kobzev, the most high-profile member of Navalny's legal team, was given five and a half years, while Liptser was handed five and Sergunin three and a half years.

They were almost the only people visiting Navalny in prison while he served his 19-year sentence.

Navalny, Putin's main political opponent, communicated with the world by transmitting messages through his lawyers, which his team then published on social media.

Passing letters and messages through lawyers is a normal practice in Russian prisons.

Navalny's exiled widow Yulia Navalnaya said the lawyers were "[political prisoners](#) and should be freed immediately".

Navalny's team has accused prison authorities of having secretly filmed Navalny's meetings with his lawyers, which are meant to be confidential. His team published footage of the meetings on social media to support their claim.

'New low point'

The [Netherlands](#) said that pursuing the lawyers marked a "new low point in the already dire [human rights](#) situation" in Russia. [Germany](#) said that "even those meant to defend others before the law face harsh persecution".

Britain's foreign minister David Lammy posted on X: "Nearly a year on from Navalny's death, the Russian authorities continue to crush any dissent..."

"The [UK](#) and our partners are clear: the Kremlin must release all political prisoners."

To display this content from X (Twitter), you must enable advertisement tracking and audience measurement.

The men were sentenced after a closed-door trial in the town of Petushki – a town about 115 kilometres (72 miles) east of Moscow – near the Pokrov prison where Navalny was held before he was moved to a remote colony above the Arctic Circle.

"We are on trial for passing Navalny's thoughts to other people," Kobzev said in court last week, Novaya Gazeta newspaper reported.

A statement from the court said they had "used their status as lawyers while visiting convict Navalny... to ensure the regular transfer of information between the members of the extremist community, including those wanted and hiding outside the Russian Federation, and Navalny."

It said this allowed Navalny to plan "crimes with an extremist character" from his maximum-security prison.

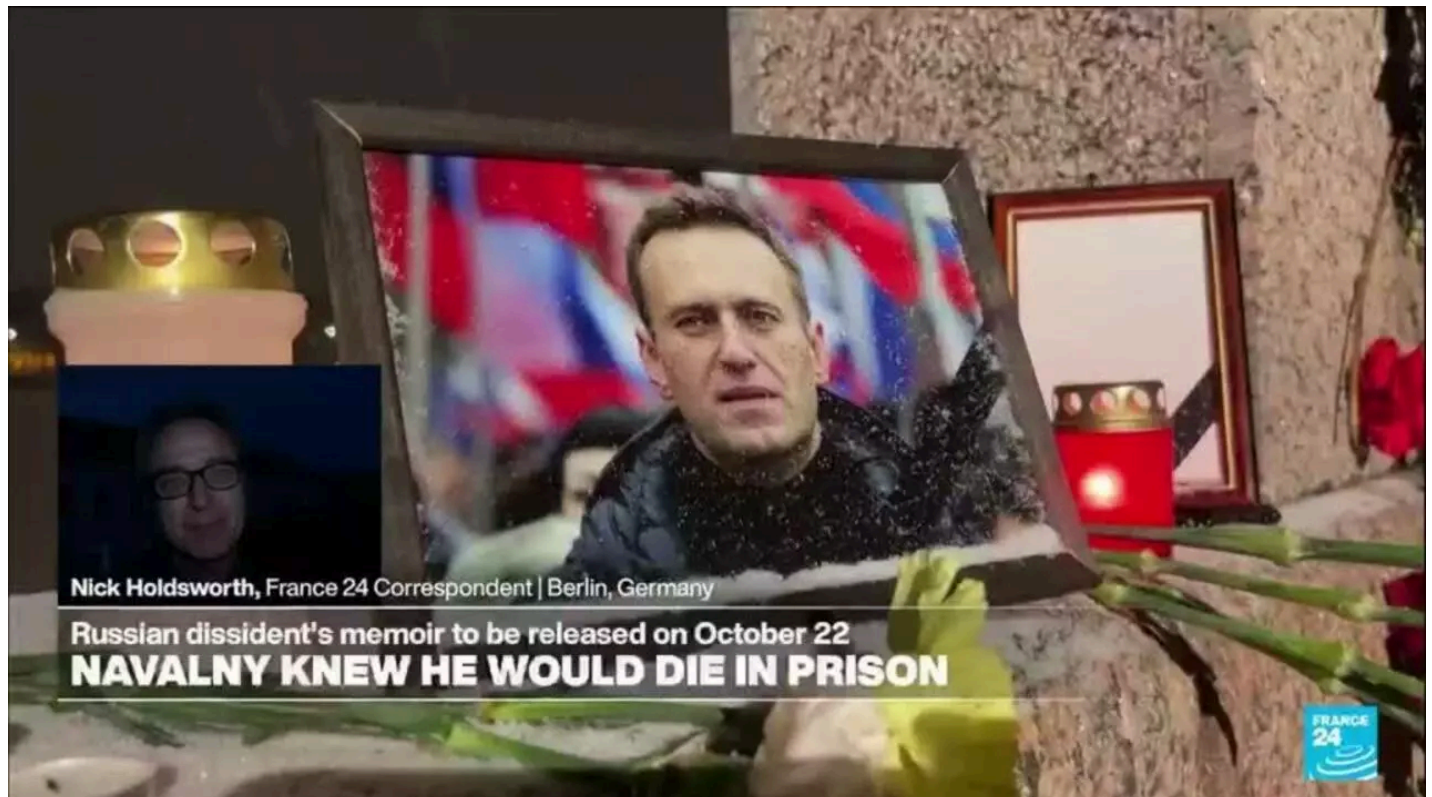
In his messages to the outside world, Navalny denounced the Kremlin's Ukraine offensive as "criminal" and told supporters "not to give up".

Navalny was himself a lawyer and was known for his tongue-and-cheek speeches in court, attempts to sue officials and long legal tirades defying prosecutors.

He had denounced the arrest of his lawyers in October 2023 as an attempt to further isolate him.

To display this content from YouTube, you must enable advertisement tracking and audience measurement.

One of your browser extensions seems to be blocking the video player from loading. To watch this content, you may need to disable it on this site.



Kobzev last week compared Moscow's current crackdown on dissent to Stalin-era mass repression.

"Eighty years have passed... and in the Petushki court, people are once again on trial for discrediting officials and the state agencies," he said.

'Dangerous precedent'

The OVD rights group that monitors political repression in Russia said Friday that the sentences showed Moscow was now intent on making defending political prisoners – a practice that is still allowed but becoming more difficult – outright dangerous.

"The authorities are now essentially outlawing the defence of politically persecuted people," the group said.

"Pressure on defence lawyers risks destroying what little is left of the rule of law – the semblance of which the Russian authorities are still trying to maintain."

The UIA International Lawyers Association has also warned the trial raises questions about the future of the profession in Russia.

The trial "sets a dangerous precedent" in "potentially deterring" lawyers from defending clients in sensitive cases, it said.

Last week, Navalnaya said Russia had refused to remove her husband from its list of terrorists and extremists despite his death.

She published a December letter from Russia's financial watchdog Rosfinmonitoring addressed to Navalny's mother that said the late opposition leader was still being investigated for [money laundering](#) and "financing [terrorism](#)".

"Why does Putin need this? Obviously not to stop Alexei from opening a bank account," Navalnaya said.

"Putin is doing this to scare you."

(AFP)