**Putin Critic Alexei Navalny Poisoned With Military Nerve Agent, Berlin Says**

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BERLIN—Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny was poisoned with Novichok, a chemical nerve agent, the German government said on Wednesday, presenting the strongest evidence yet that the attack could have been carried out by Russian state agencies.

Chancellor Angela Merkel held an emergency meeting with key members of her cabinet and called on Moscow to immediately comment on the revelation, Chancellor Angela Merkel’s spokesman said in a written statement.

Germany’s North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies as well as the European Union were informed of the findings in order to coordinate their response, Berlin said, suggesting that the West might respond with some form of sanctions.

Russia’s government told the state news agency RIA Novosti that German authorities hadn’t informed Moscow about its conclusion about the poisoning of Mr. Navalny by Novichok.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said he had summoned the Russian ambassador to request an immediate response from his government.

“We have unambiguously asked the Russian government to explain the background of this confirmed poisoning immediately and in full detail and transparency,” Mr. Maas told reporters in Berlin. “We will discuss in the coming days how Europe will react in an appropriate way, and the decision will be made depending on how Russia will behave now.”

A special laboratory of the German military had proven without doubt that a variant of novichok, one of the most deadly military-grade nerve agents, was used on Mr. Navalny, said Steffen Seibert, Ms. Merkel’s spokesman.

Mr. Navalny was flown to Germany for medical treatment on Aug. 22 after suddenly falling critically ill while on board a commercial flight in Russia. Mr. Navalny underwent extensive tests at Berlin’s Charité hospital, which sent medical samples to top clinics around the world.

Novichok, which is believed to be only available to state actors, was used to poison a former Russian double agent and his daughter in Britain in 2018 in the U.K., British authorities said at the time. London has since blamed the attack on the Kremlin after a meticulous international investigation.

The use of Novichok, which qualifies as a chemical weapon, is banned by international treaties.

“It is a devastating occurrence that Alexei Navalny was the victim in Russia of an attack with a chemical nerve agent,” Mr. Seibert said. “The Russian government must immediately explain this.”

Mr. Navalny’s supporters believe Russian President Vladimir Putin was involved in poisoning Mr. Navalny, who has long been an outspoken critic of the Kremlin leader and Russia’s political elite.

The Kremlin has denied any involvement in harming Mr. Navalny and had pushed back against demands from Western leaders for an inquiry into the attack against the opposition leader.

“In 2020, poisoning Navalny with Novichok is exactly the same as leaving an autograph at the crime scene. Like this: V.V Putin,” Leonid Volkov, one of Mr. Navalny’s top lieutenants, tweeted.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said Moscow was still waiting for a response to the request of its Prosecutor General’s Office to Germany regarding Mr. Navalny, Russian state news agency TASS reported Wednesday.

“To claim this, you need to present evidence, but they, apparently, aren’t,” Vladimir Kozhin, first deputy chairman of the Russian Federation Council Committee on Defense and Security, told the state news agency RIA Novosti. “So all this is from the category of fantasy and conspiracy theories.”

Yuriy Shvytkin, a parliamentary deputy said Russia was “not engaged in the manufacture of substances of the “Novichok” type,” RIA reported. “There are such laboratories on the territory of Georgia and the United States.”