

Prominent Rights Activist Gets 3 Days in Jail

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Nemtsov, front, carrying a Russian flag on Novy Arbat on Sunday with about 100 activists, including Ponomaryov. **Misha Japaridze**

A Moscow court on Thursday sentenced human rights activist Lev Ponomaryov to three days in jail for participating in a banned march during the Flag Day holiday last weekend, in what fellow activists said was an unexpectedly harsh ruling.

Ponomaryov, 68, was convicted of disobeying police officers' lawful order to stop marching on Novy Arbat, in central Moscow, on Sunday.

The administrative penalty could have been limited to a fine of up to 1,000 rubles (\$32), but the court ruled that Ponomaryov should face arrest because he has a record of previous minor offenses, Interfax reported.

Opposition leaders Boris Nemtsov and Mikhail Shneider were detained on the same charges. Shneider was also sentenced to a three-day arrest Thursday, but Nemtsov's case was returned to police because of insufficient evidence.

Ponomaryov's lawyer, Valery Shukhardin, accused the five police officers who testified against his client in court of falsifying their reports, Interfax reported. Shukhardin said he would ask that the officers be investigated.

Ponomaryov, who spent four days in the hospital with high blood pressure after being detained at an Aug. 12 opposition rally, complained about feeling ill after Thursday's ruling but was not re-hospitalized.

He called the case against him political and promised to appeal, Interfax reported.

Human Rights Watch criticized the arrest, saying Ponomaryov had been punished for defending his convictions. Several dozen opposition activists rallied in his support near the Chistiye Prudy metro station Thursday.

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