

Intern Fired for Duma Exposé

By [Alexander Bratersky](#)

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State Duma deputies waiting for Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to arrive for a parliamentary address on April 20. **Igor Tabakov**

A college student who blogged about State Duma deputies playing cards and surfing the Internet during sessions has lost his Duma internship.

Yevgeny Starshov, a student at the Moscow Institute of Management, Economics and Law, started publishing his observations on his LiveJournal [blog](#) last week, and he removed them earlier this week — but not before they were read, cited and copied by thousands of bloggers as well as the news media.

“Everyone is walking around, chatting to one another. Some read newspapers and others play cards in the back rows,” Starshov wrote Sunday.

“Are they driving [to the Duma] in the oncoming lane with their flashing blue lights on, endangering the lives of regular motorists, only to sit in the hallway, read papers and play around on their iPads?” he said on his blog, titled “Diary of a Democratic Extremist.”

All deputies are authorized to place flashing blue lights on their cars, which allow them to break some traffic rules. But the practice is often abused by them and despised by ordinary drivers.

In the accounts, peppered with obscenities, which are considered good form in the Russian blogosphere, Starshov also criticized the Duma for its well-stocked shops offering expensive jewelry and liquor.

Starshov, who was interning at the Duma management's office that oversees travel expenses for lawmakers, also accused deputies of getting reimbursed for nonwork-related trips.

He said Iosif Kobzon, the well-known crooner and a United Russia lawmaker, “flew to Kaliningrad to perform for the regional administration at the Duma’s expense.”

A representative for Kobzon denied the account Wednesday, saying the deputy had traveled to the western exclave on Duma business, not to give a show. The representative only agreed to speak on condition of anonymity, saying she was not authorized to comment on the issue. Kobzon, who was elected to the Duma from the Zabaikalsky region in Siberia, has made no official statement.

Excerpts from the blog posts were [reprinted](#) by the opposition-minded Novaya Gazeta newspaper this week.

Starshov [announced](#) on Twitter on Wednesday that he had lost his internship.

Starshov did not specify who had ordered his ouster.

He could not be reached for comment Wednesday, with repeated e-mailed requests going unanswered. A spokeswoman for his institute said by telephone that he remained a student there. She refused further comment.

Oleg Shein, a Duma deputy with A Just Russia, said he regretted that Starshov had been punished for his reports. “I'm all in favor of criticism and think that taking revenge for it is stupid,” he said.

Shein said not all of Starshov’s observations seemed accurate, but conceded there was much truth in them. He did not elaborate.

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