

Ponomaryov Faces Voting Suspension

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Just Russia's Gennady Gudkov, left, his son Dmitry, center, and Ponomaryov attending the Duma this month. **Mikhail Metzel**

The State Duma's ethics commission on Monday recommended that Deputy Ilya Ponomaryov's right to speak in parliament be suspended for one month after he called United Russia members "crooks and thieves" and wore jeans instead of a suit to the Duma.

United Russia member Vladimir Pekhtin, who heads the ethics commission, told reporters the Duma would tentatively approve the measure this week. The proposal was backed by the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia.

Ponomaryov, who represents the Just Russia party, told reporters that the proposed ban from Oct. 16 to Nov. 16, was meant to exclude him from taking part in discussing the oft-controversial state budget, Interfax reported.

The "crooks and thieves" phrase, which Ponomaryov uttered in an address to the lower house of parliament during its final spring session, had been popularized by opposition leader Alexei

Navalny to describe the nation's ruling party.

Valery Gartung, a Just Russia representative who is on the ethics commission, told The Moscow Times that there were no grounds for a ban because Ponomaryov did not name any specific "crooks" or "thieves" and thus did not break any law.

Gartung called the measure "political revenge" from Kremlin-controlled United Russia for Ponomaryov's participation in the opposition movement, which for the past nine months has held marches and rallies on the capital's streets.

Gartung said the commission should have only warned Ponomaryov that it was unacceptable to address lawmakers in such a manner.

Last week, Just Russia Deputy Gennady Gudkov was ousted from the Duma for unlawful entrepreneurship. A speaking ban against Ponomaryov could signal more hang-ups on the way for the opposition party, which collaborates with protest leaders including Navalny, Sergei Udaltsov and Ilya Yashin.

Communist Deputy Sergei Obukhov told The Moscow Times that Ponomaryov voiced a "widespread opinion" about United Russia, which is trying to "muzzle" the political opposition by silencing Ponomaryov in particular.

"We see that any deputy who speaks out rather actively is immediately repressed," Obukhov said.

The ethics commission comprises 14 lawmakers — seven from United Russia, three Communists, two Liberal Democrats and two from A Just Russia.

United Russia and the Liberal Democratic Party deputies voted in favor of suspending Ponomaryov's right to speak at Duma sessions, while the other two factions voted against it.

United Russia based its decision on the offensive words Ponomaryov used, while the Liberal Democratic Party said Ponomaryov did not deserve to vote because he wore jeans to the Duma, Ponomaryov told reporters.

The ethics commission acted Monday on the instruction of Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin, a United Russia member who was asked by 40 deputies from his party and the Liberal Democratic Party to assess Ponomaryov's use of the words "crooks and thieves."

Correction: An earlier version of this article incorrectly stated that the Duma ethics commission recommended that Deputy Ilya Ponomoryov be barred from voting in the Duma for a month. In fact, the commission recommended only that he be barred from speaking at Duma sessions for a month.

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