

Ponomaryov Barred From Speaking in Duma for a Month

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Ilya Ponomaryov speaking at an opposition rally in March. **Karachun**

The State Duma on Friday voted to suspend the right of an opposition lawmaker to speak in parliament for a month and named the head of a newly formed committee to oversee mass media.

The Duma voted 297-132 to bar opposition Deputy Ilya Ponomaryov from giving speeches in the Duma from Oct. 16 to Nov. 16, Interfax reported.

The Duma's ethics commission had recommended the measure earlier this week on the grounds that Ponomaryov had referred to some fellow lawmakers as "crooks and thieves" during a Duma session in July and had worn jeans instead of more formal clothes to parliament.

The "crooks and thieves" phrase was popularized by opposition leader Alexei Navalny to

describe ruling party United Russia.

Ponomoryov's party, A Just Russia, says the measure, passed with support from United Russia and the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party, is punishment for his active participation in the opposition protest movement.

Just Russia and Communist Party deputies opposed Friday's vote.

The Duma also voted Friday to make Deputy Alexei Mitrofanov the head of a new committee to oversee mass media.

The committee, which was officially formed Friday, will be called the committee for information policy, information technology and communications, Mitrofanov said by phone Friday. Similar committees existed in past Dumas.

Mitrofanov said he would reveal his plans for the committee next week.

The veteran lawmaker takes the position of committee head without being the member of any party following his expulsion from A Just Russia in May. He was kicked out of the party along with three other deputies for supporting Dmitry Medvedev's nomination as prime minister, thereby going against the party line.

Just Russia leader Sergei Mironov called Mitrofanov's election to the committee chairmanship a "shame" and reiterated the party's earlier accusations that Mitrofanov was being rewarded for having backed measures favored by United Russia.

Mitrofanov gained the post amid bribery accusations against him by a Moscow businessman.

On Wednesday, entrepreneur Vyacheslav Zharov asked Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin in a letter not to make Mitrofanov head of the media committee because Mitrofanov allegedly solicited a \$200,000 bribe from him in exchange for settling an arbitration court battle.

Mitrofanov has denied wrongdoing and said Zharov was making his accusations on behalf of A Just Russia.

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