

Missing Sloviansk Mayor Detained on Orders of Russian Militant, Report Says

By [Anna Dolgov](#)

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Self-declared Mayor of Sloviansk Vyacheslav Ponomaryov was reported missing in early June.

The missing self-declared mayor of Sloviansk, Vyacheslav Ponomaryov, has been detained on the orders of a militant Russian citizen who has emerged as leader of a separatist faction in the eastern Ukrainian city, a news report said.

The self-proclaimed people's mayor is in custody on suspicion of "improper spending of the municipal budget," a Sloviansk City Hall deputy, Viktoria Patsiora, said, RIA Novosti reported Wednesday.

Patsiora added the order for his arrest was issued by Igor Strelkov — a Russian citizen who appears to have been strengthening his control over separatist forces in the region and who takes his nom de guerre from the Russian word "strelok," or shooter.

Ponomaryov "has not been charged yet, but we have heard that Strelkov is displeased with

misappropriations of the people's money," Patsiora told RIA Novosti.

The administration of the separatist Donetsk People's Republic — of which Slovyansk forms part — claimed to have no information about the mayor's whereabouts, citing intermittent communications with the city, the report said.

Amid an apparently deepening rift among separatist factions in eastern Ukraine, Strelkov in late May called for disbanding Ponomaryov's bodyguard detail, saying that the city should have only one armed force, RIA Novosti reported.

Ponomaryov, meanwhile, appears to have been missing since early this week, with no reliable account of his whereabouts.

Ponomaryov's spokeswoman Stella Horosheva said he had gone missing after giving a news conference on June 8, the Ukrainian arm of Komsomolskaya Pravda reported Wednesday.

Ponomaryov's mother, Inna, told the newspaper her son had called her on the morning following the news conference as he was leaving for work.

"After that, he never called me," she was quoted as saying. "I read on the Internet that he has been arrested. Nobody told me anything."

An unidentified aide to the Donetsk separatist leader Denis Pushilin told RIA Novosti the reported arrest of Ponomaryov "was a personal decision by Strelkov, who has to act harshly in the time of war."

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