

# Lawmaker Accused of Soliciting \$200,000 Bribe Leaves Country for 'Health Reasons'

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Alexei Mitrofanov, the head of the State Duma's Committee on Information Policy.

A Russian lawmaker who was stripped of legislative immunity over accusations he solicited a bribe has left the country, saying that he needed to travel abroad for medical treatment but that he could return home for the fall legislative session if his health allowed.

Alexei Mitrofanov, the head of the State Duma's Committee on Information Policy, told the ITAR-Tass news agency on Sunday that he has no plans to resign from the job and that he intends to return to Moscow when the State Duma reconvenes in the fall, but that this depends on his health.

Mitrofanov also said that he had maintained contact with investigators and that the Russian authorities had been notified as to his whereabouts, the report said.

He dismissed as "nonsense" Russian media reports that prosecutors may issue an arrest

warrant for him in absentia, ITAR-Tass reported.

But his deputy Andrei Tumanov told Ekho Moskvyy radio that lawmakers had lost contact with Mitrofanov when he left the country two months ago and that they were unaware of his present location. Tumanov insisted that this did not affect the committee's work, Ekho Moskvyy reported.

Russia's Mir i Politika (World and Politics) news portal on Sunday cited a letter from investigators to a State Duma chief of staff as saying that "currently, investigative actions [against Mitrofanov] are impossible because of the absence of data on his whereabouts." The report did not specify the date of the letter.

The State Duma stripped Mitrofanov of parliamentary immunity in June and authorized prosecution against him in connection with accusations of extortion.

Mitrofanov and his aide are accused of trying to solicit a \$200,000 bribe from a Russian businessman in exchange for ensuring that an arbitration court ruled in his favor in a business dispute.

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