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Opposition Lawmaker 'Won't Return to Russia' Until Travel Ban Is Lifted

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Speaking from California, left-wing Russian lawmaker Ilya Ponomaryov vowed on Thursday not to return to his home country unless a foreign-travel ban imposed against him by a Moscow court is lifted.

The lawmaker explained that while he has no desire to flee his legal obligations, he would prefer not to "become a hostage," in comments carried by RBC news site.

The Skolkovo Foundation, a Russian science and technology innovation center founded in 2010 by then-President Dmitry Medvedev, filed a lawsuit against Ponomaryov in April 2013 alleging he had breached a lecture contract.

According to the complaint, Ponomaryov was paid the sumptuous sum of $300,000 to deliver 10 lectures during a specific period, but only managed to deliver one that was considered up to par with his contract obligations. Other lectures delivered during the term were seen as off-topic or otherwise inadequate.

Ponomaryov refuted Skolkovo's claims, arguing that he had fulfilled his obligations. Moscow's Gagarinsky District Court sided with Skolkovo, imposing a 2.7 million ruble ($75,000) fine.

A travel ban was then imposed against him by law enforcement authorities, a method commonly employed in Russia to ensure the payment of fines.

In comments to RBC, Ponomaryov claimed that he had initially received guarantees that his right to travel would not be infringed, but later discovered that a ban was nonetheless imposed.

The lawmaker plans to jet off to China and then Malaysia after leaving the U.S., he told RBC.

Ponomaryov has developed a reputation among his peers in the State Duma for his vocal opposition to many Kremlin policies. In March, Ponomaryov was the only member of the Duma to vote against Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula.

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