The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Criminal Case Opened Against Opposition Lawmaker Ponomaryov

By Ivan Nechepurenko

June 09, 2015



Ilya Ponomaryov

Russian federal investigators have launched a criminal case against opposition-minded State Duma Deputy Ilya Ponomaryov, who moved to the United States last summer citing legal troubles at home.

"In view of the fact that Ponomaryov is currently abroad, the investigation plans to issue an international warrant for his arrest and subsequent extradition, so he will face the Russian judicial system," the Investigative Committee said in a statement published Tuesday.

Ponomaryov, a rare voice of dissent amid a devoutly Kremlin-loyal parliament, stands accused of large-scale misappropriations in connection with work he was paid handsomely to do for the Skolkovo Innovation Center, a science and technology initiative spearheaded by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev in a bid to bolster Russia's high-tech industry.

The Skolkovo Foundation, which oversees the Innovation Center, agreed to pay Ponomaryov $750,000 to conduct research.

The agreement was later amended, changing the terms and the payment structure. Under the new version, Ponomaryov would receive $450,000 for research, but would be freed from the obligation to file reports on the work he had done. He would still receive the additional $300,000, but now it would be to pay for a series of lectures and workshops on the commercialization of new technologies.

But the appearances he made on the campus left much to be desired, ranging from three to 18 minutes each, and focusing on topics unrelated to that which he was paid to speak about, the investigators said.

Investigators allege that Ponomaryov and the deputy president of the Skolkovo Foundation, Alexei Beltyukov, "created conditions for the theft of Skolkovo's money on behalf of Ponomaryov."

Ponomaryov has adamantly denied accusations of misappropriation, claiming that the charges against him are politically motivated. He has maintained that he cannot return to Russia until the Skolkovo situation has been resolved.

International law firm Amsterdam & Partners announced last week that Ponomaryov had retained its services to represent his interests.

"The charge brought against the Honorable State Duma Deputy Ponomaryov not only lacks merit, it is incoherent to the point that it is not even worthwhile to refer to it as a 'legal case,'" said Ponomaryov's lawyer Robert Amsterdam in the statement.

"Having seen similar abuses of process by the Russian prosecutors in the past, our top priority at this point is to communicate the fundamental absence of grounds of any applicable laws before a number of international forums, such as Interpol," he said.

Ponomaryov was the only Duma deputy to vote against the decision to annex Crimea in March 2014, a move that invited widespread criticism from his more conservative fellow deputies.

Following the 2011 Duma elections, Ponomaryov was one of the organizers of the large-scale anti-government protests in Moscow. In 2013 he stepped down from the A Just Russia party, though he remained within its faction in the Duma at that point.

In April the Duma voted to strip Ponomaryov of his immunity, paving the way to his criminal prosecution.

Contact the author at i.nechepurenko@imedia.ru

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/06/09/criminal-case-opened-against-opposition-lawmaker-ponomaryov-a47270