The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Duma Approves Arrest of Opposition Deputy

October 16, 2015



Ilya Ponomarev

The Russian State Duma, Russia's lower chamber of parliament, voted Friday to agree to the arrest in absentia of A Just Russia deputy Ilya Ponomaryov, charged with complicity in the embezzlement of $750,000 from the Skolkovo Foundation, Interfax news agency reported.

Only three of the 420 parliament members present at the session voted against the opposition deputy's arrest, Interfax reported Friday.

Just days before the Duma session, Ponomaryov's lawyer Maria Bast said that her client had fully paid his debt to the Skolkovo Foundation, Interfax reported. The Just Russia deputy has repeatedly dismissed the embezzlement allegations as politically motivated.

According to the Investigative Committee, the Skolkovo Foundation, a state-funded scientific and technological foundation, paid Ponomaryov $750,000 for several lectures, including one on the commercialization of new technologies. The prosecution claims that he delivered only brief comments, failing to carry out the services for which he was paid.

Ponomaryov was stripped of parliamentary immunity by the Duma in April and charged with embezzlement in June.

Moscow's Basmanny District Court authorized his arrest in absentia on July 17, and the politician was subsequently put on an international wanted list.

The investigation has been ongoing since 2013. Another high-ranking suspect in the case is the foundation's former vice president Alexei Beltyukov. He was arrested in absentia in July.

Both Ponomaryov and Beltyukov are currently in the United States, according to news reports.

Ponomaryov was the only member of the Russian parliament who voted against the annexation of Crimea last year. While in the United States, he has campaigned for an extension of Washington's sanctions imposed on Russia over its role in the Ukrainian conflict.

The deputy also played a prominent role in the anti-Kremlin street demonstrations that swept Moscow in 2011-12.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/10/16/russian-duma-approves-arrest-of-opposition-deputy-a50315