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Veteran Communist Party Lawmaker Detained for Illegal Hunting

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Communist Party lawmaker Valery Rashkin. **SHOT Telegram channel**

A veteran Communist Party lawmaker has been detained on charges of illegal hunting in central Russia, police said Friday.

Police in the Saratov region said they opened a criminal case into hunting without a license against Valery Rashkin and another man accompanying him in his vehicle.

While responding to reports of gunfire in the area, police found Rashkin and his friend with fragments of an elk carcass, an axe and two knives with traces of blood on them in their vehicle, the police statement said.

"The driver explained that he and his passenger friend found the shot animal's carcass and decided to carve it up," the Saratov police department said.

Footage published by the Baza Telegram messaging app, which is believed to have sources in Russia's security services, showed Rashkin moving unsteadily and identifying himself on

camera.

The senior lawmaker could face up to two years in prison if found guilty of illegal hunting. He could also be placed under arrest for up to 15 days for refusing to submit a breathalyzer test and medical examination for intoxication.

Rashkin, 66, has represented the Communist Party in the State Duma, Russia's lower house of parliament, since 1999. He enjoys immunity as a lawmaker and decisions on his detention are sanctioned by fellow lawmakers based on a petition filed by federal prosecutors or the head of the Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes.

Rashkin, a vocal Kremlin critic who has voiced support for jailed opposition figure Alexei Navalny, also serves as the first secretary of the Communist Party in Moscow.

His detention comes on the heels of police searches at the Communist Party's Moscow headquarters as it sought to challenge the controversial online voting results of last month's parliamentary elections.

The Kremlin dismissed allegations of fraud or vote-rigging and hailed the Sept. 17-19 election, where the Communist Party came in second after the pro-Putin United Russia party, as transparent.

Party spokesman Alexander Yushchenko denounced Rashkin's detention, calling it a part of "active provocation against our activists and lawmakers" in comments to the Znak.com news website.

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