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Russian Communist Lawmaker Stripped of Immunity in Elk Poaching Probe

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Valery Rashkin. **duma.gov.ru**

Russian lawmakers have voted to strip their veteran opposition colleague of immunity as he faces charges of illegally killing an elk, the lower house of parliament, the State Duma, said Thursday.

Communist Party deputy Valery Rashkin was detained in late October with fragments of an elk carcass and blood-stained knives in the trunk of his car.

Rashkin, 66, initially denied the accusations but later confessed to killing the elk without a hunting license.

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The Duma said it upheld a request by the General Prosecutor's Office to strip Rashkin of immunity to pursue criminal poaching charges against him, with 343 lawmakers voting in

favor of the request, 55 against and two abstaining.

It also authorized prosecutors to file administrative charges against Rashkin for refusing to submit a breathalyzer test as well as to search his home and impose certain restrictions on his movements during the investigation.

The Duma commission on parliamentary mandates had recommended that Rashkin be stripped of his immunity Monday.

The senior lawmaker could face between three to five 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 has represented the Communist Party in the State Duma since 1999.

Some observers have linked the criminal case against him to his support for jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

His detention also followed police searches at the Communist Party's Moscow headquarters as it sought to challenge the controversial online voting results of this fall'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.

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