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Freedom of Russia Legion Breaks Ties With Ex-Lawmaker Ponomaryov

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Ilya Ponomarev. **Serg Glovny via ZUMA Wire / TASS**

A Ukraine-based paramilitary unit of Russian citizens opposed to the Kremlin announced Wednesday that it was breaking ties with former Russian lawmaker turned opposition figure Ilya Ponomaryov.

The Freedom of Russia Legion said in a statement that it would "unilaterally revoke" its signature from the Irpin Declaration, "thereby terminating participation in any political projects."

The Irpin Declaration, signed in August 2022, is a cooperative agreement between anti-Kremlin paramilitary units fighting on the side of Ukraine. Its reported aim is to establish common goals and interests, with the political side of the cooperative being headed by Ponomaryov, who went into exile in Ukraine in 2016 after he was charged with embezzlement while serving as a State Duma lawmaker.

"Unfortunately, it was not possible to achieve the stated political goals [of the Irpin

declaration] over the past two years," the Freedom of Russia Legion said in its statement on Wednesday.

Ponomaryov did not immediately comment on the paramilitary group's decision to back out from the agreement.

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The Freedom of Russia Legion was founded at the outset of Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, with the stated aim of the group being the liberation of occupied regions and overthrowing the "dictatorial regime of Vladimir Putin."

Its members are mainly Russian army defectors, as well as Russian and Belarusian volunteers with no prior military background. The legion has claimed responsibility for a series of armed incursions into Russian border regions since the start of the 2022 invasion.

Russia's Supreme Court branded the militia group a terrorist organization in March 2023.

Russian police reportedly raided the homes of several journalists in September 2022 over their alleged ties to Ponomaryov and the Freedom of Russia Legion, both of which called the reports fake.

The Freedom of Russia Legion said in Wednesday's statement that it would continue prioritizing military operations against Moscow's forces and welcomed "cooperation with like-minded people."

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