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Moscow Court Orders Pre-Trial Detention of Veteran Activist Lev Ponomaryov in Absentia

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Lev Ponomaryov. **Alexander Zemlianichenko / AP / TASS**

A Moscow court on Monday ordered the pre-trial detention of exiled human rights veteran Lev Ponomaryov in absentia.

Ponomaryov, 84, a former member of the State Duma, has been a leading figure in Russian human rights activism since the late Soviet period. In 1988, he helped found Memorial, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning organization that was dissolved by Russian authorities just before the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

The Khoroshevsky District Court ruled to place Ponomaryov in pre-trial detention for two months should he be extradited or return to Russia, according to the state-run TASS news agency. Russian police issued a warrant for his arrest in March.

Ponomaryov currently faces criminal charges for allegedly organizing the activities of an

“undesirable” organization and evading his duties under Russia’s “foreign agent” law, the exiled news outlet Mediazona reported.

A frequent target of police at opposition rallies over the decades, Ponomaryov fled to France in 2022 after being detained for protesting the invasion of Ukraine. Since his departure, Russian authorities have designated two organizations he established in exile as “undesirable,” a label that criminalizes any association with the groups.

Ponomaryov was declared a “foreign agent” in 2020 and has been repeatedly fined for failing to comply with the designation’s strict labeling requirements.

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