

Moscow Judge Sentences Veteran Activist Lev Ponomaryov to 5.5 Years in Prison in Absentia

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Lev Ponomaryov. duma.gov.ru

A Moscow judge on Thursday [sentenced](#) exiled human rights veteran Lev Ponomaryov to five and a half years in prison in absentia after finding him guilty of violating Russia's laws on "foreign agents" and "undesirable" organizations.

In 2021, Ponomaryov was the first person ever [to face](#) charges in Russia for violating the "foreign agent" law after the Justice Ministry designated him as a "foreign agent" a year earlier. He has since been repeatedly fined for failing to comply with the strict labeling requirements placed on "foreign agents."

Ponomaryov [fled](#) to France in 2022 after being detained for protesting Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Since then, Russian authorities have [designated](#) two organizations he established in exile as "undesirable."

A judge at Moscow's Khoroshevsky District Court convicted Ponomaryov of both evading his "foreign agent" obligations and participating in an "undesirable" organization.

He was ordered to serve the 5.5-year sentence at a penal colony upon extradition or reentry to Russia. He was also banned from running websites for nine years.

Prosecutors had asked for a sentence of six years and six months and a 10-year website ban for Ponomaryov, [according](#) to the exiled outlet Mediazona.

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Prosecutors reportedly accused Ponomaryov's non-profit organization, Peace. Progress. Human Rights, of distributing materials "aimed at fostering protest sentiment" and "discrediting" the Russian government, including a Change.org petition calling for the 2024 election results, in which Vladimir Putin was re-elected president, not to be recognized.

Ponomaryov's court-appointed defense attorney told the court that he is not aware of his client's position about the accusations and charges against him, Mediazona reported.

The Moscow Times contacted Ponomaryov for comment.

Hundreds of cultural figures, journalists, businesspeople, as well as news outlets and organizations, have been branded "foreign agents" since Russia introduced the label in 2012.

Russia applies the designation to individuals it views as enemies of the state. Those branded as "foreign agents" are required to include a lengthy disclaimer in all of their public appearances and statements, including posts on social media.

Ponomaryov, 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.

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