Beat: Politics

Withhold EU visas for Russian officials linked to Magnitsky case, say MEPs

EU visas for Russian officials

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USPA NEWS - The EU should introduce a visa-ban and freeze the EU assets of all Russian officials linked to the death in custody of Russian lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, who had alleged large-scale corruption and theft from the Russian government. Imposing these sanctions would step up the pressure on Russia.

MEPs ask the EU Council of Ministers to draw up a list of officials responsible for Mr Magnitsky's death in custody, the subsequent cover-up and harassment of his family. An EU-wide visa ban should be imposed on these officials and their EU assets, and those of their families, should be frozen, says the resolution, adopted on Tuesday by a show of hands.

"Instead of facing justice, these people are still in office. They travel in the EU, they spend their dirty money in the EU, buy real estate and educate their children here," said Kristiina Ojuland (ALDE, EE), who steered the recommendation through Parliament. "At the same time, this recommendation is our sign of solidarity with the Russian people.

Who are living through challenging times and aspire to genuine, not decorative democracy," she added.

Sanctions for change

The EU sanctions are a necessary and legitimate foreign policy tooland could prompt the Russian authorities to make genuine and fresh efforts to address the current climate of impunity in Russia, MEPs say. They add that the Council should engage with Russia to stop the widespread corruption there and ensure that the judicial system cannot be misused for political reasons.

Not the only case

Mr Magnitsky's case is only the best-documented of a number of cases of disrespect for fundamental human rights and abuse of power by the Russian law-enforcement authorities, MEPs say.

MEPs call for similar restrictive measures to be introduced in those cases, as a last resort and on the basis of well-documented, converging and independent sourced and convincing evidence.

Background

Sergei Magnitsky died in November 2009 after being held for 358 days in a pre-trial detention centre. He had been arrested after alleging systematic and large-scale corruption and theft from the Russian government sanctioned by officials. He died after having been refused adequate medical treatment, eight days before he would have had to be released or brought to trial.

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