

<http://www.moscownews.ru/society/20110704/188808142.html>

Netherlands bans Magnitsky officials

by Tom Washington at 04/07/2011 17:01



Europe's relations with Russia have been handed another test, as Dutch lawmakers voted unanimously to slap sanctions on Russian officials on the ever more notorious Magnitsky list.

In The Hague, 150 Dutch MPs voted in favor of sanctions against 60 officials implicated in the prosecution and death in disputed circumstances of Sergei Magnitsky.

Magnitsky was a lawyer with British hedge fund Hermitage Capital and claimed to have exposed how Russian officials had embezzled \$230 million of public funds.

But on the same day that Magnitsky supporters were clapping themselves on the back a Moscow court issued an arrest warrant for Ivan Cherkasov, Magnitsky's old colleague.

The thin end of the wedge

Bill Browder, Magnitsky's boss at Hermitage Capital, said that the Dutch bill was the start of a chain of similar resolutions across Europe.

"I'm certain," he told The Moscow News. "We have been in discussions with other parliaments, in Norway, Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, France, Luxembourg, the UK and there have been similar reactions, it's been universal across these parliaments."

The timing of these other resolutions now depends on parliamentary schedules, he added.

Rooting them out

Kirill Kabanov, head of the National Anti Corruption Committee and member of the Presidential Council for Human Rights, says that it sends out a strong message to secretive agents of corrupt agenda who hide behind the mantle of the state.

“I think that these measures of international influence are very useful because these cryptocrats get shown up for what they are and see that they can’t go unpunished. It’s not about the bribes that teachers and doctors take but about those billions of rubles that are taken out of the country and stay abroad in foreign bank accounts,” he told The Moscow News.

Time is running out for these people, maintains Browder.

“The people in law enforcement agencies that are so desperately trying to cover up this crime are now creating a situation that is hugely costly to Russia and the question is how much of a cost will be tolerated before these people are brought to justice,” he said by telephone.

Note of discord

International pressure is mounting, the US Congress is currently debating a similar bill and Kabanov cites President Medvedev’s demands to get to the bottom of the matter: but the signs are that in Russia the officials have got at least some time yet before the prison vans come calling.

A Moscow court issued an arrest warrant for Cherkasov, another of Magnitsky’s old colleagues Monday, the RAPSI news agency reported. Browder told The Moscow News in May that moves against Cherkasov were in retaliation for Swiss Prosecutors investigating potential links between Russian tax officials and Swiss accounts.

Cherkasov is accused of underpaying \$73 million in taxes in 2006 as head of the Russian branch of British investment company Hermitage Capital Management. He intends to appeal the arrest warrant.

And later that same month Oleg Silchenko, who occupies pride of place on the so-called Magnitsky List, was found to have done no wrong by Russian investigators.

Investigations in Russia are, however, still underway and on Monday the Investigative Committee announced that it was investigating those who had denied Magnitsky essential medical care, thus precipitating his death, Interfax reported.