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Dutch MPs want tougher stance against Russia

Published on : 5 October 2011 - 3:16pm | By [John Tyler](#) (Photo: UCI Documentaries)

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A majority of Dutch MPs are calling on the government to take measures to punish Russia for alleged human rights abuses in the case of the death in prison in 2009 of Russian lawyer Sergei Magnitsky. The case was highlighted earlier by Radio Netherlands Worldwide and interviews recorded by RNW have been used by UN investigators examining corruption in Russia.

The failure to punish those involved in the lawyer's death, is causing concern among many Dutch MPs who this week again demanded action.

Listen: Investor William Browder tells RNW's Jonathan Groubert how his fund was gutted by Russian officials and how his lawyer Sergei Magnitsky died in jail (13-minute programme fragment)



Unanimous support

Coşkun Çörüz handles human rights for the Christian Democrats in the Dutch parliament. He drafted a resolution which got unanimous support this summer calling on the government to take further measures against Russia. Now he wants things to go further:

"The minister said he would take up the matter. But it should not be just words. Here is a case where people went too far, flagrantly, and you have to point that out, and make sure there are consequences such as sanctions."

Dilemma

The case highlights a fundamental dilemma for Dutch foreign policy – when does addressing human rights abuses take precedence over economic interests? Dutch foreign ministers usually try to do both. The current cabinet's foreign policy is decidedly pro-business, however, leading critics to suspect that human rights are no longer a priority.

Foreign Minister Uri Rosenthal has denied this. In the case of Mr Magnitsky, a spokesman for the minister says the Netherlands is applying pressure both in Moscow and in Europe to bring those responsible for the death to justice. And while the minister disagrees with parliament about the need for sanctions, he is considering what other measures could be taken.

No clash

The minister is supported by his party's parliamentary foreign policy spokesman. Free-market conservative Han ten Broeke denies any clash between human rights and economic interests, and says the Netherlands must help ensure that a case like Sergei Magnitsky's never occurs again:

"We won't achieve that in the Netherlands by suddenly going further than we already have. Everyone knows our position. The Russians were furious when our parliament passed the motion. Other European countries are following this lead - this has nothing to do with economic interests."

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Earlier this year, the United States announced a travel ban for some of those suspected of involvement in Mr Magnitsky's death and there are reports that the UK has taken a similar action, although the government will not confirm this.



William Browder, former manager of Hermitage Fund

US businessman William Browder made a personal appeal to Dutch MPs to pressure the Dutch government to do the same. Sergei Magnitsky was working for Mr Browder's Hermitage Fund when he was arrested in 2009.

Foreign help

Mr Browder is currently travelling around Europe making his case to members of parliament after unsuccessfully lobbying governments themselves. He says European governments are not willing to jeopardise their relations with Russia.

While various critics of the Russian government have been killed over the past few years, the case of Sergei Magnitsky is exceptional because of his ties to Mr Browder. The American investor had made the Hermitage Fund the largest foreign investment fund in Russia – worth 4.5 billion dollars at its peak.

It was how the Hermitage Fund earned its money that initially won the praise and even the help of Vladimir Putin in his battle with the oligarchs, but later it earned Putin's ire.

"The way we made this money was by exposing corruption inside the companies in Russia we invested in... the way we chose to deal with the corruption was by researching how it was done, and then exposing it in the Financial Times, the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal."

William Browder described the rise and fall of the Hermitage Fund in Russia to Radio Netherlands Worldwide's programme *The State We're In* last April. That broadcast got the attention of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, [Juan Mendez](#), who requested a copy for use in his ongoing work on abuses of power by corrupt authorities in Russia.

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Delay

The Council of Europe this week released a statement asking Russia to prosecute those responsible for Mr Magnitsky's death and to cease intimidation of his family. Russian Prime

Minister Vladimir Putin has now announced another investigation into the death, possibly delaying any Russian action in the matter and bringing into question results of an investigation commissioned by President Dmitri Medvedev, which concluded that the death was indeed suspicious.

Russians were surprised by the Dutch parliamentary resolution passed early this summer. They will have to wait a while longer to see if the resolution has any effect.

(rk/imm)

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DISCUSSION

David Berridge
7 October 2011 - 1:28am / Canada

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This may not be the ultimate protest but it is nonetheless a voice from a government source that says this is not the way to conduct business as usual.

Anonymous
7 October 2011 - 1:07am / timor leste

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Russia rule by security forces so what the point, they all corruptors

Papuan People Congress 2011
6 October 2011 - 5:04am

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PeterNY
5 October 2011 - 6:04pm / USA

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There is no point in accusing Russia of anything. Change in Russia will have to come from the inside. As long as the Russian people do not decide they want a different government it is not the role of other governments to intervene.

Vera Gottlieb
5 October 2011 - 5:09pm / Germany

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And continue to turn a blind eye to the killings the US is carrying out all over the world?

Hiram1
6 October 2011 - 6:50pm

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Does the blind eye also apply to the E.U., Syria, Iran, North Korea, Libya, China, and the many other nations who kill at will?

Hiram1
5 October 2011 - 4:11pm

[reply](#)

"A majority of Dutch MPs are calling on the government to take measures to punish Russia for alleged human rights abuses in the case of the death in prison in 2009 of Russian lawyer Sergei Magnitsky."...Response: What measures will the MPs impose on the Russians? Will you stop exporting your tulips to Russia? What are you going to do when they stop the flow of natural gas and other fuels into Europe? The E.U. needs Russia more than Russia needs the E.U. Making threats of a tougher stance against Russia will not work. They hold a stronger hand and they know from experience that the Europeans (The Dutch) will fold under pressure. You have too many "tells" and each one shows a bluff.

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