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EU Lawmakers Call For Sanctions On Russians Involved In Magnitsky Case

by RFE/RL

STRASBOURG, France -- The European Parliament has overwhelmingly approved a proposal recommending common visa-restriction regimes and asset freezes to target Russian officials involved in the death of lawyer Sergei Magnitsky.

It's the second time such an initiative has come from Europarliamentarians, with EU members balking at a similar effort two years ago.

In addition to the measures by EU member states, the latest proposal calls on Russia "to conduct a credible and independent investigation encompassing all aspects of the case" and to stop widespread corruption by reforming the judicial system.

The text urges the EU to raise those issues in bilateral meetings with Russia authorities "in a more determined, resolute and result-oriented manner."

Sergei Magnitsky, a Moscow attorney, was allegedly tortured and beaten to death following nearly a year of pretrial custody in 2009 after uncovering alleged massive fraud by Russian authorities.

A statement by the European Parliament on the proposal quotes Kristiina Ojuland, who steered the recommendation through the chamber as saying: "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. 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."

It also says the European lawmakers agree that "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" and urge "similar restrictive measures" in other, well-documented cases.

The European Parliament passed a similar resolution in 2010, but EU member states have stopped short of endorsing an EU-wide sanctions regime.

Magnitsky's mother, Natalia Magnitskaya, testified on October 2 at the trial of the sole defendant in the case -- Dmitry Kratov, a former deputy warden at Moscow's Butyrka detention center who is charged with negligence leading to the lawyer's death. She has urged a further investigation and said other individuals must be held accountable for her son's killing.

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