

Magnitsky Foes Face EU Rebuke

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The European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee unanimously approved a proposal Tuesday to block entry to the EU for 60 Russian officials implicated in the death of Hermitage Capital lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, the investment firm said.

The motion, which would also freeze the officials' assets, will now go to the full European Parliament, which will vote on the resolution in December as part of the official EU policy on human rights.

It would then need to be approved by the European Commission to take effect, Hermitage Capital said in a statement.

No news of the vote was available on the parliament's web site.

Magnitsky was arrested on tax charges in 2008 after he accused senior Interior Ministry officials of embezzling 5.4 billion rubles (\$173 million) in federal funds. He died of health problems in detention in November 2009.

Magnitsky's supporters call the case against him fabricated and say he was intentionally

denied medical help. Prison officials have taken partial responsibility for his death.

The U.S. Senate and Canadian parliament are considering similar sanctions against 60 officials Hermitage has linked to the case.

Heidi Hautala, head of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights, said the vote was "inspired by our shared values in this parliament that human rights and freedoms are not 'empty words' and that international conventions prohibiting torture must be respected," according to comments circulated by Hermitage.

Konstantin Kosachev, chairman of the State Duma's International Affairs Committee, said the decision was too hasty and "distorted" the case, Interfax reported.

The vote was made "without any preliminary contact with Russian lawmakers" and "violates the presumption of innocence," he said.

The Interior Ministry struck back at critics last week by accusing Magnitsky of being involved in the embezzlement scheme that he allegedly exposed. Earlier this month, several investigators who worked on his case received awards from the ministry.

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