

Khodorkovsky Says Europe Ties to Putin Hurt Democracy

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BERLIN — Europe's closer ties with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin weaken the cause of democracy in Russia, jailed former Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky said in a newspaper interview.

"The 'realpolitik' often practiced by the European political elites has disappointed many dedicated people in Russia and shattered the belief in the sincerity of the values propagated by the West," Khodorkovsky said in the interview published Tuesday with the German daily Die Welt.

Khodorkovsky, in jail since 2003, was sentenced in December to remain in prison until 2017 after what senior European officials suspected was a politically motivated trial initiated by Putin.

Khodorkovsky compared Putin to Soviet tyrant Josef Stalin, saying both interpreted judicial independence the same way, although he made a distinction in the case of President Dmitry Medvedev.

"Medvedev has a democratic disposition, and he wants to continue with the reforms. But it is much too little, simply to wish for reforms — one has to breathe life into them," Khodorkovsky said, responding to questions sent by the newspaper to his team of lawyers.

"Naturally there is a better alternative to Putinism, which can be understood as a gentle totalitarianism, an economic dependency on resources and an archaic bureaucracy."

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