

Ban the Extradition of Russians Back to Russia

By [Grigory Pasko](#)

November 29, 2011

The  Moscow Times

A group of Russian intellectuals including myself have launched a campaign to appeal to Western leaders to impose a moratorium on the extradition of Russian nationals who are wanted by Moscow authorities. Since 2005, we have witnessed numerous and failed requests to extradite former Yukos employees who fled abroad. The fate of those unfortunate enough to find themselves in Russian jails or courts has become evident in recent years.

There was a time when many people thought that extralegal persecution and torture in prisons would disappear once tensions between Yukos and senior Russian officials had subsided. But that did not happen. The case against Mikhail Khodorkovsky was followed by criminal proceedings against Mikhail Gutseriyev, Yevgeny Chichvarkin, Alexei Kozlov, Yana Yakovleva, Nikolai Maximov and Andrei Borodin, whose businesses were seized by corrupt officials or state firms.

The Russian judicial and prison systems have become adept at eliminating political opponents

of the regime through commercial disputes, extortion and by pressing charges against innocent people. The only thing this system has been incapable of doing is bringing the administration of justice into accordance with the law and international conventions.

While Russian citizens have little ability to influence this situation, that is not true for international judicial authorities. They have the choice of whether to comply with extradition requests from Russia.

We firmly believe that granting extradition on request from Russian prosecutors makes foreign officials complicit in the cruel treatment those individuals receive in their homeland. One can never be certain of their guilt because most such criminal cases are witch hunts. Only one thing is certain: 99.7 percent of all criminal cases in Russia end in guilty verdicts.

Conditions for Russia's 800,000 prisoners are torturous, with people dying in pretrial detention (Andrei Kudoyarov, a Moscow school principal, is a recent example) or as a consequence of being deliberately deprived of life-saving medical care (like the recently deceased Vasily Aleksanyan, a former Yukos vice president). They join the hundreds of Russians given a death sentence without trial.

We hope our campaign against extradition to Russia at

Noextradition.info will not only attract global attention to the meager state of Russian justice, but also will prevent Western officials from becoming puppets in the hands of criminal Russian law enforcement officials.

Grigory Pasko is a journalist who was recognized by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience during his 1997–2003 incarceration.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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