

Foreign Ministry 'Outraged' U.S. Senate Panel Passed Magnitsky Act

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Correction appended

A senior Foreign Ministry official expressed outrage on Wednesday over a U.S. Senate committee's approval of a bill that would penalize Russian officials for human rights abuses, and warned Americans that adoption of the sanctions would strain U.S.-Russian relations.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee passed the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act, named after an anti-corruption lawyer whose death in jail in 2009 while in pretrial detention has drawn widespread condemnation.

Despite broad support in Congress, the bill's future remains uncertain, partly because U.S. President Barack Obama's administration is unenthusiastic about a measure that Russia says would be an unwarranted intrusion into its internal affairs.

"We are not only deeply sorry but outraged that, despite common sense and all signals Moscow has sent and keeps sending about the counterproductive nature of such steps, work

on the Magnitsky law continues," Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov was quoted by state news agency Itar-Tass as saying.

Implementation of the bill would be extremely negative for U.S.-Russian relations, Ryabkov said.

He reiterated Russia's threat to retaliate if the bill is passed, in part by passing a tit-for-tat measure denying entry to U.S. citizens that it believes are linked to human rights violations.

"There will be a response," Ryabkov said. "There will be a symmetrical response, but there will also be a number of additional measures."

President Vladimir Putin this month called Magnitsky's death a tragedy, but said Moscow would retaliate if the Magnitsky bill were passed.

During brief discussion of the legislation, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry, a Democrat, said the United States shouldn't always be the one pointing fingers at other nations, but added, "Human rights is in our DNA."

(Reuters, AP)

Correction: An earlier version of this article incorrectly stated in the first paragraph that the U.S. Senate passed the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act; in fact, only the Senate Foreign Relations Committee passed the bill.

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