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West Could Impose Travel Bans on Authors of NGO Bill, Report Says

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Rights defender Lyudmila Alexeyeva

Opposition activists and rights defenders are liaising with U.S. and European officials over imposing travel bans on the authors of the NGO bill recently floated by the ruling party, a news report said Thursday.

According to the bill, foreign-funded NGOs involved in "political" activities must register as "foreign agents" or risk hefty fines and imprisonment.

The NGO bill would affect a significant number of opposition movements and human rights organizations, which have reacted angrily to the proposed legislation.

One of the leaders of the Solidarity movement, Andrei Piontkovsky, told Izvestia that activists from his organization met with U.S. Congress officials Wednesday to discuss sanctions on officials linked to the controversial legislation.

"At the moment we are discussing the possibility of placing sanctions on the initiators of the

NGO bill and the term 'foreign agent,' Pointkovsky said. "It's no secret that the list of persona non grata in the European Union and United States will grow."

Boris Nemtsov, formerly deputy prime minister and also from Solidarity, backed the travel bans as an effective response to the bill, while stressing that the legislation was sponsored by officials at the very highest level.

"It is essential to include the initiators and authors of the bill in a list similar to the Magnitsky list and to limit their access to countries that sponsor, in their opinion, 'foreign agents,'" Nemtsov told Izvestia.

Rights defenders also came out in support of the retaliatory measure.

Lyudmila Alexeyeva, head of the Moscow Helsinki Group, said she thinks tougher sanctions are needed.

"These people should definitely be restricted not only from visiting the EU and U.S.A., but also from appearing in the European Parliament," she told Izvestia. "Today we have the Internet, it is a powerful tool, and we will find out the names of everyone who vote for the bill. For sure we will place these individuals' [names] on the Internet for discussion."

But Alexander Sidyakin, the United Russia deputy responsible for drafting the bill, brushed off concerns that the travel bans were a serious threat, calling them "absolute nonsense" in a legal sense.

"I am a lawmaker, and I will propose the laws that I think are necessary for the country," Sidyakin told Izvestia.

Sidyakin also drafted the hotly debated rally bill, which hiked maximum fines for disorder at demonstrations to 300,000 rubles ($9,300) for participants.

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