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Magnitsky List Counterpart to Stress Adoption Deaths

By Alec Luhn

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A United Russia lawmaker on Tuesday proposed that legislation in response to the U.S. Magnitsky Act be named in honor of a Russian toddler who died in the care of an American adoptive parent.

The bill, which imposes economic and visa sanctions on Americans accused of violating Russians' human rights, is expected to go into force on Jan. 1.

"United Russia is proposing to name the law after Dmitry Yakovlev, a 2-year-old child who was burned alive in Purcellville, Virginia," Vyacheslav Nikonov, first deputy head of the Duma's International Affairs Committee, said in comments carried by Interfax.

Nikonov said the legislation should be dedicated to the memory of Russian children who have died at the hands of American adoptive parents.

Yakovlev died of heatstroke in July 2008 after his adoptive father, Miles Harrison, left him in a sport utility vehicle. Harrison was acquitted of involuntary manslaughter in December 2008.

The law would only unofficially be known as the Yakovlev act, since Russian legislation is not typically named after people, Nikonov told The Moscow Times.

The list of people forbidden entry to Russia, to be drawn up by the Foreign Ministry, would likely include not only adoptive parents but also Americans involved with the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and with the detention of convicted arms dealer Viktor Bout, he said.

"The emphasis is on all categories of rights violators, not just those of children," Nikonov said.

Boris Altshuler, head of the children's rights watchdog Rights of the Child, said that by going after American parents like Harrison, the legislation punishes thousands of Russian children who could go to families in the United States.

The accidental death of children happens in all countries, and adoption in the States is certainly no worse than adoption in Russia, he said.

"It's about the same as if there were an accident on the road and one person died, and because of this we forbid all residents from leaving their homes," Altshuler said. "To engage in such politics from this while ignoring our internal problems, that is very simply an attempt to revive the Cold War using children's problems."

Nikonov said the law only seeks to hold adoptive parents of dead children liable and shouldn't hamper the process for people adopting Russian children abroad.

Children's ombudsman Pavel Astakhov said Tuesday that the Yakovlev list could be filled with the names of 22 foreign parents accused in criminal cases in Russia, including Harrison. According to Astakhov, 19 adopted Russian children have died in the United States over the past decade.

Previously, RIA-Novosti reported that 1,220 adopted children died in Russia in the 15 years after the Soviet breakup, 12 of whom where killed by their parents.

Altshuler said it's difficult to know how many adopted children die in Russia, which does not keep official statistics on adoption deaths. He said the number 1,220 most likely referred to children in foster families.

The State Duma's Constitution and State Affairs Committee recommended on Tuesday that lawmakers vote to approve the Yakovlev bill in its first reading.

Meanwhile, the Canadian Parliament was set to discuss its own Magnitsky list Tuesday. Hermitage Capital Management CEO William Browder, who was instrumental in introducing the U.S. Magnitsky bill in Congress, was slated to address the parliament's Subcommittee on International Human Rights.

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