

Boris Nemtsov

The adoption of the EU Magnitsky Law would be a blow to the criminal regime

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Interview conducted in April 2013

Boris Nemtsov: In principle, the Magnitsky Law would be unnecessary if a truly independent judiciary, and law enforcement agencies that actually enforced the law, existed in Russia, and if thieves and criminals were actually punished for their actions. But in the years under Putin, the independent judiciary has been destroyed, law enforcement agencies are under the control of the interests of a corrupt regime, and the thieves and criminals loyal to the regime are at large and actually promoted for their services. So Putin's Russia makes heroes out of murderers and corrupt officials. Naturally, the countries of Europe should hardly want murderers and corrupt officials travelling about unhindered in the European Union, buying property there, educating their children there, taking vacations, etc. The countries of Europe are interested in keeping everything peaceful and quiet in Europe. So, if you, and by "you" I mean Europeans, want to protect yourself against Putin's thieves, murderers and corrupt officials, you have to adopt the Magnitsky Law. When we in Russia establish law and order, when the country has an established independent judiciary, I will be the first to go to Brussels and Strasbourg and lobby for the law to be repealed, because we will deal with our scoundrels ourselves, and we won't need any Magnitsky Law.

Elena Servettaz: Why do you think, for example French President Fr. Hollande, when he was running for president, sharply criticised Putin, but in that moment standing in Moscow next to the Russian leader, he totally "fizzled

out”?

Boris Nemtsov: The fact is that in Europe, faced with the choice between human rights and gas, many politicians pick gas. This so-called “realpolitik” may be tactically attractive, but strategically it is insane. Europe became a place to which many people across the world are attracted precisely because it maintained its base values and principles. Denying these base values and principles, closing your eyes to the problems that exist in the world, especially in Russia, will lead, step by step, to the degradation of Europe. Mr Hollande, whom you brought up as an example, is for me neither a cult hero, nor a ruler, nor even an authority. I consider him to be an endlessly opportunistic, not very far-sighted and rather weak person. This example is, of course, “laughable”, but there is nothing surprising there. Putin knows full well the weaknesses of European politicians; he knows full well that many of them can be bought, and he makes extensive use of that.

Elena Servettaz: There are a lot of pro-Putin lobbies in Europe. Do they have to be fought? If so, how?

Boris Nemtsov: The pro-Putin lobby are people who are prepared to make a deal with the devil, with Putin, with anybody. People like that are unprincipled, pragmatic, hungry, cynical; there are quite a few of them in Europe. Putin is betting on them. He thinks all Europeans are like that, and that’s a mistake. But it is true that he has managed to pull off a “Schröderisation” (buying politicians, businessmen, etc.) of Europe. In my opinion, not everybody is like that in Europe. I think that he has not managed to buy off members of the European Parliament. Because Members of the European Parliament have already repeatedly voted on human rights problems in Russia, on the Magnitsky case, on strengthening voting laws, on the legality of non-governmental organisations, on the Pussy Riot case and the persecution of the opposition, in particular the opposition involved in the “Bolotnaya Square case”, etc. These were all matters for discussion at the European Parliament; the resolutions were quite tough. I know there was a resolution of the Bundestag, which was also quite tough, regarding the violations of human rights in Russia. I haven’t heard of anything similar in the French Parliament. This doesn’t make France look very good.

Elena Servettaz: There are people in France who understand and are presenting the Magnitsky case on their own; senators and deputies have already approached the President of the French Republic on the matter, and the Magnitsky

issue comes up regularly in the press. Maybe we'll see legal initiatives in the future?

Boris Nemtsov: The adoption of the Magnitsky Law in Europe would be an absolute catastrophe for Putin. He finds the American law disagreeable, but he's aware that it's in Europe that the overwhelming majority of corrupt functionaries have assets, children, property and bank accounts. Obviously, the regime depends on these people, because there is no indication that the people around Putin would rally around him, aside from theft of money and unlimited power. So the adoption of the Magnitsky Law in Europe would be a defeat for Putinism. These bureaucrats have placed their hopes in Putin for him to defend them and protect them from harassment, including the international kind. If Putin can't do that, if he can't shield the crooks from the Europeans, then what good is Putin himself? All his power would simply disappear. So tremendous force is being exerted to defeat the adoption of the Magnitsky Law in Europe.

Elena Servettaz: Obviously the corrupt politicians are afraid of the law. That's precisely why a mass media campaign in Russia to "expose" the people that worked with Sergei Magnitsky has begun. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of people in Moscow are taking to the streets and saying that the regime is lying through its teeth, that corruption kills and the Magnitsky Law can save society. They're not talking only about those 60 people that first appeared on Senator Cardin's list; many people in Russia are relying on this law, as the Magnitsky case is a case about all of us. Do you agree?

Boris Nemtsov: The problem is not those 60 people, it's about the Russian President. The fact is that the Putin regime has no ideas for this corrupt bureaucracy except for filling their pockets, along with absolute safety and total immunity. As soon as a bureaucrat that breaks the law in the name of the Putin regime learns that he may have to pay for it, he'll stop working for Putin. The adoption of the EU Magnitsky Law would mean, first of all, a very large schism among the Putin elite and a very high level of conflict and desertion from the elite of the more far-sighted individuals. It would really be a blow to the criminal regime – a very strong and painful blow, to boot. I'll say it again: they tolerate Putin, they don't love him, naturally, and they have no respect for him (who respects a thief?). And they tolerate him because, so far, he guarantees them security, including at the international level. As soon as he ceases to guarantee it, they will cease tolerating him. The schism of the elite means the end of the system. The system always breaks down in Russia

when irreconcilable contradictions develop within the ruling clan. And the Magnitsky Law in Europe creates these contradictions.

Elena Servettaz: When they passed the Magnitsky Act in the USA, we remember what Putin did with his Duma – they adopted the cannibalistic law against child’s adoption for the Americans. Aren’t the Europeans afraid that Putin will react like that again, punishing people who have absolutely nothing to do with the sanctions?

Boris Nemtsov: Yes, he’s taking out his revenge on orphans for the murderers of Magnitsky and the thieves. I’m not a psychiatrist or a psychoanalyst. I don’t know what kind of abomination Putin will think up when it comes to the Europeans. I have a theory that he will refrain from doing something evil to Europe. Understand that being compared with Ahmadinejad, Cuba and North Korea doesn’t please him very much. He likes to visit Europe, go skiing, shake hands, meet with people at the G8, etc. It’s quite clear that the adoption of the Magnitsky Law in Europe will unite the Western world and consolidate it to a considerable extent. And playing on the contradictions, for example, between the United States and Europe will become more and more difficult. If he conducts himself as badly as he did with the “scoundrels’ law”, I think that even the most loyal, most cowardly and most short-sighted European politicians (and there are plenty like that in Europe) will understand that you can’t do business with this gentleman, and the sooner he’s out, the better off we’ll all be. For Russia, first and foremost. So my theory is that, unlike America, he’ll be afraid to get into a serious fight with Europe. The thing is that Putin’s feud with America inflated his ratings inside Russia, especially among the uneducated people who have turned into zombies from watching Putin’s television. A feud with Europe, whose popularity even among the pro-Putin voters is quite high, would mean that a large number of people inside Russia will desert him. The fight with America and Americanism is quite popular in Russia, but the fight with Europe and actions against Europe is something quite unpopular. So, in my opinion, it is not necessary to fear that he will take some kind of revenge on Europe in a rage. There will be some nasty business, connected maybe with attempts to pressure some companies within Russia, trying to influence these companies, like he’s doing now with members of Parliament – efforts to bribe people. But if the resolution is adopted, he will hesitate to openly come out against Europe. It would be very unpopular within Russia.

Elena Servettaz: When you hear the name Sergei Magnitsky, what does it mean to you? For Putin, Sergei is just Browder's bookkeeper, who never investigated anything.

Boris Nemtsov: For me, Sergei was a sincere and honest person. That's first. Secondly, for me Sergei is of course a martyr, innocently killed. And as I know Sergei's mother and know a lot about her, even though I didn't know him personally, for me he was an example of strong spirit and of resilience. Putin and I have totally different concepts of what is good and what is bad. What is good for him (this includes murder and loyalty) is for me a mortal sin. Do you know what I think is the biggest problem with Putin? That he flouts the Ten Commandments. He thinks that murder is not a sin; he thinks that theft is not a sin. He thinks that all the Commandments are nothing in comparison with personal loyalty and allegiance. The man is deeply immoral. This is why we find the regime deeply immoral. And the conflict with Europe is not just a conflict over the Magnitsky case, it's a conflict that the whole world is watching. Putin and the Europeans have totally different ideas of good and bad. I'm not talking about European politicians – they are also quite immoral and cynical. I mean public opinion in general. And public opinion – and, in this case, the power of the European spirit – is still based on the Christian Commandments. It would never countenance what Putin is doing. Never. And it will never trust him. And as for his deep immorality, it is a catastrophe, most of all for Russia. But it's a problem for Europe, too.