

Olga Romanova

Why Europe must adopt the Magnitsky Act

Olga Romanova, journalist, human rights activist, co-founder of the League of Voters, a social organisation promoting honest elections in Russia, executive director of the “Russia in Jail” movement, providing help in the fight for the liberation of economic prisoners and those unfairly accused.

Rarely the whole world has the same thirst for vengeance and justice, and a wanted poster is issued for a group of people that had not long before considered themselves immune from any legal process.

So they searched out cannibal dictators and their entourage. So they searched out leaders and generals that perpetrated genocide. So Simon Wiesenthal searched all over the world and found Nazis. So now they search for and often find terrorists, like Bin Laden, for example. Who dares to say that people like them should not be searched for? Who dares to say that punishment cannot be the goal? It’s important for everybody, so as to be able to say: our generation did everything so that something like this won’t happen again.

The changes in Russia were inevitable, and in any case our generation will see them, simply because the march of history cannot be halted. And no matter who comes to power in our country, no matter what happens, one thing is inevitable: hundreds of Simon Wiesenthals will search the whole world, especially in Europe, for those who are now considered immune from any legal proceedings.

Future Simon Wiesenthals know the names of those to be searched for. They’re the ones on the so-called “expanded Magnitsky list” - Russian prosecutors, investigators, judges and prison administrators. They’re the ones that

are guilty of horrible crimes against the entire Russian people. These people not only stole money, they killed a witness - Sergei Magnitsky.

Now I will tell you about them in detail.

My husband is Alexei Kozlov, and he has been in prison since 2008. He was a businessman. Alexei Kozlov has an absolutely direct relation to the Magnitsky Act: he is mentioned in paragraph 15 of the Act - his name is right after Mikhail Khodorovsky. This is precisely why I know all the names on the Magnitsky list. They are the people that over many years, while serving the state, commit crimes against humanity. They not only steal money from Russian taxpayers from the treasury and hide it all over the world, laundering it offshore. They throw anybody they find undesirable in prison for years. They're undesirable for a variety of reasons - for political reasons, or people just took a liking to some business and property that they wanted to take.

Alexei Kozlov, my husband, was a businessman and - at great cost to him - a partner in a business with Senator Vladimir Slutsker. In 2007, my husband decided to leave the partnership, and the decision was mutual. However, the influential senator preferred not to divide the assets but rather to throw his partner in prison, and so he did. Alexei Kozlov was found guilty of misappropriating stock from the plant "Iskhoz", part of which belonged to Slutsker, and part to my husband. This part was officially assigned to the company of Alexei Kozlov in the oldest Russian Depository, and Slutsker lost all arbitration disputes on the matter that he initiated. Then Slutsker just threw Kozlov in jail.

In the very first file of the criminal case against Alexei Kozlov, there are bank payment documents fully and exhaustively confirming that Alexei Kozlov bought the shares that he was accused of misappropriating, and he had paid for them in full. But that didn't stop the arrest of Alexei Kozlov, and his sentencing to eight years in prison. After three years in jail, the Supreme Court ruled that the presumption of innocence in the Alexei Kozlov case was violated, and Alexei was set free. At that time, Slutsker was no longer a senator and had left Russia (he is on the wanted list here), but neither the prosecutor nor the court could leave Alexei Kozlov in peace, because during his years of imprisonment he became a popular blogger, co-author of the book "Butyrka", where he openly discussed the conditions of Russian jails, and Russian justice - as it

happened, at one time he was in Butyrka prison together with Sergei Magnitsky.

Despite the fact that the Alexei Kozlov case and the Sergei Magnitsky case were completely different cases and entirely unconnected with each other, an investigation team brought them in, accusations were filed by the same prosecutors, and the same judges detained and tried them. Having been released from prison, after Sergei Magnitsky had already died, Alexei Kozlov was again found guilty in the same case, and sentenced this time to a five-year term. His sentence ends in 2014. He spent four months free and out of prison. And in April of this year, the Supreme Court once again ruled on his case, stating that once again the presumption of innocence was violated. But Alexei Kozlov is still in prison.

There are more than 700,000 prisoners in Russia today. Out of these, about 30 percent are innocent, and this army gets larger every day. Many didn't end up being such a sad statistic - some buy their way out, some manage to leave the country. Russian prisons and prison camps have created torture-like confinement conditions that not everyone can tolerate. Over 4,000 people died in prisons in 2012 - and that is just the official statistic.

Sergei Magnitsky is one of many people who have been slandered. He is one of many thrown in prison unfairly. He is one of many that lived through torture and was demanded to slander people he knew, and didn't know - and he refused. Yes, he is one of many - hundreds of thousands. But his very name has become a symbol of the struggle for human rights in modern Russia. And the Magnitsky Act adopted by the US congress has become a symbol of international solidarity with the citizens of Russia - with hundreds of thousands of Russian citizens, if not millions.

And it is in his name that the criminals working in power and judicial structures of Russia will be pursued by new Simon Wiesenthals. They'll be pursued everywhere - in Europe, in America, in Australia. They may try to hide during a change of regime - and they'll go to their money and property, mostly in Europe. They'd better prepare for this future, inevitable situation - they should start now. That is, maybe they should have started yesterday.

(In May 2013, a Russian court lifted a conviction against Alexei Kozlov. He spent in prison four and half years in detention - editor's note).