

U.S. Senate Asked to Blacklist Yukos Foes

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A group of human rights activists, politicians and artists on Monday urged the U.S. Senate to blacklist 305 Russian officials linked to the jailing of former Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

The list includes Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika and Investigative Committee head Alexander Bastrykin, but not Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and his deputy Igor Sechin, whom Khodorkovsky has repeatedly named as his main enemies.

Rights champion Lev Ponomaryov, a co-signee, told The Moscow Times that Putin and Sechin were not included to make the proposal easier for U.S. senators to approve.

"We're not crazy. If we include them, the legislation would be impossible to push through," Ponomaryov said by phone.

The open letter, [published](#) by the press service for Khodorkovsky and his jailed business partner Platon Lebedev, is addressed to Senate majority leader Harry Reid and foreign relations committee chairman John Kerry.

The letter echoes a list of 60 names proposed by Senator Benjamin Cardin last year to be blacklisted in connection with the death of Hermitage Capital lawyer Sergei Magnitsky in a pretrial jail in 2009.

It is signed by 15 people, among them rights veteran Lyudmila Alexeyeva, opposition politicians Boris Nemtsov and Vladimir Ryzhkov, satirist Viktor Shenderovich, star actress Lia Akhedzhakova and director Eldar Ryazanov, who filmed many Soviet classics.

The letter says the Magnitsky list, which is pending a hearing, should include all officials responsible for rights violations in Russia, starting with the 305 whom it wants to blacklist in connection with the imprisonment of Khodorkovsky and Lebedev.

The two businessmen were jailed in 2003 and are set to stay behind bars until 2016 on fraud and tax evasion charges they have denounced as revenge from Putin for Khodorkovsky's political ambitions.

The Magnitsky Act proposes banning officials implicated in Magnitsky's death from entering the United States, as well as seizing their stateside assets.

Magnitsky died from unaddressed health problems, after he was arrested by officials he had accused of embezzling \$230 million in tax refunds.

The 305-name list is based on a similar one submitted in June to the U.S. House of Representatives by opposition leader Garry Kasparov. That [list](#), available at Rusolidarnost.ru, includes several judges and dozens of investigators involved in the Yukos case.

Russian authorities have lashed out at Cardin's bill and similar proposals now stalled in Canadian and EU legislatures.

The Russian government did not comment on the new list Monday, but a State Duma deputy with the ruling United Russia, Alexander Khinshtein, [denounced](#) it on Ekho Moskvu as a "political move," not rights campaigning.

But another signee, rights activist Nina Katerli, told The Moscow Times that the letter had nothing to do with politics. She said it was drafted without knowledge of Lebedev and Khodorkovsky, whom Amnesty International recognized as prisoners of conscience earlier this year.

Senate representatives did not immediately comment about the story. No one at Kerry's office took a call from Moscow made before working hours, American time.

Khodorkovsky, meanwhile, called on Monday to transform Russia from a "super-presidential" republic to a parliamentary one.

The current "power vertical" is too rigid to react to global challenges, he [wrote](#) in an article

for the Kommersant-Vlast weekly. He said the Duma should be "revived" with powers to appoint most ministers.

Such a reform is the only way for President Dmitry Medvedev "to enter history with a 'plus' next to his name," Khodorkovsky wrote from prison in Karelia.

Lebedev's defense said Monday that it would not appeal two refusals by Russian courts to release their client on parole, Interfax reported. But it will include the refusal on an upcoming complaint to the European Court of Human Rights, which is also to rule on Tuesday in a separate \$100 billion lawsuit on Yukos' forced bankruptcy.

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