



Dear Commissioner,

We write you in the light of the current Russian chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. Russia will - for the first time - chair a democratic European organisation. In this context we would like to make you aware of our extant concerns about the Russian political situation.

The human rights' situation in Russia does not meet European standards. Even if Russia is an important partner to the European Union and Europe as such, this should not jeopardise a firm standing on human rights. The state of affairs in Chechnya, the restriction of NGO-activities, the inhuman conditions of Russian prisons and the absence of freedom of press are all causes of great concern. The analysis on Chechnya carried out by many non-governmental humanitarian organisations confirms that the grave breaches of humanitarian laws in Chechnya are not a coincidence or a consequence of Russia's inability to control its own forces but a conscious strategy with which the Russian authorities want to end the Chechen resistance, as well as the dignity of European democrats. In the case of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev we question the impartiality, fairness and objectiveness of the authorities who appear to have exceeded the measures disregarding the fundamental rights of the defence. Their personal lives, which are under the personal responsibility of the highest Russian authorities, are endangered.

As Parliamentarians of the European Union we are highly aware of the situation in Russia and the deficiencies with respect to the rule of law. We hope that as Commissioner for Human Rights in the Council of Europe you will take a firm stand on these problems - also during the six months of the Russian Chairmanship.

As the President of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly René van der Linden pointed out lately, Russia has "to seize the opportunity to strengthen its role on the European scene". This can be done, if not with a negative impact, only by showing a full and unconditional respect for human rights.

Sincerely,

MEP Milan Horáček

MEP Sepp Kusstatscher

MEP Tunne Kelam

MEP Michael Gahler

MEP Heide Rühle

MEP Cem Özdemir

MEP Ari Vatanen

MEP Andres Tarand

MEP Maria da Assunção Esteves

MEP György Schöpflin

MEP Toomas Hendrik Ilves

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MEP Árpád Duka-Zólyomi

MEP Vytautas Landsbergis

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MEP Elly de Groen-Kouwenhoven

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