

Dear members of the Parliament,

We, the undersigned representatives of the Russian expatriate community, citizens and residents of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, address this open letter to you urging action.

On February 2, 2021, Alexei Navalny, the Russian opposition leader, was sentenced to imprisonment in a case that the European Court of Human Rights had recognized as "arbitrary and manifestly unreasonable".^{1,2} The current persecution of Alexei Navalny is one example of the arbitrary application of judicial norms that Vladimir Putin's regime has been using to suppress his political rivals and cement his personal power. As we will argue below, this well-known case not only exemplifies the systematic erosion of human rights and democracy in Russia, but also proves that the current Western reaction to this ongoing process has become insufficient.

We therefore request that you help us in our struggle for the liberation of political prisoners in Russia, initiate and introduce personal sanctions against those responsible for human rights violations in Russia, as detailed below.

Presentation of the problem

The Navalny case

Alexei Navalny, one of the few who openly criticized the Russian regime, is famous for his anti-corruption investigations.³ His last investigation concerned the so-called "Putin palace", estimated at \$1 billion, and uncovered the scheme by which it had been financed through an expanded offshore network.⁴ By February 2021, the YouTube video of this investigation has been viewed over 109 million times.⁴

Erosion of democracy in Russia

Judicial and legislative powers in Russia have often acted at the behest of its executive powers.⁵ The same is true of its special services. Thus, for instance, officials of the Russian State Security Bureau (FSB) and of the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) have been spying upon opposition leaders and activists both inside and outside Russia without a court order or any judicial procedure,⁶ even though the use of the FSB against political opponents is prohibited by the laws of the Russian Federation.^{7,8} Several political activists and opponents of Vladimir Putin's regime have been targeted by assassination attempts,⁹ and some have lost their lives.^{10,11}

The most recent case was the poisoning of Alexei Navalny with the chemical weapon Novichok, as proven by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).¹² The government of the Russian Federation refused to investigate this case.¹³ An independent investigation by *The Insider*, *Bellingcat* and *CNN* showed that Navalny's poisoning was carried out by a secret department of FSB.¹⁴

Another well-known case is the poisoning of Sergei and Julia Skripal by the same chemical, Novichok, in the UK in March 2018 where GRU agents have also been implicated.¹⁵

Amnesty International has shown that the human rights situation in Russia keeps worsening.¹⁶ It is not only direct critics of Vladimir Putin who are subject to political persecution, but also feminists, LGBTQ+ activists,^{17,18} ecological activists,¹⁹ and religious minorities.²⁰ Many ordinary people are put on trial for sharing on the internet their opposing political beliefs or slogans,^{21,22} or even for attending demonstrations.²³ The rights of the detained are often disregarded, up to harassment and even torture.^{24,25,26}

International conduct

For many years the Russian Federation has been conducting aggressive policies (including occupation, as in Georgia and Ukraine towards its closest neighbors.^{27,28} For more than six years the East of Ukraine has been an area of military confrontation involving Russian military forces.²⁹ This conflict also touched the Netherlands, having caused the MH-17 catastrophe in July 2014, which claimed the lives of 298 people, 192 of them Dutch citizens.³⁰ The Russian government has declined to collaborate with the Netherlands and vetoed a United Nations Security Council draft resolution to create an international tribunal to prosecute the culprits.^{31,32} *Bellingcat* and *Zembla* showed that several Dutch politicians and journalists were involved in the Kremlin-linked dissemination of disinformation maintaining Russian innocence.^{33,34}

Conclusions

We believe that Putin's current regime shows all signs of a dictatorship, which means that the current tolerant attitude towards Russia and its institutions (the judicial, legislative and executive systems) has to be revised. Continuing a dialogue with Russia as with a democratic country seems to us inappropriate today.

While Russia has been a long-standing economic partner of the Netherlands, this cannot and should not be grounds for a lack of action when the Russian government acts against its own people, stealing from it and using the spoils of corruption not only for personal enrichment, but also to influence the politics of other countries.

In the context of what is stated above we kindly request you:

- to demand the immediate release of Russian political prisoners (972 people as of February 5, 2021; the list keeps expanding),³⁵ including Alexei Navalny;
- to initiate an honest and unbiased investigation of Vladimir Putin, his close associates and affiliated persons (see appendix A)³⁶ with regards to their use of the proceeds of corruption (including the potential manipulation of state-internal politics) in the Kingdom of the Netherlands;

- to support Dutch and EU laws (such as the European Magnitsky Act) that would introduce sanctions against Russian officials, oligarchs and public figures who benefit from Vladimir Putin's oppressive political regime, as well as against their family members. In order for these sanctions to be effective, they should not be limited to the freezing of property and financial assets in the EU, but also put restrictions on entering the Union. A list of relevant individuals has already been suggested by Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (Appendix A).³²

We hope that our appeal will not remain unanswered and that the Netherlands will take an uncompromising stand on human rights violations in Russia.

Appendix A

This appendix suggests a list of individuals who directly supported or indirectly but consciously colluded with the Russian government in persecuting political opponents, purposefully taking part in the corruption schemes and serving as personal fund-holders for the top Russian officials.

This list matches the one published by the Alexey Navalny's organization, - Anti-Corruption Foundation on Jan-30, 2021 addressing it to the president of the United States of America.

The list is divided into three parts:

- Oligarchs upon whom Putin has bestowed wealth and power, and who wield it on behalf of the regime;
- Human right abusers and those who suppress fundamental civil and political freedoms;
- Individuals specifically involved in the persecution of Navalny and his Anti-corruption Foundation

The top 8 people are of priority as claimed by Alexey Navalny prior to his imprisonment.

Recommended List of Individuals for Sanctioning

Priority Shortlist

1. **Roman Abramovich** - Billionaire businessman with a wide portfolio of holdings in Russia and globally, one of the key enablers and beneficiaries of the Kremlin's kleptocracy, with significant ties to, and assets in the West.

2. **Denis Bortnikov** - Deputy President and Chairman of VTB Bank Management Board. He is the son of Alexander Bortnikov, FSB director and a key ally of Vladimir Putin, who acts as a "wallet" for his father's ill-gotten gains to hide their true beneficiary and avoid existing sanctions.

3. **Andrey Kostin** - President and Chairman of the Management Board of state-owned VTB Bank, a key facilitator of corrupt money flows related to the operation of the Russian government and security services and the personal fortunes of many senior Russian officials.

4. **Mikhail Murashko** - Minister of Health, responsible for covering up Alexey Navalny's poisoning and hindering efforts to evacuate him to Germany for medical treatment.

5. **Dmitry Patrushev** - Minister of Agriculture. He is the son of Nikolai Patrushev, director of the Security Council of Russia and a key ally of Vladimir Putin's, who acts as

a “wallet” for his father’s ill-gotten gains to hide their true beneficiary and avoid existing sanctions.

6. **Igor Shuvalov** - Former First Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the State Development Corporation VEB.RF, with significant assets abroad. Shuvalov was instrumental in creating the system of state corruption, which has come to dominate the country’s institutions.

7. **Vladimir Solovyev** - A high-profile Russian state media personality, one of the primary mouthpieces of authoritarian propaganda, who has both defended and advocated the extrajudicial treatment of Alexey Navalny and other opposition figures.

8. **Alisher Usmanov** - Billionaire businessman with a wide portfolio of holdings in Russia and globally, and significant ties to the West, one of the key enablers and beneficiaries of the Kremlin’s kleptocracy.

Persecution of Alexey Navalny

9. **Alexander Bastrykin** - Head of the Investigative Committee, the primary agency behind numerous fabricated and illegal cases against numerous journalists, activists and opposition figures.

10. **Alexander Bortnikov** - Director of the Federal Security Service (FSB), the main political police agency, responsible inter alia for the attempted poisoning of Alexey Navalny.

11. **Konstantin Ernst** - CEO of the state-owned Channel One TV station, a primary source of state propaganda vilifying civil society and opposition activities and encouraging extrajudicial repression.

12. **Victor Gavrillov** - Head of the Department of Transport of the Economic Security Service within the Federal Security Bureau (FSB). He was responsible for coordinating various agencies during the arrival of Alexey Navalny’s flight to Moscow, including its diversion to Sheremetyevo, where he was arrested.

13. **Dmitry Ivanov** - Head of Chelyabinsk FSB. Head of Tomsk FSB when Alexey Navalny was poisoned there by an FSB team.

14. **Alexander Kalashnikov** - Director of the Federal Penitentiary Service (FSIN), who has overseen continued human rights abuses in the penal system, and also engineered the illegal arrest of Alexey Navalny on his return to Moscow.

15. **Sergei Kirienko** - First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration, with special responsibility for domestic politics, including efforts to prevent Alexey Navalny’s “smart voting” campaign and exclude opposition candidates.

16. **Elena Morozova** - Judge of Khimki District Court, who presided over the illegal, ad hoc court inside a local police station and sentenced Alexey Navalny to 30 days in prison without bail to allow for his further trial.

17. **Denis Popov** - Chief Prosecutor of Moscow, whose office has spearheaded a campaign against Navalny's team through investigations and the courts.

18. **Margarita Simonyan** - Editor-in-Chief of state media network RT, a key mouthpiece of state propaganda abroad, who herself has boasted that RT is capable of “conducting an information war against the whole Western world”.

19. **Igor Yanchuk** - Head of the Khimki Police Department, responsible for Alexey Navalny's arrest on his return to Russia and arranging his illegal, ad hoc trial in a local police station.

20. **Victor Zolotov** - Director of the National Guard, the agency primarily responsible for the violent suppression of opposition activity on the streets, and one of Putin's most loyal supporters. Zolotov also challenged Navalny to a duel and threatened to “make mincemeat” of him.

Wallets and Cronies

21. **Oleg Deripaska** - Billionaire businessman with a wide portfolio of holdings in Russia and globally, one of the key enablers and beneficiaries of the Kremlin's kleptocracy, with significant ties to, and assets in the West.

22. **Alexei Miller** - Chairman of the Management Committee of Gazprom, the state controlled gas corporation, and a significant instrument of covert Russian influence abroad. Miller is one of the key enablers and beneficiaries of the Kremlin's kleptocracy.

23. **Igor Sechin** - Chairman of the Management Board of Rosneft and close and long-term ally of Vladimir Putin. He is one of the key enablers and beneficiaries of the Kremlin's kleptocracy and also the driving force behind policies such as support for the Maduro regime in Venezuela.

24. **Gennady Timchenko** - Billionaire businessman with a wide portfolio of holdings in Russia and globally, a close Putin ally and reported “wallet” of the president, with significant ties to and assets in the West.

25. **Nikolai Tokarev** - Chairman of Transneft, one of the enablers and beneficiaries of the Kremlin's kleptocracy, including the construction of Putin's palace in Gelendzhik.

Abuse of Freedoms

26. **Alexander Beglov** - Governor of St Petersburg, close ally of Vladimir Putin's, whose corrupt activities were highlighted by a Navalny investigation, and who has since been supportive of measures to limit freedom of protest and assembly.

27. **Yuri Chaika** - Presidential representative to the Caucasus Region, but until 2020, Prosecutor General and responsible for the Kremlin's sustained campaign of persecution of civil society.

28. **Andrei Kartapolov** - Deputy Defence Minister and Chief of Main Directorate for Political-Military Affairs, responsible for using conscription as a means of persecuting activists, and reportedly involved in the downing of Malaysian airliner MH17 in 2014.

29. **Pavel Krasheninnikov** - Parliamentarian and former Justice Minister, Krasheninnikov personally drafted or supported numerous recent authoritarian laws, including a recent proposal that would make it even harder to prosecute former presidents on corruption charges.

30. **Mikhail Mishustin** - Prime Minister of Russia, and as such the chief executor of Vladimir Putin's policies.

31. **Ella Pamfilova** - Head of Central Electoral Commission, who has endorsed and legitimized the Kremlin's unfree and unfair elections and consultative votes on a systematic basis.

32. **Dmitry Peskov** - Presidential Press Secretary, the primary spokesman for the Russian government, who has denied any illegal campaign against Navalny and, indeed, any Russian malign activities at home or abroad.

33. **Sergei Sobyenin** - Mayor of Moscow, and the primary executor of Russian government policy in the capital, including vote rigging and facilitating criminal activity through corrupt municipal projects.

34. **Anton Vaino** - Head of the Presidential Administration, arguably the most powerful institution in Russia and the primary coordinating body for the Kremlin's policies at home and abroad.

35. **Andrey Vorobyev** - Governor of the Moscow Region, whose corrupt activities Navalny has revealed.

Persons listed above who are already on US sanctions lists

Alexander Bastrykin

SDN – Magnitsky Act, 2017

Oleg Deripaska

SDN – Ukraine (EO13661, EO13662)

Andrey Kostin

SDN – Ukraine (EO13661)

Alexei Miller

SDN – Ukraine (EO13661)

Igor Sechin

SDN – Ukraine (EO13661)

Gennady Timchenko

SDN – Ukraine (EO13661)

Victor Zolotov

SDN – Ukraine (EO13661)

Endnotes

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