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Mikhail Khodorkovsky

10 years in jail and still fighting for democracy, the rule of law and the social market economy in Russia

Mikhail Khodorkovsky has been in detention for 10 years. He was arrested on 25 October 2003 and sentenced to a total of 14 years imprisonment in two politically motivated trials. The well known legal expert and trial observer Prof. Otto Luchterhandt has written: “The second judgement against Khodorkovsky far surpasses the first in arbitrariness and maliciousness. It is a disturbing document of the cynical perversion of the law, its open mockery”. The European Court of Human Rights ruled that the first trail against him was not fair; it has yet to issue its verdict on the second.

In the course of the swift privatisation drive under President Yeltsin, Mikhail Khodorkovsky built up the successful, modern and transparently run YUKOS petroleum company. President Putin first set his sights on Khodorkovsky when the latter began promoting the development of democracy and civil society in Russia through political and social activism and his projects – the Open Russia Foundation, the New Civilisation movement, the Federation of Internet Education and Schools of Public Policy – and his support of democratic parties.

Unlike other oligarchs, he was unwilling to accept the alternatives on offer: submission or flight abroad. In February of 2003, he publicly called President Putin and his team to account for the systemic corruption in his country. Afterwards, Khodorkovsky was arrested, his company broken up and taken over by the Kremlin’s ROSNEFT.

Khodorkovsky did not see the bars and barbed wire as restricting and confining though; like Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov, he viewed them as a broadening experience. A flood of articles, letters and interviews issued from his prison cell, pieces pointing a way forward towards a democratic and social Russia, founded on the EU’s fundamental values.

He responded to President Medvedev’s hollow promise of modernisation with the essay “Generation M” (M=modernisation), pointing out that if the much needed modernisation is to succeed social reforms will be needed as well as scientific and technical advances. That is predicated upon free people capable of independent thought. This, in turn, requires respect for the constitution and the guarantee of civil rights and militates against so-called 'managed democracy'.

In his idea 2020, he set out a design for a modern European country featuring both a democratic constitutional state and a social market economy. Free from oppression, bureaucratic despotism,

corruption and lawlessness. Central to his vision is the legitimisation of privatisation, generally perceived as unfair, through the introduction of an appropriate windfall tax. Linked to that is the establishment of a social welfare system which would reflect Russia's historical and psychological traditions.

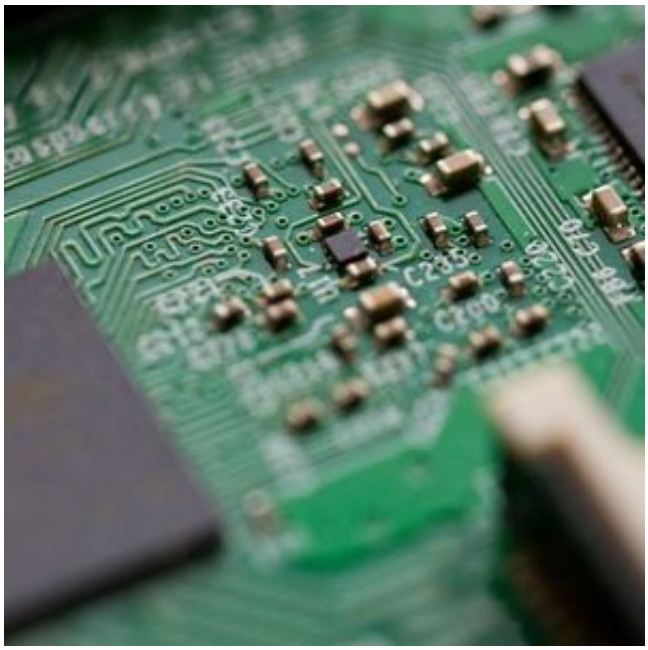
Khodorkovsky is a political prisoner of Putin, who has recently accused him publically of murder. Putin is now having a third criminal case prepared against Khodorkovsky, to put him behind bars for good.

Khodorkovsky's refusal to bend or break has long since rid him of the negative image of the oligarch. In the eyes of Russia's civil society he has converted to the side of the good. He is a beacon of hope for the opposition and the developing civil society. A figure symbolising the common struggle against the ruling autocracy, repression and despotism, who is striving for a modern, European, peaceful and democratic Russia.

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