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News | 11.09.2012

Russia and the rule of law

Shocking Pussy Riot sentence the tip of the iceberg

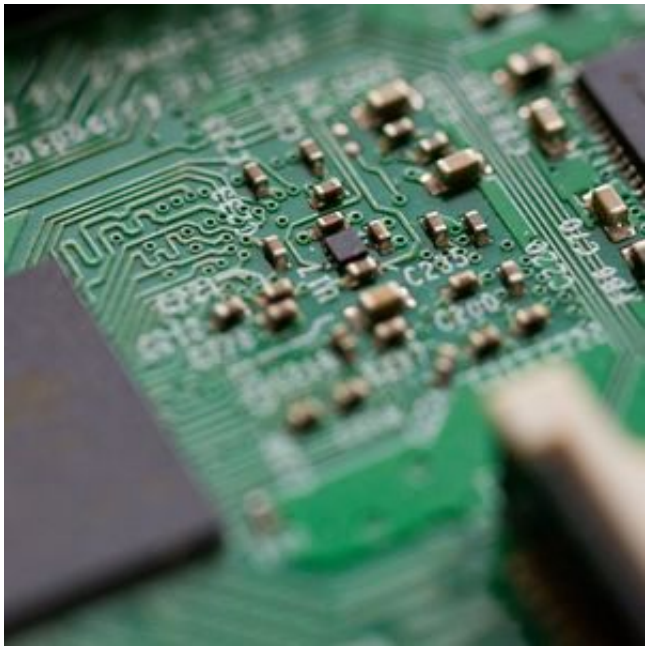
Green MEP Werner Schulz spoke out this evening in the European Parliament against the political use of justice in Russia and a series of laws adopted by an illegitimate Duma that allow such abuses. Shocking as it is, the recent sentencing of three members of the Punk band "Pussy Riot" to two years in a penal colony is the just the latest in a string of politically motivated verdicts aimed at clamping down on political dissent and opposition forces. They force the EU to take a long hard look at the relationship and call into question attempts at forming a strategic partnership with Russia at all. Greens/EFA MEPs tabled a motion for resolution listing and condemning these abuses and urging the government and high courts to review these sentences in light of Russia's international commitments to human rights. Former Russian President Medvedev introduced a working group to look at improvement of the rule of law and respect of fundamental rights. The recent developments in Russia however have moved in the opposite direction. The recent adoption of a series of laws governing demonstrations, NGOS, defamation and the internet seriously affect the climate for the development of civil society. The conviction of the three members of "Pussy Riot" for “hooliganism motivated by religious hatred” undermines the independence and credibility of Russia's judicial system and it is hoped that it will be overturned on appeal. Unfortunately, it is not the only evidence for a clampdown on dissent. The Russian law on Extremist Activities is so deliberately vague that it is being gladly used to target human rights activists, political opponents and religious groups. Demonstrators against the trial have met with arrest and opposition members of the Duma risk having their powers removed. LGBT minorities face laws against "propaganda" while Falun Gong and Jehovah's Witnesses members face accusations of extremism. Meanwhile, the deaths of Anna Politkovskaya, Anastasia Barburova and other journalists and human rights defenders go unaccounted for. These cases add to the upsurge in politically motivated intimidation and are toxic to a healthy civil society. We urge Russia not to turn its back on its international obligations, but to seriously engage in improving the independence of its judiciary and the rule of law. The EU must take a long hard look at its relationship with Russia and finally draw practical conclusions. We need a new openness and frankness in our attitude towards Russia. See also :

- Greens/EFA motion for resolution on the political use of justice in Russia

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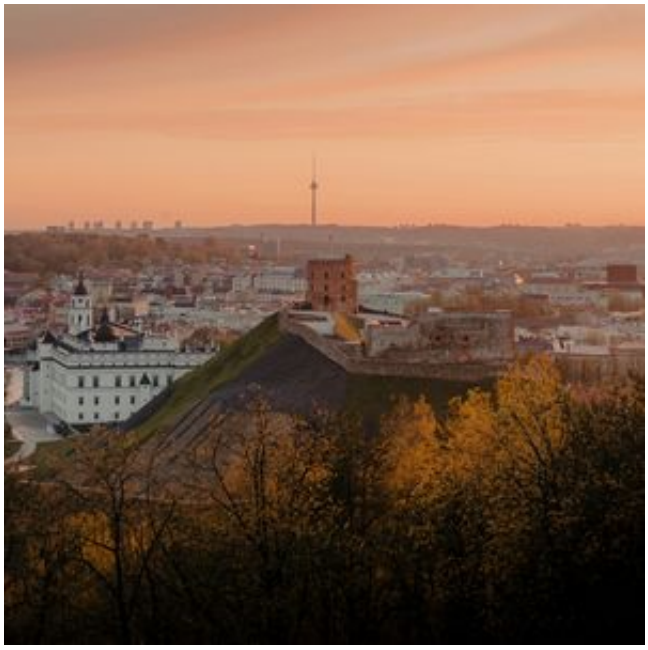
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