

**Commission on Security & Cooperation in Europe
(U.S. Helsinki Commission)**

“Democracy and Human Rights Abuses in Russia: No End in Sight”

Committee Members Present:

**Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS), Chairman;
Senator Benjamin Cardin (D-MD), Ranking Member;
Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC);
Representative Steve Cohen (D-TN);
Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)**

Participants:

**Vladimir Kara-Murza, Vice Chairman, Open Russia;
Rachel Denber, Deputy Director of the Europe and Central Asia Division,
Human Rights Watch;
Daniel Calingaert, Executive Vice President, Freedom House**

**The Hearing Was Held From 9:33 a.m. To 11:12 a.m. in Room 124, Dirksen
Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS),
Chairman, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding**

Date: Wednesday, April 26, 2017

WICKER: The hearing will come to order.

Good morning, everyone. The 115th Congress has already, in its very first months, devoted considerable attention to threats posed by Russia to the states of the former USSR, to all of Europe and even to the United States through Russia's interference in our very own elections – a matter that remains under investigation by multiple U.S. authorities. What we have not done yet – and this goes well back into the 114th Congress – is take a long, hard look at the continuing violations of democratic norms and human rights within Russia itself.

So I'm happy today that my first hearing, as chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, can focus on this very important and timely topic. I'm especially glad that we have such an expert panel of witnesses to testify today on the impact these abuses have, not only on the people of the Russian Federation but on the larger international community, by effectively silencing the voices of the opposition within Russia and giving Mr. Putin and his regime a free hand to act with impunity abroad.

We will begin with someone who is no stranger to me, to the Helsinki Commission, nor to the halls of Congress, thanks to his tireless work promoting democracy in Russia. Despite the Putin regime's efforts to silence him, Mr. Vladimir Kara-Murza is still with us today, and I can't think of anybody in a better position to tell us about the intense – and too often lethal – pressure being applied to brave Russians like him who engage in opposition politics.

We're also very fortunate to have representatives of two of the top independent organizations promoting human rights and freedom of expression across the globe, Human Rights Watch and Freedom House. Rachel Denber will be sharing with us highlights of her years of work following human rights issues in Russia for Human Rights Watch, including the shocking stories of murder and repression in Chechnya that have recently come to light. Human Rights Watch has been the only international organization actively following this case. And Daniel Calingaert is the executive vice president of Freedom House, an organization that needs no introduction here.

Freedom House's annual publications – Freedom in the World, Freedom of the Press and Freedom of the Net – have been invaluable in helping Congress and opponents of freedom of expression and democracy all of over the world track both progress and backsliding on these fundamental freedoms around the globe. In the case of Russia, the trends have not been positive, and we look forward to hearing much more about that.

Now, a word about the portraits of the people that you will notice in the room here to my right – and which you'll see in the room today – these represent several well-known political prisoners currently behind bars in Russia. We will hear about many of them during this morning's hearing. The people portrayed here represent only a fraction of the dozens of political prisoners held in Russia. Indeed, some groups following this issue, like the NGO Memorial, estimate the number is in the hundreds. We wanted to be able to help our audience see at least a few of the faces behind some of the names you will hear today, and we will, of course, have

much more information on political prisoners in the material that will be submitted for the record.

This hearing is intended to accomplish two things. First of all, we want to draw much needed attention to the ongoing serious abuses of human rights in Russia to remind all members of Congress and the American people that the situation in Russia is grave and could continue to deteriorate. Secondly, with our witnesses' assistance, we would like to evaluate how our current approach to human rights abuses in Russia is working and to consider what we can do to get things back on a positive trajectory in Russia, for the Russian people ultimately. A Russia that fully respects all of its citizens' human rights; that allows for full freedom of expression and religion and for free and fair elections will be a place where all Russians can prosper. Those improvements would also make Russia a much better neighbor and would go a long way toward promoting peace and security in the entire Eurasian region. So we have a lot to discuss.

And, with that, it's my pleasure to yield to my good friend Senator Cardin for his opening statement. Senator Cardin.

CARDIN: Well, Senator Wicker, thank you very much for convening this extremely important hearing on democracy and human rights in Russia.

Democracy and human rights and respect for human rights is very much in the hearts and minds of Russians, but not in its leader, Mr. Putin, and it's important that we have this hearing to underscore our commitment to the Russian people and their quest to be respected for human rights.

I must tell you, I am extremely impressed by the spirit of the people in Russia. Under extremely dangerous circumstances, they are taking to the streets to protest against Mr. Putin's corruption. We saw the truck drivers' protest against these corrupt taxes that are being collected from them. The Russian people are showing tremendous courage under extremely dangerous circumstances.

So, Mr. Chairman, I thank you very much for this hearing, and particularly for the posters and for the faces, because there are millions of people being persecuted in Russia today. But as we found, without personalizing it, it's difficult to get the attention that the international community should be paying to what is happening today in Russia. You and I and others were able to do that by the Magnitsky Global Accountability Act, by focusing on the tragedy that occurred to Sergei Magnitsky, and it not only caused the United States to act, but the international community also responded when they saw the outrageous way that one individual was treated by Mr. Putin in Russia.

We're at the Helsinki Commission, and it's interesting that if you look at the Helsinki Final Act, in Moscow, the OSCE participating states explicitly acknowledged that, and I quote, "Issues relating to human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law are of international concern, and the respect for these rights and freedoms constitutes one of the foundations of the international order." That was the declaration that was issued in Moscow under the OSCE. So we have a direct interest and responsibility, every member state, to

challenge when other states are not doing what is required under the Helsinki Final Act, and Russia clearly is violating those commitments.

I appreciate all three witnesses that are here, but I want to particularly acknowledge Vladimir Kara-Murza. And I thank you very much for your presence, and it's nice to see you here with your wife.

As Chairman Wicker pointed out, by the posters that we are displaying here, that by showing the courage of individuals we can get more action. And Mr. Kara-Murza, you have shown tremendous courage in standing up for what is right for the Russian people at the risk of your own life, not once but on other occasions, and it's good to see you healthier today than the last time I saw you.

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to read what our witness said when he testified before Congress – now, it's been almost two years ago. This is what he said two years ago:

“Our friends in the West often ask how they can be helpful to the cause of human rights and democracy in Russia, and the answer is very simple: please stay true to your values. We are not asking for your support. It is our task to fight for democracy and the rule of law in our country. The only thing we ask from Western leaders is that they stop supporting Mr. Putin by treating him as a respectable and worthy partner and by allowing Mr. Putin's cronies to use Western countries as havens for their looted wealth.”

That was good advice two years ago, and that advice remains the same today. Tragically, the numbers are increasing of those who are at risk. Just a few days ago, a St. Petersburg journalist succumbed to his injuries after being beaten into a coma on March the 9th. His case is a reminder that many attacks have resulted not only in loss of life, but in some cases have left people maimed and disabled for life.

Mr. Chairman, I also welcome the opportunity to focus on the political prisoners and others detained in violation of Principle VII of the Helsinki Final Act: the right of people to know and act upon their human rights. The cases of these seven detainees have been well documented by Memorial, the Russian civil society organization established to document the crimes of Soviet repression.

If I may, Mr. Chairman, I would like to include in the record Memorial's list of political prisoners, which was submitted at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw in September.

WICKER: Without objection.

CARDIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I regret that Secretary Tillerson did not meet with independent civil society groups like Memorial when he visited Moscow – foregoing an opportunity to communicate U.S. support for an open and democratic Russia.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, and I thank them very much for being here.

WICKER: Thank you, Senator Cardin.

And we begin our testimony by recognizing Mr. Kara-Murza.

KARA-MURZA: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Cardin, esteemed members of the Commission, thank you very much for holding this important and timely hearing and for the opportunity to testify before you.

This coming Saturday, April 29th, pro-democracy activists across Russia will take part in a nationwide campaign organized by the Open Russia Movement with a single message: enough. They will hold rallies, and send petitions to the Kremlin calling on Vladimir Putin to leave the presidency when his current term – officially the third, in reality the fourth – expires next spring.

Mr. Putin has been in power for 17 years. There is now an entire generation of Russians who have no memory of any other government. This longevity has been the result of a deliberate suppression of the opposition, independent media and civil society and of continuous violations of the rights and freedoms guaranteed to Russian citizens by our own constitution and by our country's commitments under the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Chief among these is the right to freely elect one's own government. After March of 2000, not a single national election in Russia, presidential or parliamentary, was assessed by OSCE monitors as free and fair.

Unequal media access, the removal of opposition candidates from the ballot and outright fraud have become the unfortunate norm in Russian elections. The result has been a parliament devoid of real opposition, not a place for discussion in the words of its own former speaker. Major media outlets have also long ceased to be places for discussion. Having taken control of all national television networks, the main source of news for Russian citizens, the Kremlin turned them into propaganda outlets that offer laudatory coverage of the authorities and portray Mr. Putin's political opponents as a fifth column that works at the behest of foreign governments. Many of these opponents are in prison. According to Memorial, Russia's most respected human rights organization, there are now 115 political prisoners in Russia, a number comparable with the late Soviet period.

And I'd like to thank the staff members of the Helsinki Commission for putting up these portraits of some of the ones who are political prisoners in Vladimir Putin's Russia today. They include opposition activists and their family members, such as Sergei Udaltsov, Oleg Navalny and Darya Polyudova, citizens jailed for taking part in peaceful antigovernment demonstrations, including construction engineer Ivan Nepomnyashchikh and history lecturer Dmitry Buchenkov. The latter was not even present at the rally for which he was charged. But a little Kafka never stopped the Russian judicial system. They include Ukrainians arrested after the annexation of

Crimea, such as the filmmaker Oleg Sentsov. And I believe there will be a special briefing here at the Helsinki Commission this week focusing on his case. They include Aleksei Pichugin, the remaining hostage of the Yukos case that saw the head of Russia's largest oil company, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, imprisoned for more than a decade for having the tenacity to support opposition parties and expose government corruption.

Sometimes political opponents are dealt with without a recourse to formal procedures. In October of 2015 at a hearing of this Commission, I recalled the near-fatal poisoning I had experienced in Moscow earlier that year. Today, I could take that statement and repeat it word for word because I have now experienced it for the second time, also in Moscow, this past February - an identical picture, poisoning by an undefined substance leading to multiple organ failure and a coma. Doctors estimated my chance to survive at 5 percent, so I'm very fortunate to be sitting here today, certainly very grateful. Many of our colleagues have not been as fortunate. Several opposition activists, independent journalists, anticorruption campaigners and whistleblowers have lost their lives in the last 17 years.

Two years ago, in the most brazen political assassination in modern Russia, opposition leader and former Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov was murdered on a bridge in front of the Kremlin. The official investigation into his assassination is stalling. While the alleged perpetrators, all of them, linked to the Kremlin-appointed leader of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, are currently on trial, the authorities have not pursued those who had ordered and organized the killing and have refused to even question potential persons of interest, including Mr. Kadyrov and the commander of the Russian National Guard, General Viktor Zolotov.

Under the statutes of the OSCE and contrary to repeated claims by Kremlin officials, human rights abuses in member states cannot be dismissed as an internal affair and are, I quote, "matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating states," end of quote. And Senator Cardin has already referenced this fundamental principle of the OSCE.

It is important that our OSCE partners speak openly and honestly about what is happening in Russia. It is also important, since human rights are a matter of international concern, that there be international accountability for those who violate them. The United States does have a mechanism for such accountability in the Magnitsky Act, of which the ranking member is the lead author and the chairman is one of the original cosponsors, the act that individually targets human rights abusers. And it is very important that this law continues to be implemented to its full extent.

The main responsibility for ensuring respect for human rights, the rule of law and democratic principles in Russia lies, of course, with Russian citizens themselves. And I would respectfully disagree with the subtitle of this hearing, that there is no end in sight to the abuses. Increasingly, the young generation in Russia, the very generation that grew up under Vladimir Putin, is demanding respect and accountability from those in power.

Last month, protests against government corruption swept across Russia with tens of thousands of people, mostly young people, taking to the streets, despite arrests and intimidation. This movement will continue and these growing demands for accountability are the best

guarantee that Russia will one day become a country where citizens can exercise the rights and freedoms to which they are entitled.

I thank you very much, once again, for holding this hearing and I look forward to any questions you may have during the question-and-answer round.

Thank you.

WICKER: Thank you, Mr. Kara-Murza.

And I'm going to defer my questioning until the end. But let me just say on behalf of the Commission that you look great, particularly considering what you've gone through. And we are just thrilled that you are up and about and healthy and able to testify today.

At this point, I'm going to yield my time to Mr. Tillis for a five-minute round, and then Mr. Cardin, and then we'll go in turn after that. So thank you much.

Senator Tillis.

TILLIS: Thank you. And thank you all for being here.

I was at a Banking Committee hearing about a month ago. And one of the subjects was Russian sanctions. And there was a question asked that was, "How rich is Vladimir Putin?" "And everybody was coming up with all kinds of calculations. My response to that, "he's as rich as he wants to be because he will take whatever he wants and he will use every device in his power in what seems to be an unbridled fashion." So I wanted to give you my predisposition on the leadership over there. It's not a positive one.

I also think it's important for us to make sure that if someone from Russia happens to watch this on video, this is not about the Russian people, this is for the Russian people and the abuses that I think are well-documented. In fact, some of the attempts on your life, some of the murders look like they're right out of a Tom Clancy novel or something. It's almost like you'd think it was fictional, but it's actually happening. And I don't think, even among the American people, when you see a Time magazine that has Vladimir Putin on it, "The Most Powerful Man Alive," you could almost conjure that up as actually respectable leaders who have had that title in the past.

So has the pace of the acts, like the acts against you, the murders, do you think that they have escalated or are they more or less running at the same rate? Where are we now in terms of Russia and actors in Russia feeling any pressure from our knowledge that these acts are going on? And I'm happy to have anyone answer that question.

KARA-MURZA: Thank you very much, Senator Tillis. And I think you're certainly right to say that Mr. Putin is as rich as he can be. And it has been said about the people who are currently in power in Russia that this group of people doesn't just rule Russia, it also owns it. And I think that's very true about the nature of the regime we have, the kleptocratic, oligarchic

regime in many ways. And when the Panama Papers came out about a year ago, that was, of course, just the tiniest tip of the iceberg, that showed as one of the revelations that there were \$2 billion worth of assets owned by Mr. Putin's close friend, the cellist Sergei Roldugin. And this presumably is the way that this money is kept. I mean, presumably it's not in Mr. Putin's own name, he's more clever than that. It's kind of stashed away in the names of other people.

And we used to say – we said in Moscow last year that we all thought that Paul McCartney was the world's richest musician. Now we know it's Sergei Roldugin who is nobody you probably ever heard of, but he's the one who has all these assets.

In terms of the pace of the repression, the crackdown, he certainly began gradually when he came to power 17 years ago. In fact, I think it could be said that he borrowed Benito Mussolini's tactic when it came to dismantling the democratic institutions in Russia. And Mussolini's advice was to, you know, he said it once, "pluck the chicken feather by feather to lessen the squawking," so you do it gradually, you do it one by one. So he went after independent media and he went after the political opposition. He went after the institutions, like Parliament, step by step by step. And, of course, the pace of the crackdown certainly has massively accelerated in the past five years since the big protests that began in 2011, 2012.

And the number of political prisoners we have in Russia today, 115 according to Memorial, actually I think it will be updated today or tomorrow because there was one more person sentenced yesterday in a political case, a well-known nationalist, Dmitry Dyomushkin is his name, this number is really well comparable to what we had in the Andropov-Brezhnev era. When Andrei Sakharov wrote his Nobel Prize lecture in 1975, he listed 126 political prisoners in the Soviet Union, we're now up to 115. That wasn't an exhaustive list back then, probably this one isn't either. And, of course, Russia is much smaller than the Soviet Union was, so you can compare the scale.

And in terms of the mortality rate among people who have crossed the Kremlin's path in one way or another, it certainly has been abnormally high in defying any kind of statistical model. And as I mentioned in my prepared testimony, the assassination of Boris Nemtsov, the leader of the Russian opposition, two years ago was the most brazen, the most high-profile political assassination in Russia in decades. And it basically continues to be surrounded by impunity. –

TILLIS: In my remaining time, I did want to get one other question in. I have a Judiciary Confirmation hearing that I have to go to. I would like to stay for the entire hearing.

But how would you gauge – the United States is one nation that really needs to stand against some of the activities that we're seeing in Russia. How would you rate the international community in general in terms of their focus and their message and their level of expressed concern for what we see going on in Russia?

KARA-MURZA: Well, the U.S. has certainly led in this because you didn't limit yourselves to words, you went into action. And four-and-a-half years ago, this Congress passed the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act which for the first time, this was really a

groundbreaking principle, for the first time it introduced sanctions not against a country, not even against a government, per se, but against specific individuals responsible for human rights abuse. And this is absolutely fundamental, because going back to what we were just talking about, the nature of this regime that we have now is that these people abuse the rights of their own citizens, but they themselves want to use all the privileges, including financial privileges, that the West has to offer for themselves and for their families. And this double standard has to end and the U.S. has led in ending this double standard.

And I think it's very important that the Magnitsky law continues to be implemented in this country to the full extent. And there are now other countries that are following your example. Estonia became the first European Union country to pass a similar measure. The U.K. is now in the process of doing so. Canada is in the process of doing so. And so I think this is the most important benchmark and it's important that it continues to be implemented.

TILLIS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

WICKER: And thank you, Senator Tillis.

We departed from regular order to accommodate the senator, who is on his way to another very important hearing. But at this point we will resume with the testimony of our two other distinguished panelists, the first being Rachel Denber, deputy director of the Europe and Central Asia Division of Human Rights Watch. She specializes in countries of the former Soviet Union. Previously, Ms. Denber directed Human Rights Watch's Moscow office and did field research and advocacy in Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Estonia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

So, Ms. Denber, we are delighted to have you here and we welcome your testimony.

DENBER: Thank you so much, Chairman Wicker.

Thank you, members of the Commission, for inviting me here today.

And I just want to personally acknowledge Vladimir Kara-Murza's courage. It's an honor to be testifying together with you and also together with our colleague from Freedom House.

I have been monitoring human rights in Russia, in the former Soviet Union, for 25 years now. And I can say that I want to agree with what Vladimir said, that Russia is today more repressive than it has ever been in the post-Soviet era. I think that Vladimir and also you, Chairman Wicker, have talked about some of the tools that the government is using to try to – I want to emphasize “try to” – silence independent critics. It's using a wide range of tools through tightening control over free expression, over free assembly, over free association, over NGOs.

And I want to add two other things about this crackdown on civil society that has grown increasingly vicious, and that's the way that the Kremlin-controlled broadcasters have been portraying Western democracies as working to destabilize Russia and the rest of the world and

how these Kremlin-controlled broadcasters have – and Kremlin-controlled media or Kremlin-loyal media – have also been urging Russians to mobilize against this threat and have branded dissenting voices as paid agents of the West working against Russia. I think it's really important to understand how the government has tried to mobilize the public mood in a very poisonous way.

I want to talk about two things, and one is something that Chairman Wicker referred to, – what's happening in Chechnya today. And I think it's very also important and relevant in the context of what you mentioned, Ramzan Kadyrov and his association with Nemtsov's murder, and with Chechnya.

As you know, there has been a campaign inside Chechnya to round up and beat, torture men who were believed to be gay in Chechnya. This is a campaign that has been very rightly condemned by the U.S. government, and by members of this Commission and other members of Congress.

You know, this campaign is targeting these men to try to get them to hand over the contacts of other men who are believed to be gay and to, again, mobilize society against them. When they are released, they are at great risk of persecution by their own families, of hate crimes, because Chechnya is a highly traditional society, and being gay in Chechnya is considered a stain on family honor.

I think that as a result of the pressure that has been mobilized by the United States government, by governments all over Europe and by international organizations, Putin eventually did discuss the allegations of these roundups with Ramzan Kadyrov, who owes his political career to Vladimir Putin. You know, of course, Kadyrov denied that these roundups were happening, that this torture was happening, but the facts are there. The facts are there. Human Rights Watch has done our own interviews. We've confirmed the roundups. We've confirmed the forced outings to families. And we've also confirmed the very visceral threats that Chechen officials have issued against the newspaper, "Novaya Gazeta," that made these allegations public for the first time.

The second thing I wanted to address was the broader issues of political prisoners in Russia. I'm very happy to see the posters and these faces. That's incredibly important to actually see these faces and realize that they're actual people with actual families. Human Rights Watch, we doesn't have our own comprehensive list of politically motivated arrests. We also follow and pay great attention and liaise with the Memorial Human Rights Center, which keeps this comprehensive list.

I think it would be an overstatement to say that the Russian government systematically arrests and imprisons dissidents, political-opposition activists and government critics. I think that the government for now doesn't need to engage in mass arrests. It has other tools in the toolbox, tools that induce self-censorship. People who they want to intimidate are people who are online, who are active on the Internet, or people who might participate in protests.

Vladimir already set out the main groups of people who are targets of intimidation and who are targets of arrests. They include protesters, not only from four years ago, the Bolotnaya case, but also the people who marched last month against corruption. A second group is other people who are targeted with arbitrary cases of extremism; these include people who are imprisoned for sharing or for posting something on the Internet having to do with government – their criticism of Russia's actions in Syria, also having to do with religious insults. And I can give a couple of examples in question and answer.

Probably the largest category of new cases of politically motivated arrests have to do with Ukraine, either Ukrainian citizens who have been arrested on a range of charges – and I especially want to point out Oleg Sentsov, as Vladimir had, and to point out also that the third anniversary of his arrest is coming up May 10th. I wish I could be here for tomorrow's briefing on that. So they're either Ukrainian citizens or they are people who have spoken out against Russia's actions in Ukraine, whether it's the young woman, Darya Polyudova, who did nothing more than make a harmless post on her VKontakte account, to a very small closed group, or others who criticize Russia's occupation of Crimea.

There's even a librarian, Natalia Sharina, who's currently under house arrest because of suspicion that some of the books in the Ukrainian-language library in Moscow, where she is the librarian, that there were a couple of dozen books that the government has said are extremist materials. And also there's a large group of Crimean Tatars who have been arrested or who are facing criminal charges.

And I would also say that there's a fifth group, and that's people who simply face political retribution by the regime. And that's either people like Oleg Navalny, the opposition leader Alexei Navalny, his brother – I'm very glad to see his photograph up here – and also people inside Chechnya who have criticized Ramzan Kadyrov, who are in jail now and facing completely false drug charges.

I'm really glad that you asked what it is that the United States could be doing. I would put forth four recommendations.

One is specifically about the anti-gay campaign in Chechnya. It's to stay strongly focused on this, to continue to bring pressure on the Kremlin to stop these purges and to insist that the Kremlin ensure that they never happen again. I think that the criticism that's been brought forward so far is the only reason why Putin raised this issue with Kadyrov in the first place.

The second thing the United States can do is to actually understand that men from Chechnya who are gay or believed to be gay have absolutely nowhere to go, and they will be targeted. They will continue to be targeted, whether it's by the regime or by their families, and that the U.S. should do whatever it can to help these men find safe sanctuary, especially in the United States.

The other two recommendations are quite general, and that's to continue full support for outlets like Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, Voice of America. These are incredibly

important sources – important and high-quality sources of information in Russia and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union.

And then, finally, I'm so glad you mentioned that when Secretary Tillerson went to Moscow, he did not meet with Memorial. We were quite surprised that Secretary Tillerson, during his trip to Moscow, met with no civil-society leaders. It's not that every single time a secretary of state travels to Russia that they must meet civil-society leaders. But on his first trip, I would have expected Secretary Tillerson to meet with them.

And I think we need to make sure that when high-level U.S. VIPs travel to Russia, they should meet with civil-society leaders – not only to show support, but also to listen to what they have to say, because their analysis of what's going on in Russia is incredibly important — and also to find ways to raise those issues in meetings that they have with Russian officials and to show that meeting with civil-society leaders is a normal thing to do in a strong democracy.

I think that I will stop there. Thank you very much for inviting me to speak today.

WICKER: Thank you very much, Ms. Denber.

Dr. Daniel Calingaert is executive vice president at Freedom House. He oversees Freedom House's contributions to policy debate on democracy and human-rights issues and outreach to the U.S. Congress, foreign governments, media, and Freedom House supporters. He previously supervised Freedom House's civil society and media programs worldwide.

He has taught at Georgetown and John Hopkins University, also at the American University School of Public Affairs. And it's worth noting that he graduated with highest honors in international relations from Tufts University and earned both a Master's in Philosophy and a Doctor of Philosophy from Oxford University.

Dr. Calingaert, we're delighted to have you with us.

CALINGAERT: Thank you, Chairman Wicker.

And thank you, honorable members of the Commission, for the opportunity to testify.

I ask that my full written statement be submitted for the record.

WICKER: Without objection.

CALINGAERT: Thank you.

Repression in Russia echoes across Eurasia and beyond. President Putin was the primary author of what we call the modern authoritarian's playbook. And it's a playbook that he developed starting in the early 2000s and refined over time. And this, in essence, is the façade of pluralism that really masks political control. Other dictators have picked up the playbook and used it.

A key component of the playbook is suppressing civil society. We heard earlier about restrictive NGO laws, criticism of foreign support for local civil society. And these are methods that we've seen replicated not only in neighboring countries, but even as far afield as Ethiopia and Venezuela.

In 2012, Russia passed its foreign-agent law. And we've seen similar legislation enacted in Kazakhstan. It was debated but ultimately rejected in Kyrgyzstan; and most recently there are reports that foreign-agent legislation is being drafted in Hungary, which I'd note used to be held up as an example of democratic transition and progress.

The foreign-agent bill not only stifles civil society but fuels a poisonous narrative of civil society as paid foreign agents who are trying to impose alien agendas. And this is really a distraction. It's a way for President Putin and other dictators to shift attention from the real issue, which is their efforts to deny citizens' fundamental freedoms.

The foreign-agent bills and other restrictions on civil society are echoed in Eurasia and other places. If you look at Russia's manipulation of the media, that is directly affecting countries in the neighborhood and further on. And when I say media manipulation, I'm talking about really a sophisticated form of influence that is designed to undermine trust in democratic institutions. And this is a combination of facts, distortions and outright fabrications designed to shape public opinion. It often relies on social media to amplify rumors, blatant falsehoods, and reach a significant audience. And in some cases the buzz on social media causes coverage in mainstream media, as we saw in the French elections with rumors about the candidate Emmanuel Macron.

Russian television has extensive reach and influences public perceptions. According to a Gallup poll, residents in most of Eurasia find that the Russian media's coverage of the situation in Ukraine and Crimea is more reliable than Western media coverage. The large reach of Russian TV can shape public discourse in other countries. For instance, the whole debate in Kyrgyzstan on foreign funding for civil society was really driven by Russian TV.

And even where the reach is limited, it can gain traction. To cite other examples, in Germany there was a false report of a 13-year-old Russian-German girl supposedly raped by migrants. Again, it was fueled by social media. And even in the U.S. elections last year, there are certain stories that sort of gained traction through, you know, dubious websites and social-media accounts likely connected to Russia.

Russia is seeking to undercut the ability of international organizations to protect human rights and democratic standards; for instance, impeding this election of a new OSCE representative on freedom of the media. This obstruction is part of a broader effort to revise the European order. A key component obviously is the Helsinki Final Act, which in essence was a grand bargain whereby the U.S. and Western Europe accepted existing borders, and the Soviet Union and its allies recognized the human dimension of security. As is evident from Russia's intervention in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, Russia doesn't respect human rights nor existing borders.

Unless the U.S. actively defends the European order, Russia will continue to erode it and Europe will grow less stable. The expansion of Russian influence is likely to reduce support for the transatlantic alliance and weaken resistance to Russia's violations of territorial integrity.

The spread of democracy serves U.S. economic interests as well. Corruption and weak rule of law put U.S. businesses at a disadvantage. And restrictions on media limit access of American companies, as was seen by Russia's decision to block LinkedIn.

When the U.S. defends human rights, it is not imposing its values on other countries. It is holding other governments to account for failing to follow their own laws and international human-rights commitments. The United States lives up to its international commitments. It's only fair that we expect Russia and others to do the same.

I have several recommendations to counter the spread of Russia's repressive practices and media manipulation.

First is to staunchly defend the norms that are established by the OSCE and other international conventions and respond firmly and vocally to violations.

Second, the U.S. should lead democratic countries in publicly criticizing and diplomatically pushing back on initiatives to replicate Russia's repressive practices; for instance, the introduction of the foreign-agent law in Hungary.

We call on the Congress to push for full enforcement of the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act and the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, and specifically urge the president to add more senior Russian officials to the Russia sanctions list and to impose sanctions on officials under the Global Magnitsky Act.

We support robust continued funding for U.S. foreign broadcasting – RFE/RL, VOA – even mindful of the current budget environment and likely reductions in federal spending. We think it's critical to support independent Russian-language media, and also to continue assistance for human-rights and civil-society activists, following their lead on what forms of assistance are most helpful.

A firm U.S. response to the spread of Russia's repressive practices is critical to defend American values, protect the European order and advance U.S. security and economic interests in Europe and beyond.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

WICKER: Thank you very much.

Thank you, all three, for your testimony.

And before I go to Representative Cohen, who is next on the list, I want to take a matter of personal privilege and ask Orest Deychakiwsky to stand. (Applause.) Now, just remain standing for a moment. (Laughter.)

Orest has faithfully served the Helsinki Commission for 35 years. And this is not only his last hearing, but actually his last day of service for the Commission. So I want to thank you and ask unanimous consent that, when this hearing adjourns today, that we adjourn in honor of Orest Deychakiwsky and his 35 years of service. Without objection. (Applause.)

And I might mention that Representative Dr. Burgess has not been able to stay with us, but asked that a statement be included in the record. And, without objection, that will be done.

Mr. Cohen, you are recognized to question these witnesses.

COHEN: Thank you, Senator Wicker. And thank you for holding this important hearing at this time.

Firstly, I have to admit I was a bit remiss at preparing. And so, Mr. Kara-Murza, I was surprised to see you here. I didn't realize you were going to be a witness. And I've kept up with your travels. I can recommend a new path of travel and a new travel adviser. But I'm so pleased that you're here and in good health. I was very concerned about you and read all the articles. You're a brave man.

I care about human rights greatly, and that's why I'm on this Commission. But I do want to ask you – and anybody who would like to help if they have any answers – do you have any knowledge about any involvement of Russia in our elections? Do you have people that you had contact with in Russia that have advised you or given you opinions about what Russia might have done to manipulate, through the media, our elections, or to hack our elections or to be involved, or people they may have had contact with?

KARA-MURZA: Thank you, Congressman. Thank you for your kind words. I hope you were surprised in a good way to see me.

COHEN: A very good way.

KARA-MURZA: Thank you very much.

COHEN: A very good way.

KARA-MURZA: On election interference, I certainly don't have any inside information. As you can imagine, I don't have too many interlocutors in the current Kremlin administration. (Laughter.) But the Putin regime has been known to interfere in elections in other countries for many years. So when this talk began, there was nothing surprising, frankly, or new about this. They've tried to interfere and did interfere in elections in Ukraine, in Georgia, in Moldova, and all these other countries. And if they were able to do all of that over seven years, basically

without any significant reaction from the international community, you know, why not try to upgrade a little bit?

So I don't have any specific inside information, but it certainly would not come as a surprise if there were any facts on this particular issue. Thank you.

COHEN: Do any of the other witnesses have any opinions to offer?

CALINGAERT: I don't have information beyond what's in the public record.

COHEN: Thank you.

The killing of your friend, Mr. Nemtsov— it's alleged that these two or three guys were Chechens or agents of Ramzan. They haven't spoken? Do they think they're innocent? Or what's their story?

KARA-MURZA: Thank you, Congressman. This is a very important question. And as you can appreciate, it's a very personally difficult issue for all of us. But in terms of the investigation, there's currently a trial ongoing. There are five defendants, all of them Chechens, all of them directly linked to Ramzan Kadyrov, the Kremlin-appointed leader of Chechnya.

And at the moment of the assassination on February 27, 2015, the alleged gunman, a man by the name of Zaur Dadaev, was actually a serving officer of the interior ministry of the Russian Federation. This is why the trial is going on in a military court, as opposed to a civilian court, because he was a serving officer.

And so I don't want to say anything definitively before there's a verdict. The verdict is expected at the end of May, from what we believe. But this is only the lowest level of people who are on trial. Investigations have been unable or unwilling to go beyond this unspoken glass ceiling, to go to any of the higher-ranking people.

For example, there were reports last year in *Erbaka* (ph), an independent Russian newspaper, that General Alexander Bastrykin, who is head of the Russian investigative committee, who's also now on the U.S. Magnitsky list for human-rights abuses, has personally vetoed attempts by lower-level investigators to question a man named Ruslan Geremeyev, one of the key persons in Kadyrov's entourage, to name him as an organizer in the assassination. Bastrykin personally vetoed this twice.

And despite the numerous requests by lawyers acting for Boris Nemtsov's family to question Kadyrov himself; to question Adam Delimkhanov, who is a member of the Russian State Duma, the right-hand man of Kadyrov; to question General Viktor Zolotov, who is now the commander of the National Guard of the Russian Federation, who was previously commander of the interior forces of the interior ministry. So he was actually officially the superior of Dadaev, who is the accused gunman. But again, both investigators and courts have refused to even question these people.

So we're seeing this glass ceiling on the investigation. They're unable or unwilling to go higher than the lowest level of alleged perpetrators. And this is why we think it is very important to have international attention and international mechanisms, to the extent we can, involved in this investigation. We have been able – and this is thanks to the efforts of Zhanna Nemtsov, Boris Nemtsov's daughter, and her lawyer, Vadim Prokhorov, who have been able to push for a decision by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, of which, of course, Russia is a member, to have a special rapporteur appointed to oversee this investigation.

Unfortunately, there's really nothing that can replace a national investigation of this case, unless the country itself, the government of the country itself, requests it, like, for instance, the Lebanese did with the Hariri case, or Pakistan did with Benazir Bhutto's case at the U.N. Security Council. Needless to say, Mr. Putin's regime is not going to do that.

So the only thing we can do in the absence of an international mechanism for investigation is to have international attention, an international oversight of the investigation. So we would urge our partner countries in the OSCE also, including the United States, to raise this issue, to talk about this, to ask questions in OSCE Parliamentary Assembly settings and elsewhere, in bilateral contacts, when U.S. officials go to Moscow or when Russian officials come here. And there are bilateral meetings. It's important to raise this issue, not to let them sweep it under the carpet and forget.

And there's one more issue I would like to mention in the context of your question. They haven't just killed Boris Nemtsov himself. They're also trying to kill his memory. They have rejected – by they, I mean Russian authorities – have rejected numerous petitions and initiatives for any kind of commemoration of his name. They wouldn't even let us put up a small sign, a street name, nothing.

They actually come and steal flowers from the bridge. People still bring flowers to the spot where he was killed. Every night, Moscow police comes in and they steal flowers. You should see the videos – it's mind-boggling – of these grown men in uniforms running around like thieves in the night and stealing flowers from the bridge.

So it's very important – while we cannot do anything to commemorate him in Russia, for obvious reasons, it is important to commemorate him where it is possible to do so, which is outside of Russia. And there's actually a congressional bill of which Chairman Wicker is a co-sponsor – it's S. 459 in the Senate; it's H.R. 1863 in the House – that would re-designate the address of the Russian embassy in Washington, D.C. as 1 Boris Nemtsov Plaza. And this is very important, I can tell you, not just for Boris's family, but for many friends and colleagues back in Russia. So, if that were to happen – I know it sounds small and symbolic, but it is really, really important.

COHEN: Thank you for what you're doing to preserve his memory. And I know you've done much work, and that's why you went back to Russia. And I'm a co-sponsor of that bill in the House. When I saw it, I had to take a second look. I thought that is a pretty effective way of continuing his memory.

KARA-MURZA: Thank you very much for that.

COHEN: It's a remembrance, which is so important. Yesterday was Holocaust Memorial Day in the United States. And it's important that we never forget atrocities and we never forget the people who stand up for freedom. Your friend, Boris Nemtsov, was one.

Now, I've read somewhere the idea that these folks killed him acted on a directive from Chechnya as a gift to Putin, never saying that Putin might have called his buddy and said help me. What is your speculation as far as the level of involvement? Does it just go to Chechnya and Kadyrov, or does it go back to Putin?

KARA-MURZA: Well, first of all, political responsibility for this assassination lies squarely with Vladimir Putin and his regime. When the leader of the opposition, of the national opposition, is assassinated, especially in such a place, in front of the Kremlin, it is the government that bears responsibility. It is the government that bears responsibility for the campaign of hate and attacks and slander against opponents of Mr. Putin in general, but specifically against Boris Nemtsov.

For years he was vilified on Russian state TV. My colleagues mentioned the role, the nefarious role, that state-controlled broadcasting in Russia today plays in this regime and its propaganda. It is absolutely vicious. They've described him as an American agent, as a traitor, as part of a fifth column. They said he would have welcomed Nazi troops if he was alive in 1941 in Moscow. I'm not making this up. These are all direct quotes that were reported day after day after day for years.

So this – you know, this atmosphere of hatred and intimidation didn't just come out of nowhere. The atmosphere that made it possible to assassinate the leader of the opposition in front of the Kremlin was created by those propaganda outlets that are directly controlled by Mr. Putin and his regime.

And, of course, the impunity and the lack of any kind of real investigation when it concerns the organizers and masterminds of the assassination are also a direct responsibility of the current regime, because it's they who are doing it.

So, of course, I don't have any specific information as to how it was done. I very much hope – in fact, I am certain – that one day we will know the truth and that one day those people who did this to him will face justice, according to the law in our own country. Until that day comes, we need to make sure people remember and we need to make sure people pay attention.

COHEN: There does seem to be a trend in Russia. There was the former parliamentary member who was assassinated on the 23rd of March? I guess that's what Putin wants to send a signal to those who oppose him. He is unbelievable.

Tell me something about the oil company they kind of took from the multibillionaire oligarch who I think was incarcerated. Is he dead now? The gentleman that created that oil empire, gas empire that was taken over by –

KARA-MURZA: Right. I think you're referring Mikhail Khodorkovsky –

COHEN: Yes.

KARA-MURZA: – who was the CEO of Yukos, which was Russia's largest oil company, he was also the richest man in Russia when he was arrested in 2003 in October for daring to behave independently of the Kremlin. He supported opposition parties. He supported civil society projects. He openly exposed government corruption in a televised meeting directly with Putin sitting across from him like I'm now sitting across from you.

He spent more than 10 years in prison. He was pardoned and released at the end of 2013 as part of this mini thaw that came before the Sochi Olympics. And he was not just released, he was basically kicked out of the country because they only removed the police and prison escort from him when he was put on a plane belonging to a former foreign minister of Germany, the plane that took him to Germany.

He's now based in the United Kingdom and he's actually the founder of the Open Russia movement of which I have the honor of being the vice chairman. So he's now back to the work of supporting civil society, supporting pro-democracy activists in Russia with a main focus on helping and empowering and training the young generation of democratic activists across Russia. Those are the very people that we're seeing now rise up in the tens of thousands across the country to protest against authoritarianism and corruption. So after spending more than 10 years in jail, he's now very much free, thankfully, and very much involved in what's happening in Russia.

COHEN: Well, I've read about him. I am happy to know he's alive. I didn't know, you know, where he was now. The company, which they basically just stole from him, is apparently the company that apparently Putin might have an interest in now. And much of their future earnings would be based on their relationship with ExxonMobil and drilling in the Arctic. Is that accurate?

KARA-MURZA: The company that – well, let me put it in the most diplomatic way I can. The company that ended up having most of the assets that were stolen from Mr. Khodorkovsky and Yukos is a company called Rosneft, which is a majority state-owned oil company which is headed by Mr. Putin's longtime and very close, personal friend, a man by the name of Igor Sechin, also from the KGB, as most of them are. And yes, Rosneft does have a very active international life, as it were, and international partnerships. And yes, it does have several partnerships with Western oil and gas companies.

There are also many lawsuits, international lawsuits, including at the Arbitration Court in The Hague, filed by former Yukos shareholders. I have to say, Mr. Khodorkovsky is not one of them because he sold all of his shares while he was still in prison, so he's not involved in any of these legal processes. But other former Yukos shareholders are actively pursuing legal avenues obviously outside of Russia on the international stage because it's, as you well understand, it's

impossible to do it in the current judicial system in Russia against Rosneft and against the people who basically stole and plundered this company. So you're exactly right in that.

COHEN: Putin has gotten himself pretty involved with the church and that's politically wise for him, I guess. And the church has gone along with it. And I think that may be one of the reasons why Pussy Riot was arrested and treated like they were because it was a church-Kremlin relationship, and so it made for a perfect opportunity to punish somebody. That continues, I guess. And how are other religions? How are Jews treated in Russia this day? Is there freedom of religion for Christians and other minority religions?

KARA-MURZA: Well, of course, the situation with freedom of religion is definitely much better than it was in Soviet times. I think that's one area where things haven't deteriorated as badly as they have in other areas. Although, I must say there are also cases that go against the principle of freedom of religion. I mean, just recently the Russian supreme court banned the Jehovah's Witnesses, for instance, as an extremist group.

COHEN: Right. I saw it was illegal to be a Jehovah's Witness, isn't it?

KARA-MURZA: They said these are extremist views, so they have been banned for that reason.

As far as all the major religions go, the so-called major traditional religions, which is Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Islam, those are the four traditional religions recognized in Russia, there is freedom of religion for worship, needless to say. And I think it would be fair to say, as you mentioned, that there is this close relationship between the people who are currently in power and the leaders or the hierarchy I should say of basically all of those major organized religions. I mean, Mr. Putin regularly has meetings obviously with Russian Orthodox church leadership, but also with the leaders of the Jewish religion in Russia, with Islam and Buddhism.

But I wouldn't equate the leadership and the hierarchy with believers and even with the clergy. There are different views among the clergy, for instance I know very well this Russian Orthodox priest whose name is Father Georgy Edelstein, he's a member of the Moscow Helsinki Group, one of the oldest human rights organizations in Russia, he's also a serving Russian Orthodox priest, and there are others who are not afraid to state their opinions which may be, in many cases, different from what the government wants them to believe and say.

So, in general, I think you're right to say that there is this close relationship between the current regime and the hierarchy of religious organizations. But generally, I think, on the level of people, of citizens, freedom of religion, that's an area where things are a little better than in other areas, such as freedom of the media certainly, or freedom of political opposition.

COHEN: Thank you very much.

I yield back.

WICKER: The congressman has no time to yield back. (Laughter.) But we've had a good discussion.

KARA-MURZA: Forgive me, that was probably me rather than him.

WICKER: No, it was the chair.

Ms. Jackson Lee.

JACKSON LEE: I thank you, Mr. Chairman, very much.

And I welcome all the witnesses here.

I am a new member of the Commission and delighted to be here. I am also the ranking member of the House Judiciary's Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security and Investigations. Their hearing is going on as we speak, and so I will ask my questions and beg your pardon for my leaving the hearing early.

But I do want to mention, as my colleagues have done, yesterday was the Holocaust memorial and want to again take note of that heinous and horrific and violent and singular act of barbarism.

I do want to take note of the fact of where we are as it relates to Russia, because when the Soviet Union was broken up, I know there was a great deal of hope and aspirations and inspiration because we had believed we could not change Russians' political infrastructure, it's a communist country. But when I say "could not change," we had hoped that the various voices would be allowed to speak freely and the people's will could then be directed according to those voices of the Russian people.

So I do want to say to you, Mr. Kara-Murza, you are a living miracle and testament to the fortitude of the Russian people, who have a great history and whom many of us admire. And we want that kind of, how should I say, seeding of democracy to be able to thrive. You have survived. You have been under threat of death; and therefore, it certainly is an example of not what we want to have happen, but that we must now fight even harder.

So I want to ask unanimous consent that my statement be submitted into the record –

WICKER: Without objection.

JACKSON LEE: – and just make these points. Thank you.

Russia has not had a free and fair election since March 2000. It shocks the American conscious to grapple with the somber realities that opposition activists like yourself, Mr. Kara-Murza, are routinely assaulted or even murdered, giving rise to a new term, the "sudden Kremlin death syndrome," which I'm going to pursue in questions.

Political prisoner numbers now match those of the late Soviet era, which is shocking. And on March 26th, tens of thousands of people in cities across 11 time zones protested widespread government corruption with more than a thousand arrested.

So this question will go to all three witnesses. And we'll start with Mr. Kara-Murza, but all of you will answer. First, give me your sense of the "sudden Kremlin death syndrome." There may be others that are not as well-known that have mysteriously lost their lives because they dared to oppose the regime – that's under the umbrella of human rights, that you have a right to express your opposition and to live.

The other question would be, your comments on this issue of prisoners, political prisoners without counsel, without being able to see family members. And everyone knows that when America begins to raise the question, someone will point out the high number of people we have incarcerated. I happen to be heavily engaged in reforming our criminal justice system. But I think we can match point for point in a more superior stance of our constitutional privileges and processes that we see every day.

And so I really want to get into the weeds of how this is intertwined, the "sudden Kremlin death syndrome" and the issue of human rights and the incarceration of anyone that may offer themselves as an opponent or just simply want to express their rights for expression that oppose, in particular, Mr. Putin and his administration. And I certainly want to make sure that I said it right, the "sudden Kremlin death syndrome."

Mr. Kara-Murza?

KARA-MURZA: Thank you very much for the questions, Congresswoman. As far as the deaths go, there are about 30 people, who were prominent either in the political opposition or who were independent journalists and who were engaged in anticorruption campaigns and who were whistleblowers, who have lost their lives in one way or another since Vladimir Putin came to power 17 years ago. These were sometimes suspicious suicides or plane crashes or strange and very rare diseases. But in many cases, it was just plain and open assassination, like what happened to the leader of the Russian opposition, Boris Nemtsov, when they put five bullets in his back when he was walking home over the bridge in front of the Kremlin.

And there certainly seems to be a very high mortality rate among the people who oppose Vladimir Putin, a mortality rate that defies any kind of normal statistical model. And the latest case of this was just a couple of days ago when a journalist in St. Petersburg, Nikolai Andrushchenko, who also engaged in anticorruption investigations, died after being beaten up by quote-unquote, "unknown assailants." So, you know, I think there is no more horrible human rights violation than a violation of the right to life. And that right has been violated repeatedly since Mr. Putin came to power. And not only has it been violated, but it has been violated with impunity because not in a single case of those political assassinations were their organizers and masterminds brought to justice.

In some of the cases the lower-level perpetrators were convicted, like in the case of Anna Politkovskaya, who was a journalist for "Novaya Gazeta," who was assassinated almost 11 years

ago. There are alleged perpetrators who are on trial now in the case of the assassination of Boris Nemtsov, but never have the authorities pursued the higher-ups, those who organized those killings and those who masterminded them, not in a single case. So this impunity, needless to say, creates the conditions for these things to continue. And it's very important to pay attention to it and not to let them forget and hush up and sweep under the carpet.

And as far as the political prisoners go, the Memorial Human Rights Centre, which is the most respected human rights organization in Russia today, which monitors the situation with political prisoners, it has a very high, actually, a high standard of defining what political prisoners are. So their estimate, it's actually based on the Council of Europe definition, and so it's pretty conservative. And even by that conservative estimate, there are 115 people in Russian prisons today who are imprisoned on politically motivated charges.

And you can see some of those people on the posters here. And these are opposition activists, these are journalists, these are people who took part in peaceful antigovernment demonstrations. These are people connected with the Yukos case that we mentioned, and many, many, many others. And it is very, very important to raise their cases, to talk about them, including in international fora, because we don't have the law protecting us in Russia. We don't have the rule of law under the current regime in Russia. The only thing that can serve as any kind of protection in these cases is international attention, international public opinion.

And these people are not just imprisoned. They're also very often beaten, tortured. Ildar Dadin, who was an opposition activist, was thankfully released recently after a massive campaign, including an international campaign for his release. He was the first person in Russia to be imprisoned under a new law that was a specially passed law to target people who stage one-man pickets, one-man opposition pickets. So there's one person standing with a, you know, with a poster. And he was given a two-year prison sentence for that. He was released earlier. But while he was imprisoned, he was tortured and he had the courage to talk about it and to pass this information to the outside, so this became known. And the campaign for his release really took off and he was released, so this really does work and it's important to talk about this.

And Ivan Nepomnyashchikh, who is one of the people on this poster, who was imprisoned as part of the Bolotnaya case. This was a big anti-Putin opposition rally in Moscow in May of 2012. And there are people still in prison today for taking part in that rally, including him. He's only 27 years old. He was 22 at the time of the rally. And just a few days ago, he was severely beaten as well in the penal colony where he is held in the Yaroslavl region, not too far from Moscow. And as we know, as we've heard, they're now not even allowing his defenders, his lawyers to go and see him. So it is very, very important to continue to keep these issues and these cases and these specific individuals in the eye of public attention. And it's very important to raise those cases as well during bilateral talks.

My colleagues mentioned the recent visit of the new U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to Moscow. I think it was regrettable that he did not find time to meet with civil society representatives or to talk about human rights. I think it's very important to do so. And there's been a long bipartisan tradition of U.S. government and U.S. administrations and U.S. secretaries of state to meet with civil society representatives and to talk about human rights and

to raise specific issues of political prisoners, before in the Soviet Union and now in Russia. And Carter did it, Reagan did it, Bush did it; it's important to continue to do this.

JACKSON LEE: Thank you.

The other witnesses if you can add a point or two, thank you.

DENBER: That was so comprehensive.

JACKSON LEE: If you can just focus on the human rights, political prisoners –

DENBER: I just want to give a little bit of detail about what it is that some of these other people are actually – accused of

WICKER: Let's do that.

And thank you, Ms. Jackson Lee, for giving us that opening.

We've had these portraits up here the entire hearing. So, in response to Ms. Jackson Lee's question, I think that would be a nice segue for our witnesses.

DENBER: So let's look at Darya Poliudova. She's serving a two-year prison sentence. What do you think someone would have to do to merit a two-year prison sentence? What Darya Poliudova did was she has a page on *Vkontakte*, which is kind of the Russian version of Facebook, and she had three posts that came under scrutiny. One was a comment that she made, a satirical comment on what was happening in Ukraine. I won't get into the details. And she also posted a photograph of herself holding a poster that said, "no war in Ukraine, but revolution in Russia," and another poster that said "we need a Maidan" – which is a reference to the revolt, the public revolt that ousted Ukraine's former president back in 2014 – "we need Maidan in Russia."

And those posts were visible to a very small group, you know, her 35 followers. She had 35 followers. And these were the posts that came under scrutiny. These are the posts that ended up landing her in prison. And she got a two-year prison term. It's absurd.

Maybe I'll just talk about – you already talked about Dmitry Buchenkov. So Dmitry Buchenkov is accused of, I think, assaulting a police officer during the 2012 public protests that were just on the eve of Vladimir Putin's inauguration when he returned to the presidency. This is a case that the government has milked as much as it possibly can. It's called the Bolotnaya case because the protests happened on a place called Bolotnaya Square. It started out peacefully, police interfered and there were some scuffles between a very small number of the protesters and police. And as a result, more than a dozen people served prison terms, some of them quite long prison terms. And the government keeps, even though this happened in 2012, the government continues to pursue people who they accuse of being involved in violence against police during the protests. And Dmitry Buchenkov is one of them.

He was arrested last year. And the thing is that he claims he wasn't even there. He has alibis testifying to the fact that he wasn't in Moscow at the time. If you look at his photographs and the photographs of the person the police are pursuing, because he, you know, allegedly beat a cop, you can see that these are not the same, it's not the same person.

But nonetheless, he's spent actually more than a year in pre-trial custody and only a month ago and only after a really dedicated battle by Memorial and others did they finally release him to house arrest. So that's Dmitry Buchenkov.

Oleg Sentsov, who was already mentioned, and maybe I'll only mention him briefly now because there is going to be a briefing devoted to his case tomorrow. I really encourage people to go, to attend. Oleg Sentsov last night was honored by the PEN America Center at their annual gala. Oleg Sentsov is a filmmaker. He's actually a Ukrainian, he's a Ukrainian citizen, who lived in Crimea until he was arrested. And he was arrested together with a colleague, Mr. Kolchenko. The Russian government has accused him of terrorism. The thing is that at the time when the little green men were creating the annexation of Crimea and shortly thereafter there were a couple of arson attempts on a couple of buildings in Crimea, and one of them was the building where Russia's main political party, Yedinaya Rossiya, United Russia, had its headquarters. There was an arson attempt. No one was hurt.

Kolchenko is accused of carrying out these arson attempts. And because he's friends with Sentsov and because Sentsov spoke out a lot against the occupation of Crimea and actually, I think, tried to help Ukrainian soldiers at a time when things were very tense during the annexation, during the actual seizure of Crimea, the government really went after Sentsov. And they've sentenced him to 20 years in prison on charges of terrorism, for being in league together with Kolchenko in these arson attempts. There's no evidence against Sentsov whatsoever.

And, you know, you just wonder what it is that the Russian government might be waiting for. What do they expect? Do they really expect to hold him for 20 years? Are they going to release him if there is enough pressure, like they released Nadiya Savchenko last year, another Ukrainian citizen who was a member of the Ukrainian armed forces and was arrested on wrongful charges.

So I think it's important to pay – I don't want to go through every single one of these people, but I did want to highlight those cases. There are other cases like them in each one of the categories that we mentioned. And I think that the key point is why it is that there can be "sudden Kremlin death syndrome," why it is that there can be, you know, people who are prosecuted because of political motives. How can that happen? It can happen because there's impunity and it can happen because the courts are not independent. It can happen because the government manipulates justice. And precisely because these cases are politically motivated, it means that there needs to be political pressure in order to end the injustice.

WICKER: Well, thank you.

Who mentioned public diplomacy? Who mentioned RFE and RL? Let me just ask both you, Ms. Denber, and you, Dr. Calingaert, to comment about the disparity in terms of the

effectiveness and quality of propaganda coming from the Putin side of the equation and I guess what we would like to call the public diplomacy or information coming from our side.

Is it a fair fight at all? And what should the United States be doing in that regard? Who would like to go first?

Dr. Calingaert.

CALINGAERT: Yes. You know, the scale of investment in Russian propaganda is really impressive. And also, the sophistication of it. And I will tell you, when I was teaching at Georgetown, I'd have my class look at clips from RT and basically have to answer the question, what is wrong with this picture? And think of it, even graduate students at one of the top universities would really have to think hard about how their view of a certain issue is being manipulated and sometimes would even miss key details. I mean, it really is that sophisticated.

I think, in some ways, by its nature it's an uneven fight. I mean, what we are trying to encourage is fact-based news, you know, a somber view of what's happening in the world, balance, and, you know, conspiracy theories are just more entertaining. I mean, it often comes down to that. But I think at the very least, we need to try to – I'm not sure if we could ever match the scale of investment that we give to RFE or RL and VOA and others compared to RT and Sputnik. But I think we can do and need to do a lot better in, you know, investing more and just trying to operate on the same scale.

I also think that the U.S. foreign broadcasting is only part of the answer. I mean, there is some very high-quality Russian media, like Meduza, based outside of the country. And I think they have quite extensive reach. And, you know, it's important that their independence be maintained and their credibility. But if there are ways that we can encourage more of that, you know, I think there is an appetite for real investigation, investigative reporting, coverage of anticorruption issues, news that Russian citizens can use that speaks to, the problems in their daily lives, that that will, over time, reduce the appeal of, the sensationalism, the conspiracy theories and the mind-bending that Russian propaganda is trying to carry out.

WICKER: Ms. Denber.

DENBER: I would agree with everything Dr. Calingaert just said. I would also say that I think that what the Kremlin broadcast media tries to do and particularly the Kremlin foreign broadcasting, like RT and Sputnik, what they're trying to do is undermine the very notion that there can be or should be objectivity in media reporting. So their assumption and some of their leaders have actually said this is that, oh, come on, there really is no objectivity, you know, and look at these mistakes that all of these outlets make, and so they're fake news.

So, of course, every reporter might come to a story with a bias, but there's a great difference between the things that you do to overcome that bias on the one hand, and on the other hand the complete perversion of objectivity in media reporting that we see in some of the Kremlin broadcast institutions.

So they are trying to exhaust the reader and the viewer, to sort of shower you with so many –

WICKER: Bombard the viewer.

DENBER: Exactly, to bombard the reader, to dull your senses, to sort of put you into a haze where you say, yeah, yeah, that's all, it's just too hard to figure out so I'm not even going to bother to try and, to make the viewer sort of disengage from even the search or the hunger for the truth.

I think it's doesn't work. I think that it fails. I think that after a while people distrust those outlets just as much as they might have distrusted at some point other outlets. And I think the answer is to continue supporting outlets like Radio Liberty and Voice of America, but the answer is also to ensure that they maintain a high level of quality journalism. There needs to be a fair fight, but I think that outlets like Radio Liberty need to keep to reporting facts, need to keep to looking at all sides of the story. They should not feel that they can sink to the level of what has become fake news.

WICKER: But, Mr. Kara-Murza, as a resident of Russia, it's actually the mainstream media, the everyday programming, is it not, that contains the exact message that the Putin regime wishes to be disseminated.

KARA-MURZA: Absolutely, Mr. Chairman. And this has been going on for years. And this has been going on aggressively. In fact, the first thing – the first thing – Mr. Putin did when he came to power back in the early 2000s was to silence the voices of independent television. It was in his first three years in power he shut down or took over three nationwide independent television networks. And now, all the state media in Russia are propaganda outlets for the government and nothing else who will tell you that everything the authorities do is perfect and who will tell you that those who oppose Mr. Putin are traitors, enemies and foreign agents.

WICKER: And the regular programming, the regular entertainment comes right along with that very broadcast.

KARA-MURZA: Of course, it's intermixed, so you'd watch movies, you know, you'd watch a TV series, many of which are done with very high quality and there's certainly no shortage of investments going into state media, domestic state media. And then, of course, that would be intermixed with those, quote-unquote, "news messages" and so-called discussion programs or you would never really get any differing points of view. You would just get bombarded, to use the term that you used, with the propaganda messages, you know.

And propaganda, sometimes people dismiss it as just something of second-tier importance. But propaganda can be very powerful. Propaganda can kill, as we discussed recently.

WICKER: It works.

KARA-MURZA: Absolutely. And if I could just say a couple of words on the foreign broadcasting aspect, I think the only effective way to counter the lies and the propaganda is with objective information. And for now, I don't think there's a level playing field in terms of this foreign broadcasting. I'm quoting these figures from memory, but I think if I'm correct, the White House budget request for both RFE, RL and Voice of America services in the Russian language for the current fiscal year is 15 million U.S. dollars. The annual budget of RT is 300 million U.S. dollars, so it's a factor of 20. So I think it's very important to maintain something at least close to a level playing field here.

WICKER: Well, let me then get back to the idea of an expanded Magnitsky list. Do any of you have specific suggestions, either in open testimony today or for the record, about names that should be added?

KARA-MURZA: Can I start? There are now 44 people sanctioned on the U.S. Magnitsky list. And I have to say that in the early years since the law was passed, the administration was very timid in implementing it in terms of putting the actual names on the list. And the highest-profile people were put on this list just this year, in January of this year, in the last two weeks of the former administration when they put in, for example, Andrei Lugovoi, who is a member of the Russian parliament, who was found by a British public inquiry to have been responsible for the murder of Alexander Litvinenko in London in 2006.

And they also put, as we discussed earlier in this hearing, they put General Alexander Bastrykin, who is a top law enforcement officer in the Putin regime, the guy who's responsible for all these politically motivated prosecutions, who is responsible for the Yukos case, who once personally took a leading independent journalist to a forest near Moscow and said, "if you continue with your investigations I'm going to kill you, I'm going to bury you here and, by the way, I'm going to be in charge of the investigation, ha, ha." So that person now finally is on the Magnitsky list and he's the most high-profile Putin official to be there.

But, of course, there are many, many more who deserve to be put on that list. Of course, there is a complex and fundamental process that accompanies the way these people are screened before being put on a list. But if you're asking for specific suggestions, well, certainly Ramzan Kadyrov was mentioned several times during this hearing. In the various aspects of human rights abuses that he's been involved in, he certainly belongs. I mean, we've heard, we've seen reports in the U.S. media, all the leaks, all the sources saying that he is on the classified section. Of course, there is no way we could know that, whether that's true or not. Even if he is, I think that the main purpose of this law, one of the main purposes of the law is public naming and shaming of these human rights abusers.

WICKER: This is Mr. Putin's man in Chechnya.

KARA-MURZA: He's Vladimir Putin's man in Chechnya and he's responsible for the countless human rights abuses there. I mean, even by the standards of the Putin regime, Chechnya is a particular black hole when it comes to human rights. They have torture, they have killings, they have disappearances. Opponents and enemies of Mr. Kadyrov have ended up dead

not just in Chechnya, but in Moscow and Dubai and in Vienna, Austria. So that guy certainly does merit belonging to the Magnitsky list.

There are many others. Yury Chaika is another person that comes to mind, the current prosecutor general, who is also responsible for countless politically motivated prosecutions.

WICKER: It is a fact that our ambassador to the United Nations has specifically spoken out against these violations in Chechnya and the attacks. Is that correct, Mr. Kara-Murza?

KARA-MURZA: Yes, you are right.

WICKER: And also, I would note that Senators Rubio and Cardin have been particularly outspoken in this regard.

There's going to be a vote soon on the Senate floor.

Mr. Cohen, do you have other questions?

COHEN: Just one, thank you.

I was in Russia and we visited a couple of times, but one time we had Steven Seagal join our CODEL. And he seemed to have a fascination with the Chechen muscle man. He also, I think, wanted to sell some Kalashnikov rifles over here. What is his status and how close is he to Putin and to Ramzan?

KARA-MURZA: How close is Ramzan to Putin?

COHEN: No, to Steven Seagal. And is he still – does he have dual citizenship now?

KARA-MURZA: No, Gérard Depardieu does, the French actor, he is a dual citizen. He was given a Russian passport.

COHEN: Yeah, I knew he did, but Seagal, see, he was telling us that he had some type of Mongolian heritage and he claimed to be –

KARA-MURZA: I'm afraid I have to excuse myself, I'm not a very big expert on Steven Seagal, but we certainly have seen him paraded on Russian state media sitting with Mr. Putin, at a stadium during a sports event. He certainly does come to Russia a lot and goes to meet with all these officials. But frankly, I hope I'm not offending anyone, I don't think he's taken too seriously by most people in Russia.

COHEN: Thank you. That's good news. (Laughter.)

WICKER: Well, we could go on and on. Let me say this about Boris Nemtsov. I hope the House and Senate can get this legislation through to name an important open area for Mr. Nemtsov here in the United States. I was a member of a delegation led by Representative Curt

Weldon back in 1998. Steny Hoyer, the current minority leader of the House of Representatives, was the ranking Democrat on this relatively large, bipartisan delegation to Moscow. And we had the opportunity to meet with this young, energetic, bright deputy prime minister serving under Prime Minister Chernomyrdin and President Yeltsin. And I'll tell you, he was no apologist for the West. He was giving us the Russian point of view in every respect, up to and including urging the United States not to support NATO expansion. He felt that it would be bad for the status quo, bad for his own country and recommended it as being bad for the West. And I disagreed with him and I think I'd probably still disagree with him.

But the point is, this was a loyal Russian official, a bright, young, up-and-comer that had the opportunity to be deputy prime minister for a time. And he loved his country and he wanted his country to be free and open and the citizens there to be free. That was the difference. And when it became obvious in the Duma that President Putin intended to move basically toward one-party authoritarianism, Boris Nemtsov called it what he saw it, a coming dictatorship. And that was the beginning of Boris Nemtsov's fall out of favor.

And I just have to say that it is the very least we could do to honor this brave individual who spoke out and led those oppressed dissidents in Russia. And so I hope we can double our efforts, Representative Cohen, to get this legislation passed, to have the Boris Nemtsov Plaza.

I would also, before we adjourn, ask unanimous consent that we include in the record of this hearing the photographs and one-paragraph descriptions of the individuals (Russian prisoners) who are on display here. And without objection, that is so ordered.

And at this point, if there's nothing else, this hearing will stand adjourned with the thanks of the chair and in honor of Orest here. (Applause.)

[Whereupon, at 11:12 a.m., the hearing ended.]