



Mikhail Khodorkovsky asks MEPs to back Russia's opposition

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Russia's "neo-totalitarian regime" leaves open no legitimate means for a "sober-minded" and "pro-European" opposition to come to power. So the opposition needs strong support from the EU, which must understand that Russia does not equal Putin, Russian businessman and philanthropist Mikhail Khodorkovsky told Foreign Affairs Committee MEPs on Tuesday. MEPs asked him to say how they could help the cause of democracy in Russia and to explain his controversial views on developments in Ukraine.

The EU approach to Russia needs to be "intelligent, honest and differentiated", Mr Khodorkovsky suggested in his address to MEPs. It should take a "realistic view" of Russia, rather than "painting it black and white" and understand that the Russian administration has many "sober-minded", rational people who are currently "forced to submit to a will of a criminally corrupt minority".

Mr Khodorkovsky also called on the EU to "stop applying double standards to Russia" by "forgiving Russia what you would not forgive anyone else". He also called on it to "differentiate" EU sanctions, so as to prevent them hitting the whole economy and "ordinary citizens".

In the debate, MEPs asked Mr Khodorkovsky how the European Parliament could make a real contribution to the cause of democracy in Russia and reach civil society and citizens, given that Russian public opinion is "brainwashed" by Kremlin-controlled media and curbs on the internet.

Finally, Mr Khodorkovsky was asked to elaborate on his view that the EU should "look for a compromise with Kremlin to avoid global war", and also, given his stated ambition to become Russia's next President, to explain his publicly stated view that Crimea should not be returned to Ukraine.

"There is no doubt that annexation of Crimea was illegal, but at the same time, the majority of Russian citizens were in favour of it. We have to balance respect for international law with the will of Russian people", replied Mr Khodorkovsky.

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