

MEPs call for new EU strategy to promote democracy in Russia

- EU must distinguish between the Russian government and the Russian people
- Step up work with partner countries and civil society to strengthen pro-democracy tendencies in Russia
- Impose sanctions when necessary, counteract flow of dirty money and support human rights activists

Parliament says the EU must push back against aggressive policies while laying the groundwork for cooperation with a future democratic Russia.

Assessing the state of EU-Russia relations, the European Parliament makes clear that it distinguishes between the Russian people and President Vladimir Putin's regime. The latter is, Parliament says, a "stagnating authoritarian kleptocracy led by a president-for-life surrounded by a circle of oligarchs".

MEPs stress, however, that a democratic future for Russia is possible and that the Council must adopt an EU strategy for this scenario, encompassing incentives and conditions to strengthen domestic democratic tendencies.

The text was approved by 494 votes in favour, 103 against with 72 abstentions.

Work with like-minded partners to strengthen democracy

Parliament says the EU must establish an alliance with the U.S. and other like-minded partners to counterbalance the efforts of Russia and China to weaken democracy worldwide and destabilise the European political order. It should foresee sanctions, policies to counter illicit financial flows, and support for human rights activists.

Support to Russia's' neighbouring countries

On Russia's aggression and influence over the EU's eastern neighbourhood, the EU must continue to support so-called "Eastern Partnership" countries such as Ukraine or Georgia, and to promote European reforms and fundamental freedoms in the region. These efforts should

also serve to encourage Russian support for democratic reforms.

Reduce the EU's energy dependency on Russia, fighting "dirty money" at home

The text further states that the EU needs to cut its dependency on Russian gas, oil and other raw materials, at least while President Putin is in power. The European Green Deal and the boosting of new resources will play a crucial geopolitical role in achieving this.

MEPs want the EU to build its capacity to expose and stop the flows of dirty money from Russia, as well as to expose the resources and financial assets that regime-linked autocrats and oligarchs have hidden in EU member states.

Worries ahead of the 2021 parliamentary elections in Russia

Members conclude by demanding the EU be prepared to withhold recognition of the Russian parliament if the 2021 parliamentary elections in September are conducted in violation of democratic principles and international law.

Quote

"Russia can be a democracy and defending 'Democracy First' in EU relations with Russia is our first task. The EU and its institutions have to work on the assumption that change is possible in Russia. It also needs more courage in taking a strong stance vis-a-vis the Kremlin regime when it comes to defending human rights; this is what strategic engagement with the Russian people is all about. It is about ending domestic repression, returning the choice to the people, and freeing all political prisoners", said rapporteur [Andrius Kubilius](#) (EPP, Lithuania) after the vote.

"In addition, if this week's parliamentary elections in Russia are recognised as fraudulent, the EU should not recognise the Russian Duma and should ask for the country to be suspended from international parliamentary assemblies, including the one of the Council of Europe. The Kremlin's continuous repression of all opposition candidates, free media and NGOs undermines the legitimacy and fairness of these elections. The Russian people must have the right to choose and their choices must be honoured, as in any other democratic country", he added.

Further information

[The adopted text will be available here \(15.09.2021\)](#)

[Video recording of the debate \(14.09.2021\)](#)

[Procedure file](#)

[Direction of EU-Russia political relations in AFET committee: statement by Andrius KUBILIUS \(EPP, LT\), rapporteur](#)

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