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The murder of Alexei Navalny and the need for EU action in support of political prisoners and oppressed civil society in Russia

European Parliament resolution of 29 February 2024 on the murder of Alexei Navalny and the need for EU action in support of political prisoners and oppressed civil society in Russia (2024/2579(RSP))

(C/2024/6744)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to its previous resolutions on Russia, in particular those concerning Alexei Navalny and the human rights situation in the country,

— having regard to the statement of its Conference of Presidents of 21 February 2024,

— having regard to the statement by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on behalf of the European Union of 19 February 2024 on the death of Alexei Navalny,

— having regard to the joint statement by the Commission President and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 16 February 2024 on the death of Alexei Navalny,

— having regard to the constitution of the Russian Federation and to the international human rights obligations to which Russia has committed itself,

— having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,

— having regard to the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Mariana Katzarova, of 15 September 2023 entitled 'Situation of human rights in the Russian Federation',

— having regard to the statement by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation of 22 February 2024,

— having regard to the report by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights of 11 July 2023 entitled 'Protecting Human Rights Defenders at Risk: EU entry, stay and support',

— having regard to Rule 132(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas Alexei Navalny, a prominent Russian political figure and the 2021 laureate of the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, perished in a Siberian penal colony north of the Arctic Circle while serving a unfounded, politically motivated prison sentence; whereas the killing of Alexei Navalny is yet another sign of the increasing and systematic repression in Russia; whereas the full responsibility for his death lies with the Russian state, in particular its president, Vladimir Putin, who should be held accountable;

B. whereas the Russian authorities have not yet provided information about the exact causes and circumstances of his death, and his family was only allowed to recover his body for a medical investigation and funeral on 24 February 2024; whereas no independent autopsy or investigation into the cause of death has been conducted;

C. whereas Alexei Navalny had been in detention since 17 January 2021, the date on which he returned to Russia following medical rehabilitation after an attempted state-sponsored assassination using the internationally banned nerve agent Novichok; whereas he had previously been detained and arrested many times and had been sentenced, on fabricated and politically motivated grounds, to long prison terms in evident attempts to stop his political activities and anti-corruption campaigns; whereas he had been subjected to psychological pressure, arbitrary punishment, severe ill treatment and torture during his imprisonment in several notorious prisons and penal colonies; whereas Alexei Navalny's health had deteriorated due to mistreatment and a lack of proper medical care;

D. whereas Alexei Navalny embodied the struggle for freedom and democracy, with his dream of a 'beautiful Russia of the future'; whereas the continuous evolution of his views on Russian politics and Russia's role in the world was noted with respect; whereas through his work, Navalny exposed the illegalities and corruption at the heart of the Russian government system; whereas Navalny tirelessly and courageously continued his fight from prison, illustrating his commitment to the principles of democracy and justice; whereas Navalny's lawyers are being harassed and three of them have been in pre-trial custody since October 2023;

E. whereas there are reports of Russian citizens paying tribute to Alexei Navalny in cities and towns across Russia, many of whom are being detained for these peaceful actions and some of whom are being subjected to targeted military draft notices; whereas the EU Ambassador to Russia, Roland Galharague, and many of his counterparts from the Member States, the UK and the US were among those who honoured Alexei Navalny's memory at the Solovetsky Stone in Moscow;

F. whereas Russia's political system is controlled by a consolidated authoritarian regime that engages in rampant corruption; whereas it uses rigged elections to provide a semblance of democracy and concentrates all power in the hands of Vladimir Putin; whereas the government suppresses any dissent with the support of loyalist security forces, a subservient judiciary, a controlled media environment and a legislature consisting of a ruling party and pliable opposition parties;

G. whereas the death of Alexei Navalny is not an isolated incident, but the culmination of the Kremlin regime's pattern of violence, suppression of dissent and intimidation against political opponents and civil society activists; whereas many democratic rights and civic freedoms guaranteed by the Russian constitution are non-existent in practice; whereas the Russian Federation continuously breaches international law and commitments;

H. whereas the crackdown on independent civil society in Russia, targeting non-governmental organisations, human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, historians, women's rights, LGBTIQ+ persons' rights, environmental activists and activists for ethnic and cultural minorities, has had a devastating effect on the lives and freedoms of people belonging to minorities, LGBTIQ+ persons, women, and all people who do not adhere to the prevailing norms or who criticise the Russian regime and its policies; whereas an active civil society and a free media are crucial for ensuring democratic and open societies and safeguarding human rights;

I. whereas Putin's regime has decimated a generation of Russian human rights organisations, including Memorial and the Moscow Helsinki Group; whereas the EU hosts a variety of Russian dissidents and representatives of the media and civil society who were forced to leave Russia as their criticism of the government put them at great risk of retaliation from the authorities;

J. whereas many opposition actors remain in Russia and continue to fight for democracy, the rule of law and human rights from within Russia, at great personal risk; whereas representatives of the opposition are systematically subjected to verbal attacks, ad hominem campaigns and dehumanisation by the government or by pro-government media; whereas the human rights group Memorial has designated over 600 people as political prisoners in Russia;

K. whereas since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Russian authorities have increased their repression of political opposition, the media and civil society, curtailing rights and individual liberties even further to stifle domestic dissent, including by criminalising any expression of anti-war sentiment; whereas anti-war candidates have been prevented from standing in the forthcoming 2024 presidential elections in Russia;

L. whereas there is no longer any safe space for civic action or political opposition within Russia, according to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation;

M. whereas the Russian regime's severe curtailment of human rights is in clear contravention of the nation's own constitution and legal framework, as well as a violation of Russia's international obligations;

N. whereas a transparent, democratic, free and fair political competition process is not compatible with the political repressions that have been carried out in the Russian Federation for many years, culminating in the murder of a major leader of the Russian opposition, Alexei Navalny;

1. Strongly condemns the murder of Alexei Navalny; expresses its wholehearted condolences to his family, associates and colleagues, and to his countless supporters across Russia; expresses its full support to Yulia Navalnaya in her determination to continue the work started by Alexei Navalny with her support, and to the Anti-Corruption Foundation founded by Navalny, which is continuing its work under the new circumstances;

2. Pays its respects to Alexei Navalny as a political leader and prominent anti-corruption politician who, thanks to his bravery, charisma and capacity to mobilise people, achieved what others had tried but few had managed, namely to empower people by making them believe in their ability to improve their lives, change society and influence politics;

3. Recalls his contributions to developing civic consciousness through genuine public debates, political campaigns, street protests and innovative communication, which led to him being viewed by many as representing a vision of another Russia where power would not be held captive by a kleptocratic regime protected by subservient law enforcement agents, but would be held by and serve the people;

4. Calls on the Russian authorities to allow Alexei Navalny's body to be buried according to his family's wishes and not to obstruct his family's efforts to organise a dignified funeral ceremony; demands an independent and transparent international investigation into the exact circumstances of Alexei Navalny's death and into those responsible, in order to uncover the truth, ensure accountability and deliver justice; calls for the EU and its Member States to assume a leading role in calling for and supporting this investigation;

5. Deplores and condemns the disinformation campaigns orchestrated by the Kremlin-controlled media that have sought to smear Alexei Navalny's legacy and dignity both prior to and following his death, as well as that of his wife, family and close collaborators;

6. Calls on the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Member States to hold the Russian political leadership and authorities to account, in close coordination with EU partners; calls on the Council to effectively use the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime and implement targeted measures against those involved in and responsible for the politically motivated trials against Alexei Navalny, his sentencing, his imprisonment and his detention conditions, including the prosecutors and judges, prison staff and those responsible for his premature death; welcomes the recent adoption of sanctions by the US following Navalny's death and invites the EU to coordinate its sanctions with international partners;

7. Underlines that the Russian Government and Vladimir Putin personally bear criminal and political responsibility for the death of their most prominent opponent, Alexei Navalny, and that under such circumstances it is justifiable to raise the question of Vladimir Putin's legitimacy in public and international discourse;

8. Expresses its solidarity with all those in Russia and beyond who, despite the purposefully brutal repression and the severe personal consequences they face, still find the courage to speak the truth, uphold human values and fight for a democratic and peaceful future for Russia; considers that the people of Russia cannot be confused with the warmongering, autocratic and kleptocratic Kremlin regime;

9. Denounces the escalation of human rights violations by the Russian regime and condemns the ongoing crackdown on government critics, human rights defenders, anti-war and environmental activists, leaders of national minorities, indigenous activists, independent journalists and historians, as well as the increased repression of LGBTIQ+ communities; calls on the UN Human Rights Council to conduct an immediate investigation into the acts of inhuman imprisonment, torture and murder of political opponents; underlines that the killing of Alexei Navalny serves as a stark reminder of the urgent need to address the Russian regime's repressive policies and to take a decisive stand against such actions;

10. Calls on the Russian authorities to drop all arbitrary charges and to immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners and arbitrarily detained persons, including but not limited to Vladimir Kara-Murza, Yuri Dmitriev, Ilya Yashin, Alexei Gorinov, Lilia Chanysheva, Ksenia Fadeeva, Vadim Ostanin, Daniel Kholodny, Vadim Kobzev, Igor Sergunin, Alexei Lipster, Viktoria Petrova, Maria Ponomarenko, Alexandra Skochilenko, Svetlana Petriychuk, Evgenia Berkovich, Dmitry Ivanov, Ioann Kurmoyarov, Igor Baryshnikov, Dmitry Talantov, Alexei Moskalev, Oleg Orlov, Boris Kagarlitsky and Ivan Safronov;

11. Urges the Russian authorities to immediately end the use of torture, other ill treatment and arbitrary disciplinary measures against all detainees and to urgently reform prisoners' detention conditions so that these comply with Russia's obligations under international human rights law, in particular regarding prisoners' access to doctors of their choice, appropriate medical treatment, lawyers, and communication with their families;

12. Calls on the Member States to step up their efforts to find feasible ways of freeing the worst-affected prisoners, in particular political prisoners who are ill or have been tortured, including the option of possible exchanges of imprisoned individuals; calls on the Council to create a special role of envoy for political prisoners and hostages in Russia in order to coordinate such efforts, in cooperation with international partners, and to serve as a point of contact for affected families and associates;

13. Calls on the Russian authorities to immediately release the hundreds of people who have been detained in recent weeks for peacefully paying tribute to the memory of Alexei Navalny; condemns the Russian authorities' cruel practice of targeting political protesters by drafting them to serve in the war;

14. Calls on the Russian authorities to repeal their oppressive legislation that contravenes the Russian constitution and the country's international commitments, such as the laws on censoring truthful information about Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and on so-called 'foreign agents' and 'undesirable organisations';

15. Calls on the Member States to introduce extensive EU restrictive measures against individuals involved in the political persecution and fabrication of cases against Russian civil society representatives and activists, and to consider adding further persons identified by Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation to the sanctions list as regime enablers who contribute to waging and financing the war of aggression against Ukraine and to perpetrating domestic repression in support of the regime's survival; insists on greater transparency in the process of applying and lifting EU restrictive measures;

16. Calls on the EU Delegation and Member States' missions in Russia to continue monitoring and attending the trials of individuals facing politically motivated prosecution;

17. Calls for the EU and the Member States to continue to show their unfailing solidarity with and to actively support independent Russian civil society and the democratic opposition, who are working to transform Russia into an open society where political rights, fundamental freedoms and human rights are respected, thereby honouring the enduring legacy of Alexei Navalny; calls for the EU to support the establishment of a network of human rights defenders to monitor and report on human rights violations;

18. Urges the Member States to expand and further facilitate the programme for humanitarian visas for Russian human rights defenders, pro-democracy activists and independent journalists at risk of political persecution;

19. Reiterates its call for an EU-wide multi-entry visa scheme for human rights defenders, civil society activists and politically persecuted individuals, for the existing legal flexibility to be used and for gaps in legislation to be addressed, as proposed by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in its 2023 report entitled 'Protecting Human Rights Defenders at Risk: EU entry, stay and support'; invites the EU institutions to prepare measures to cover the eventuality of Russia ceasing to issue passports at its consulates, including the recognition of de facto statelessness, and to issue travel documents in order to allow the democratic opposition, civil society activists and otherwise politically persecuted persons to relocate to EU Member States, and, where relevant, continue their work while in exile;

20. Calls on the Member States to avoid the unjustified and disproportionate application of restrictive measures on individuals seeking refuge from and fighting against the current Russian Government;

21. Calls for the simplification of processes for Russian dissidents in the EU to register organisations and entities, open bank accounts and carry out other administrative tasks in order to allow them to continue their work in exile;

22. Deplores the Russian regime's imperialist policies and condemns, in the strongest possible terms, Russia's continued war of aggression against Ukraine; reiterates that the EU, its Member States and like-minded partners around the world must continue their political, economic, financial and military support for Ukraine, including support to civil society and long-term support for the reconstruction of Ukraine, as this is the best response to the oppressive and aggressive practices currently perpetrated by the Kremlin regime; is convinced that Ukraine's decisive victory may lead to genuine changes in the system in the Russian Federation, in particular deimperialisation, decolonialisation and refederalisation, all of which are necessary conditions for the establishment of democracy in Russia;

23. Calls on the Commission to use the multilateral platforms of which Russia is a member to continue condemning human rights violations in Russia and Russia's crime of aggression against Ukraine, to further support the documentation of human rights violations in Russia, and to support turning the examination by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights of the human rights situation in the Russian Federation into a fully independent investigative mechanism;

24. Expresses support for the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Mariana Katzarova, and calls on the Member States to ensure that the UN Human Rights Council extends her mandate again in 2024;

25. Calls on the Commission, and in particular the European External Action Service, to develop a proactive, long-term strategic policy towards Russia that effectively responds to the reality of EU-Russia relations today, the human rights situation in Russia and the need to support Russian civil society and opposition representatives in exile;

26. Commits to continuously addressing the Russian regime's violations of its constitution and of international law, including the elections of 17 March 2024, given that these elections are expected to be held in the occupied territories of Ukraine, in a context of increased suppression of political pluralism and the media;

27. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Russian authorities, and to ensure that it is made available in the Russian language.