

Sergei Magnitsky: independent investigation into death of lawyer slams Russia

An independent investigation into the treatment of a Russian lawyer who died in jail after accusing officials of corruption and theft has slammed the Moscow legal and prison authorities.

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In a 20-page report into the death of **Sergei Magnitsky** that further damages **Russia's** reputation for the rule of law, the Moscow Public Oversight Commission (MPOC), a non governmental organisation mandated to monitor human rights in Moscow detention facilities, said "psychological and physical pressure was exerted upon him".

Mr Magnitsky, who was working with hedge fund Hermitage Capital Management to expose an alleged \$230m (£143m) fraud, claimed in testimony before he died that officials were trying to coerce him into giving false evidence implicating himself and Bill Browder, the US founder of Hermitage. The MPOC raised similar concerns in the report: "The circumstances that have lead to the death of Magnitsky cannot be viewed separately from the course of the investigation of the criminal case.

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"Of particular concern are two facts. First, Magnitsky made a statement about the large-scale fraud involving theft of state money by high-ranking officials of the Russian Interior Ministry. He gave a detailed description of the fraudulent scheme and named names. Second, the one year in pretrial detention was due to expire. The investigators did not have sufficient evidence to prove his guilt."

Russia has attempted to draw a line under the incident by sacking 20 senior prison officials and launching an official investigation. The case has been raised by **Gordon Brown**, who called for a "full and transparent investigation".

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