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Berlin Exhibit Explores Magnitsky Case

By **Emilie Trice** November 28, 2011 6:00 am

A permanent exhibition at the Checkpoint Charlie Museum (Friedrichstrasse 43-45; mauermuseum.de) in Berlin exposes a modern-day saga of governmental corruption, coercion and torture. The Sergei Magnitsky case revealed egregious abuses of power that continue to plague Putin's Russia and which ultimately led to the tragic demise of the 37-year-old tax attorney Magnitsky, while he was held captive in a maximum security Russian prison.

His crime? Uncovering a vast conspiracy that sought to rob the Russian state and its citizens of millions of dollars in fraudulent tax refunds, allegedly executed by police officers and governmental officials.

The exhibition venue, at the historic former border between the American and Russian sectors, memorializes the Soviet Union's innocent citizens who suffered fates similar to that of Magnitsky while behind the Iron Curtain. The real tragedy is that such an injustice could occur now, more than two decades after communism's collapse.

William Browder, the chief executive of Hermitage Capital, and once the single largest foreign investor in Russia during its early stages of privatization, first hired Magnitsky to investigate seemingly random police raids on three of his companies. Having pieced together the motives behind these raids, as well as the theft of official company documentation by police and subsequent transfer of company ownership, from Hermitage to "a convicted murderer" in the words of Browder, Magnitsky presented his findings in a sworn testimony to the Russian intelligence community. Shortly thereafter, he was arrested and incarcerated, beaten and denied medical

attention for an illness that, exasperated by the horrific conditions of his detention, would ultimately kill him.

The exhibition features numerous chilling letters written during Magnitsky's time in police custody. "In the 358 days Sergei spent in detention before he died, he wrote nearly 450 complaints to the authorities about the injustice he was being subjected to," Browder wrote. "He described in granular detail how he was tortured, who did it, and how they retaliated from his previous complaints. The letters read like a modern day Gulag Archipelago, making the Russian prison system, in 2009, look exactly like the Stalin Gulags of 1937."

In honoring the memory of a young man whose refusal to compromise his integrity essentially resulted in his indirect execution, the Sergei Magnitsky exhibition serves as a poignant reminder that, especially in these uncertain times, civil liberty should never be taken for granted.

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