



EDWARD M^cMILLAN-SCOTT
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT VICE-PRESIDENT
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MOSCOW: Liberals sense Arab Spring in Russia

As the Arab Spring turns to summer, Europe's leading pro-democracy activists also focus on Russia, where key elections are to be held soon.

Mikhail Kasyanov, leader of the liberal People's Freedom Party, said this week that the Russian people were fully aware of the dire state of democracy in Europe's largest country and watched with some envy the situation in Egypt and Tunisia. His party is still awaiting formal registration.

Guy Verhofstadt, leader of the liberal group in the European Parliament and Edward McMillan-Scott (LibDem, UK) the parliament's Vice-President for Democracy and Human Rights are speaking alongside Kasyanov and other key reformists at a Moscow conference "Russia's European Way" on Thursday [June 16] organised by the European liberal party.

Verhofstadt and McMillan-Scott have been in Cairo twice since the fall of Mubarak to champion the secular liberal El Ghad (The Future) party:

"The rise of democracy in the Arab world is being watched around the world, from Russia to China and the remaining dictatorships. There is an existential change under way, to the benefit of mankind" said McMillan-Scott, founder of the EU's €160 million Democracy and Human Rights Initiative, which sponsors pro-democracy activities worldwide.

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