

# UKRAINIAN PRISONERS OF THE KREMLIN



## INVISIBLE VICTIMS OF RUSSIA'S UNDECLARED WAR

In 2014, in response to the Euromaidan revolution, Russia occupied Crimea and launched a covert war against Ukraine, a move which was condemned by the majority of world countries and punished with sanctions by the EU, USA, and many others. Often called a hybrid war, it entails the usage of non-military means to achieve a military goal: the subjugation of Ukraine. At least **70 Ukrainian citizens** are now hostages of this war and are *de facto* political prisoners, according to Ukrainian human rights activists. Only 10 have come back home.

They come from very different walks of life and had very different convictions, professions, and nationalities. Among them are journalists, activists, farmers, miners, directors, teachers and students. Most of them are proactive in public and political life and actively voice their position; some just happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time.

The one thing they all have in common is being prosecuted on fabricated charges to crush dissent and/or drive up hatred against Ukraine, serving Russian propaganda narratives, which are a primary component of its hybrid war.



# UKRAINIAN PRISONERS OF THE KREMLIN: THE CASES

## ACCUSED OF TERRORISM AND EXTREMISM

*The Investigation Committee and the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation prosecute the "Kremlin prisoners" by charging them falsely for common criminal offences and invoking so-called anti-extremist and anti-terrorist legislation, the purpose of which is to punish and convict all active protesters. Based on its anti-terror laws, Russia is prosecuting at least 32 Crimean Tatars, and has prosecuted lawyer Emil Kurbedinov, who defends political prisoners in Crimea.*

Famous film director **Oleg Sentsov** (🔒 20 years), left-wing activist-student **Oleksandr Kolchenko** (🔒 10 years), teacher **Oleksiy Chyorny** (🔒 7 years) - arrested May 2015. All the men are natives of Crimea who participated in resisting the Russian occupation of the peninsula. What they did is usually considered "hooliganism" in Russia, but after false testimonies extracted through torture they were classified as "terrorism." Despite having no ties whatsoever to the Right Sector, a Ukrainian nationalist organization, the men were accused of being its members, and the case used for its criminalization and subsequent arrests.



Oleg Sentsov



Oleksandr Kolchenko



Oleksiy Chyorny



Oleksiy Syzonovych



Pavlo Hryb

**Oleksiy Syzonovych** (🔒 12 years). A 61-year pensioner living in occupied Donbas. According to the FSB, he was allegedly preparing a "terrorist act" on the territory of Russia. Most probably, he was kidnapped to Russia. His trial lasted only 3 days, with the accusation based on the testimony of nine witnesses who didn't show up in court, as well as absurd details such as the defendant, who claims he can't swim, escaping by jumping from a bridge into a river.

**Pavlo Hryb** is a 19-year old Ukrainian who was kidnapped by the FSB while going to Belarus to meet a schoolgirl from Russia. The girl herself has said she was forced to collaborate with the FSB to lure her on-line romantic acquaintance to Belarus. He is being accused of planning to detonate a bomb in the school where the girl was studying, apparently based on a joke the two exchanged in social media.

**Oleksandr Steshenko** (🔒 2 years) from Kharkiv was first arrested while trying to enter Crimea over doubts of the border guards about the authenticity of the photo in his passport. Then, his lawyer learned that Steshenko was accused of smoking at a bus station. Then, the activist disappeared for a month and surfaced in a FSB video where he "confesses" to taking part in an extremist group that was under the order of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis leader to perform "provocations" in Crimea.

**Yevhen Karakashev**, an anarchist activist who took part in actions against the arbitrariness of police in Crimea and in solidarity with political prisoners, is accused of "public justification of terrorism." The accusation is based on one video repost on the VKontakte social network and a text in a chat.

**Oleksandr Shumkov** and **Roman Ternovsky** have been arrested under accusation of taking part in Right Sector activities on the territory of Ukraine. Russia's ban on the Ukrainian Right Sector organization has been criticized as being politically motivated in view of the conflict between the two countries, and lacking justification.

**Edem Bekirov**, a Crimean Tatar man who suffered a major heart attack and now has four cardiac shunts to regulate blood pressure, was traveling to his relatives in Crimea prior to a heart operation. He was detained at the border with mainland Ukraine and accused of transporting 14 kg of ammunition and weapons into Crimea. His lawyer explained in court that Bekirov is unable to lift a 1.5 liter bottle, let alone 14 kg, but was disregarded. Bekirov, who has an amputated leg which requires daily dressings, and a bouquet of health issues which require daily medication and medical supervision, is detained in grossly insanitary conditions. His family pleads to the world to save him.



Oleksandr Steshenko



Yevhen Karakashev



Oleksandr Shumkov



Roman Ternovsky



Edem Bekirov

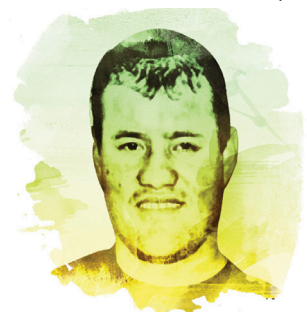
### ***A conveyor belt of repressions against Crimean Tatars***

*The Crimean Tatars, the indigenous population of the Crimean peninsula, remain the staunchest opponents of Russian occupation. Their representative organ, the Mejlis, has been banned as an "extremist" organization, Crimean Tatar media outlets shut down, Crimean Tatar leaders banned from entering Crimea, and Mejlis deputy leader **Akhtem Chiygoz** was sentenced for alleged "organization of mass riots," this way even criminalizing protests against the Russian takeover of Crimea before its occupation. Chiygoz was released, but Crimean Tatars **Mustafa Dehermendzhy** and **Ali Asanov**, who refused to collaborate with the prosecution to falsely testify against Chiygoz, are still under trial.*

*However, the largest number of them remain imprisoned under accusations of terrorism and extremism, being accused, without proof, of participating in peaceful religious organizations which in what human rights lawyer Emil Kurbedinov called a "conveyor belt of repressions."*



Mustafa Dehermendzhy



Ali Asanov

### **HIZB UT-TAHRIR AND TABLIGHI JAMAAT: A UNIVERSAL PRETEXT FOR JAIL**

Hizb ut-Tahrir and Tablighi Jamaat are Islamic organizations which state their mission as the non-violent expansion of Islam. To severe criticism by human rights organizations, Russia has banned both, being the only country in the world to brand the former a terrorist organization and being one of six countries to ban the latter as extremist. **Both are legal in Ukraine and most countries of the world.**

According to Russian legislation, conviction for "extremism" or "terrorism" in connection to Hizb ut-Tahrir and Tablighi Jamaat is possible by **mere accusation of membership in the organization**, despite none of their members committing terrorist or extremist acts anywhere in the world. **This has led to Russia's**



renowned *Memorial* human rights center considering Russian Muslims accused solely of participation in the organizations as political prisoners.

According to *Memorial's* Central Asia Program Director Vitaliy Ponomarev, these cases present an excellent opportunity for the **career growth of functionaries of the Russian security apparatus**. Almost in all the cases, **testimonies of "secret witnesses" and hidden audio/video recordings, which are interpreted by FSB-connected "experts,"** serve as proof of involvement in the Islamic organizations, which allows the FSB to regularly report on their successes in "combating international terrorism." After Russia's occupation of Crimea, this Russian practice, widespread in Central Asia, became a problem for the Crimean Tatars, many of whom are devout Muslims. Russia persecutes them despite the provisions of international humanitarian law, according to which the occupying country must respect the criminal law of the country which it occupied - Ukraine.



*Armed searches of houses of Crimean Tatars are a regular occurrence in Crimea. Most of the detainments of the political prisoners take place during them.*

*Presently, 32 Crimean Muslims, most of them ethnic Crimean Tatars, are imprisoned in Russian-occupied Crimea under accusation of participating in the two organizations.*

**Ferat Sayfullaev** (15 years), **Rustem Vaitov** (15 years), **Yuriy Primov** (15 years), and **Ruslan Zeytullaev** (15 years) have been sentenced based on the testimony of a secret witness. **Enver Mamutov** (17 years), **Rustem Abiltarov** (9 years), **Zevri Abseitov** (9 years), **Remzi Memetov** (9 years) have similarly been jailed based on the testimony of a secret witness as well based on "evidence" provided by pseudo-experts. None of them have been proven to commit, encourage, or plan to commit any violent acts. Others are awaiting trials with a predictable outcome: **Muslim Aliev**, **Enver**

## CRIMEAN MUSLIMS PERSECUTED FOR THEIR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS



**Bekirov, Vadym Siruk, Arsen Dzhepparov, Refat Alimov, Teymur Abdullayev, Uzair Abdullayev, Emil Dzhemadenov, Ayder Saledinov, Rustem Ismailov, Talyat Abdurakhmanov, Renat Suleymanov, Enver Seytosmanov, Arsen Kubedinov, Seyran Mustafaev, Server Zekiryaev.** As well, the following Crimean Tatars accused of participation in Islamic organizations are human rights activists: **Emir Usein Kuku, Ernest Ametov, Memet Belyalov, Suleyman Asanov, Tymur Ibrahimov, Seyran Saliev, Edem Smailov** and **Server Mustafaev**; the last six are members of the **Crimean Solidarity civic association**, which aims to resist Russia's string of politically motivated arrests in Crimea.

The human rights lawyer Emil Kurbedinov, who represents the unlawfully persecuted Crimean Tatars in court, has also faced persecution himself - for sharing a facebook post of a Hizb ut-Tahrir meeting before the Russian occupation of Crimea. Now, because of these concocted accusations, he may be expelled from the bar association.

Most of the prisoners of this category are family men, and their illegal imprisonment leaves their families without breadwinners and children without fathers. Altogether, over 100 children are now left without parental care.

## ACCUSED OF EXTREMISM FOR SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

Citizen journalist **Nariman Memedeminov** is under custody, being accused of promoting terrorism on the internet for two videos of a Hizb ut-Tahrir meeting posted on his youtube channel before Russia's annexation of Crimea, i.e. before Russia's criminal legislation could even theoretically apply to the peninsula. **Emil Minasov** (1 year 3 months) has been sentenced under accusation of extremism for re-posts on his facebook page expressing protest against the occupation of Crimea and the imprisonment of Crimean Tatar political prisoners.



*Nariman Memedeminov*



*Emil Minasov*

## ARRESTED FOR HELPING ELDERLY CRIMEAN TATAR WOMAN

When Turkish citizen Yusuf Aitan borrowed \$7,000 from the family of Crimean Tatar legendary activist, the 83-year-old Vedzhie Kashka, and refused to give it back, four Crimean Tatar activists came to persuade him to do so. Russian security forces detained them in a cafe in Simferopol where the Turkish citizen had come to return the sum to the elderly lady and accused of "extorting large sums of money." The elderly lady suffered a heart attack during the operation and died. **Bekir Dehermendzhy, Kazim Ametov, Asan Chapukh, and Ruslan Trubach** are under custody.



*Bekir Dehermendzhy*



*Kazim Ametov*



*Asan Chapukh*



*Ruslan Trubach*



## ACCUSED OF SPYING ON RUSSIA

*The cases of prisoners designated as “spies” are classified so it’s often impossible to even know what they are accused of.*

**Valentyn Vyhivskyi** (🔒 11 years) was seized on a private visit to Russia-occupied Crimea in September 2014, abducted to Moscow, held incommunicado, tortured, underwent “mock executions” and is now serving a sentence for mystery “spying.”

**Viktor Shur** (🔒 12 years) was accused of “spying for Ukraine” for taking photographs of an abandoned aerodrome in Bryansk, which the FSB called a “military enterprise” despite its mines for ballistic missiles being flooded back in the 1980s and the field being used for grazing cattle.

**Roman Sushchenko**, a Paris correspondent of the Ukrainian media Ukrinform, was arrested on a private trip to Moscow while receiving a CD he was asked to take back to France, and accused of espionage.

**Ihor Kiyashko** (🔒 8 years), a lawyer from the Ukrainian city of Poltava, came to Russia to purchase medicine for his son and was accused of spying and smuggling military airplane parts. His wife informed he was pressured to refuse the services of an independent lawyer.



Valentyn Vyhivskyi



Viktor Shur



Roman Sushchenko



Ihor Kiyashko

## ACCUSED OF WAR CRIMES

The case against **Mykola Karpyuk** (🔒 22.5 years) and **Stanislav Klykh** (🔒 20 years) is a likely candidate for being the most outrageous one of them all. The two men were accused of **taking part in Russia’s First Chechen war** based on incriminating testimonies extracted through **beatings, torture, electrocution, and being held incommunicado** for 1.5 years (Karpyuk) and 10 months (Klykh), as well as the testimony of a mystery Ukrainian national who had already been sentenced to 23 years in prison. One of these “testimonies” names then Prime Minister of Ukraine **Arseniy Yatseniuk** as one of the participants of the war. Bizarrely enough, the Russian prosecutors lodged a case against him as well. The “confessions” Klykh and Karpyuk were forced to make don’t correspond to reality: out of the 30 Russians they are accused of shooting, **18 were killed in another place, and 11 more did not die from  $\frac{1}{12}$  shot wounds at all**, Russia’s Memorial Center said in a report. Additionally, none of the Russians the men allegedly wounded were able to identify them. This, and other exculpatory **evidence was not taken into account by the prosecution**. Now, the mental health of Stanislav Klykh has greatly suffered from the torture and absurdity of his ordeal. In November 2017, his mother found out he had **fallen into a coma** in Russian prison. Previously, he had been administered **psychotropic drugs**.

No less absurd is the trial of **Serhiy Lytvynov** (🔒 8.5 years). A cowherd from Luhansk Oblast, where the Russian proxy war in Donbas is ongoing, he was seized while treating a tooth inflammation in Russia,

where he went after all nearby Ukrainian hospitals were cut off in result of attacks by Russian-militant forces. During the investigation, he testified to killing 30 people, raping and killing 8 women and a 12-year old girl while being part of Ukraine's Dnipro battalion which fought against the Russian-backed militants. These crimes qualified for life imprisonment. His story was used in an infamous, now deleted, TV episode run by the Kremlin's chief propagandist Dmitry Kiselev to **illustrate the Kremlin myth of bloodthirsty Ukrainian "punishers"** who are not defending their land from a covert Russian invasion, but instead killing their own people. After a meeting with the Ukrainian consul, Lytvynov **retracted the testimonies, saying they were given under torture.** After finally getting an independent lawyer who organized a jury trial, the accusations of war crimes were lifted and Lytvynov granted a whopping \$15 compensation, but was instead accused of robbery in a case his lawyer also said is fabricated.



Mykola Karpyuk



Stanislav Klykh



Serhiy Lytvynov

## ACCUSED OF BEING "UKRAINIAN SABOTEURS"

*In the summer and autumn of 2016, FSB operatives detained several people who they accused of sabotage in the interests of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense. The Russian special services presented these cases as proof that the Ukrainian authorities are dangerous for the inhabitants of the occupied peninsula. But one year later, none of the accusations of sabotage have been proven.*

**Yevhen Panov** and **Andriy Zakhtey** were arrested in early August 2016 and accused of planning terrorist acts and targeting critically important parts of Crimean infrastructure. **Volodymyr Prysyach** ( **3 years**) and **Rydván Suleymanov** ( **1 year 8 months; now free after serving sentence**) were arrested in the following weeks. All four gave **televised "confessions"** where they claimed, respectively, to have worked for Ukrainian military intelligence to plant bombs in the Simferopol Airport and Bus station and record the movement of Russian military technology.



Yevhen Panov



Andriy Zakhtey



Volodymyr Prysyach

The case collapsed. The weapons stockpile which Panov and Zakhtey allegedly were connected to **bore no traces of their DNA**, the weapons broadcast on Russian TV from the scene of Panov's arrest were actually airsoft guns, and there are grounds to believe that both Panov and Zakhtey



had been lured to the place where they were captured. Panov, Zakhtey, and Prysyk had subsequently said they had said what they were told to, under torture. Since then, Prysyk has been **sentenced on entirely different charges** - of possessing drugs, which he claims appeared in his van half a day after he was seized, and the charges Suleymanov now faces are **different as well**: the prosecution now accuses him of making false bomb threat calls, but not of using weapons or explosives, **which indicates the initial testimony was forced out of him**. Zakhtey has chosen to collaborate with the investigation, and his testimony radically differs from his initial one, where he claimed he was tortured into saying what was required of him.

In November 2016, the FSB operatives announced they had captured a new batch of saboteurs. This time, they were military experts of the analytical center "Nomos" **Dmytro Shtyblikov ( 5 years)** and **Oleksiy Bessarabov**, as well as former Ukrainian military servicemen **Volodymyr Dudka, Oleksiy Stohniy ( 3.5 years)**, and **Hlib Shabliiy**. Despite the televised confessions of the men alleging they were planning sabotage attacks in Crimea under the command of the Ukrainian intelligence on Russian state TV, Oleksiy Stohniy has been **sentenced for a different article altogether**: illegal possession of firearms, which indicates that the whole "confession" show is a setup, as the men had "testified" to working as a group. The Crimean Human Rights Group considers the men as political prisoners due to the staged nature of their televised "confessions" and denial of right to a proper trial.

**Hennadiy Lymeshko ( 8 years)** was arrested in Crimea and was broadcast "confessing" to sawing down an electric post as part of a pre-planned Ukrainian sabotage attempt. However, he was, like other "Ukrainian saboteurs" sentenced on totally another accusation - purchasing and buying explosives - in a trial where he was denied the right to proper defense. This suggests that the FSB did not have enough evidence to prove the first fabricated accusation in court and that the case is politically motivated.



Dmytro Shtyblikov



Oleksiy Bessarabov



Volodymyr Dudka



Oleksiy Stohniy



Hlib Shabliiy

## PUNISHED FOR EUROMAIDAN

*Ukraine's Euromaidan revolution of 2013-2014 unleashed the tidal wave of disinformation against the country which continues till today, and which remains a prominent motive for imprisoning Ukrainians till this day.*

**Mykola Shyptur ( 9 years)** had set off to Crimea in the days just before the referendum, when unmarked Russian soldiers together with local militants were preparing the ground for a Russian takeover, as part of a company of Euromaidan activists, to assist with a pro-Ukrainian rally. During the rally, they were **assaulted by pro-Russian militants**, and in the events that followed, Shyptur fired a few warning shots from the gun he brought to Crimea. Despite the warning shots being made in an act of self-defense while being assailed, Shyptur was convicted of "attempted murder of persons carrying out their official duties or civic duty."

**Andriy Kolomiyets ( 10 years)** was living in Russia's North Caucasus with his partner when he was **seized in May 2015, illegally taken to Crimea, and tortured to extract "confessions"** of throwing Molotov cocktails during the Euromaidan in Kyiv, of which there is no record, at two riot police officers who managed to identify him nearly one and a half years later. Kolomiyets was additionally charged with



possession of narcotic substances which are likely planted. Despite the “victims” reporting only suffering “physical pain,” the defendant was charged with attempted murder. As in the case of Kostenko, Russia had **extended its jurisdiction to a place and time which it had no right to deal with.**

**Volodymyr Balukh ( 3.5 years)** is a Crimean farmer who sympathized with the Euromaidan Revolution, flew a Ukrainian flag above his house, and set up a plaque commemorating the slain victims of Euromaidan, irking the Crimean occupation authorities. He was convicted on charges of possessing 90 bullets and trotyl explosives found in the attic of his home. The weapons were **produced in 1989 and there were no signs he had been in contact with them,** but that didn’t influence the judge’s decision.



*Mykola Shyptur*



*Andriy Kolomiyets*



*Volodymyr Balukh*

## HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND METHODS OF FALSIFYING EVIDENCE

One way or another, all the cases against the “Kremlin prisoners” have **violated their right to a fair trial.** The methods include an open falsification of materials and evidence to invention of names for the victims, staged and unconvincing witnesses for the prosecution, manipulation of basic evidence and fabrication of material evidence, unfair approaches to the assessment of defense and prosecution arguments. As a rule, the court and the prosecutor’s office act jointly as the prosecutor.

In the case of Hizb ut-Tahrir, the mechanism of criminal prosecution is similar: in almost all cases, the basis of the evidence is a **questionable testimony of “secret witnesses” and hidden audio/video recordings,** which are interpreted in the needed fashion by “experts” associated with the FSB. At the same time, the possibilities of alternative expert assessments are very limited.

A number of prisoners have stated that they were **tortured to force them into making false confessions:** Oleg Sentsov, Oleksandr Kolchenko, Valentyn Vyhivskiy, Mykola Karpyuk, Stanislav Klykh, Yevhen Panov, Andriy Zakhtey, Andriy Kolomiyets, Serhiy Lytvynov, Oleksandr Kostenko, as well as formerly released Yuriy Yatsenko and Hennadiy Afanasyev.

### TO RECEIVE THE NEEDED “INCRIMINATING EVIDENCE,” THE FSB FOLLOWS THESE RULES

- Victims are **kidnapped or arbitrarily detained** by the law enforcement organs without any official

records, are held incommunicado, and **are brutally tortured to extract a "confession"** which incriminates the defendant in committing crimes or belonging to an organization banned in Russia, such as the Right Sector or Hizb ut-Tahrir.

- On multiple occasions, the law enforcement organs extracted **"confessions" to incriminate other Kremlin prisoners**, even if they did not know each other - for instance, Kolomiyets had told that he was beaten in order to get a testimony out of him against Kostenko, another figurant of the "Euro-maidan" cases.
- The "confessions" sometimes become the **sole basis of the accusation against the defendant and others he incriminated**, as it was in the case of Chirniy, the "confession" of whom is the basis of the accusation against the Sentsov group. The prisoners describe harrowing details of the torture, saying they **were willing to sign anything to stop the pain**. Many agree to collaborate with the investigation, being promised lighter sentences.
- As long as the prisoners are **held incommunicado**, and their relatives are not informed of their detention, they have **no access to an independent lawyer, or consul**. These "confessions" are usually retracted as soon as the defendant receives access to them.
- Often, the initial "plot" is **"supplemented" by additional charges**, when planted drugs or weapons are "found" among the items of the victim. Sometimes, the case based on the initial "confession" falls apart and the prisoners are charged with something else altogether.

## HERE ARE THREE FRAGMENTS OF THE KREMLIN PRISONERS' TESTIMONIES ABOUT BEING TORTURED BY THE RUSSIAN "LAW ENFORCERS":

**Renat Paralamov**, a Crimean Tatar who was tortured to give a "confession" about him being part of Hizb ut-Tahrir, but later managed to escape to Ukraine:

*"Then everything repeated, but the blow went to the back of my head. They said I have two options: either I will lose my health and will do what they say, or I will do what they say, but will still have my health. Then they electrocuted me, attached them [electrodes] to my buttocks and hit me. [...] Then they electrocuted me with stronger shocks and attacked the electrodes in another way. They sat on my back so that I couldn't move at all. I fainted. The pain was terrible, my tongue went numb, I couldn't talk. Probably, they showered me with water, it was flowing out of my mouth when I woke up. A bag was on my head, I couldn't see anything..."*

From the appeal of **Stanislav Klykh** to the European Court of Human Rights:

*"I was also given alcohol and psychotropic drugs which were administered to me intravenously. [...] These methods were applied to me to force me to admit that I was allegedly in Chechnya in 1994-2000 and took part in the hostilities on the Dudayev's side, participated in killing soldiers on ploshchad Minutka in Grozny, had intended to carry out terrorist attacks in different cities of Russia and supposedly arrived in Russia for this purpose.*

*Besides that, I was kept for several days in the Vladikavkaz prison without food or water. As a result, I was brought to a state of dystrophy, could not hold a spoon or pen in my hands, because my hands were dislocated from being chained to the bars. The execution was attended by unidentified persons in masks that placed a bag over my head and secured it with tape before starting to torture me.[...]*

*Then, on the second night, at approximately midnight, masked men came into my cell and dragged me into the basement, after which a man calling himself 'Sasha' began torturing me with electricity, shocking me through metal caps on my fingers. This lasted for three nights in a row, during which he asked me about Chechnya and Crimea. If his answer did not satisfy him, he increased the voltage.*

*After each execution, masked men came to disinfect my wounds with iodine and brilliant green,*



*because in some places my skin was worn off almost to the bones (to this day, I can't stand on my knees or wear handcuffs because the layer of skin on my hands is still very thin). [...] 'Sasha' came into the cell, hit me in the ribs and legs and said that I should say that I cut the throat of two Russian soldiers on ploshchad Minutka."*

From the complaint of **Yevhen Panov** to the Investigative Committee of Russia:

*"They beat me with an iron pipe in the head, back, kidneys, arms, and legs; they tightened handcuffs from behind until my hands became numb; they hung me up by handcuffs: my knees were bent, the handcuffs were fastened slightly below the knees, an iron stick was inserted under the knees, and then two men took it from both sides and lifted this stick with me, which caused wild pain. [...] Apart from that, during the torture, they tied up my penis until it started turning blue, during this the men asked 'Who did you come to blow up?' I couldn't answer, because I didn't have any such goal, and I didn't understand why they thought this." After some time, Panov was taken outside with a bag on his head and was informed how he would be shot. "I believed it, because I heard how they reloaded the weapons," he told.*

## **LIVE VICTIMS FOR THE KREMLIN PROPAGANDA MACHINE**

In order to keep conducting an aggressive foreign policy towards Ukraine to try force it back into the Russian geopolitical orbit, the Russian authorities need to enjoy the support of their population. Therefore, the bulk of Russian propaganda spread by government-controlled media works for the purpose of **creating an alternative reality** for its citizens which justifies the actions of the authorities.



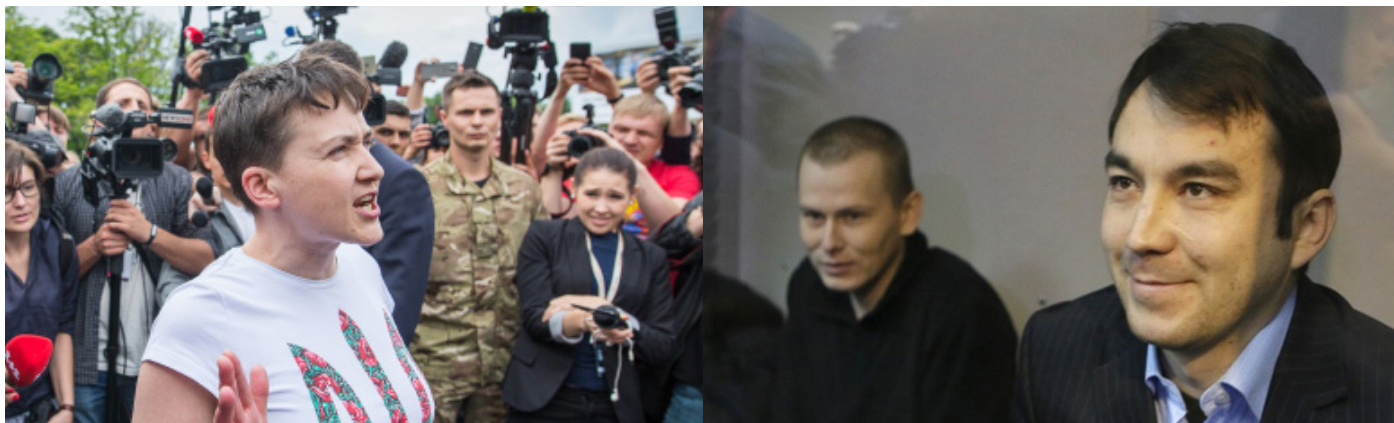
A TV report of the FSB catching "Ukrainian saboteurs" was broadcast on Russian state TV channel Rossiya 1. Caption: "Yet another failure of the Ukrainian intelligence: the saboteurs did not have time to harm Crimea; 'The saboteurs blew it'"

In this alternative reality, Russia isn't waging an undeclared covert war against Ukraine, it is itself being attacked by Ukraine via "saboteurs, extremists, spies, war criminals." Russia isn't repressing the indigenous population of the Crimean peninsula which it occupied, it is itself facing an existential threat from this population, which is swarming with "terrorists." The Ukrainian political prisoners serve as living proof for this "reality."

Shown on Russian TV, they are living "proof" of the Kremlin's narratives. **The fake "crimes" allegedly**

**perpetrated by the Ukrainian political prisoners are then reported as fake “news”** justifying the Kremlin’s picture of the world, while the law enforcement organs create an illusion of their successful work.

Additionally, **Russia exchanges the Ukrainians it has taken hostage for its agents in Ukraine.** This is what happened with the exchange of **Nadiya Savchenko**: she was exchanged for two Russian military intelligence officers, Aleksandrov and Yerofeyev, captured at war in eastern Ukraine.



*Ukrainian political prisoner, military pilot Nadiya Savchenko was exchanged for two Russian officers captured on duty in Donbas, on 25 May 2016*

**READ MORE:**

Let My People Go, [letmypeoplego.org.ua](http://letmypeoplego.org.ua)

Crimean Human Rights Group, [crimeahrg.org/en](http://crimeahrg.org/en)

Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, [khpg.org/en](http://khpg.org/en)

Euromaidan Press, [euromaidanpress.com/tags/letmypeoplego](http://euromaidanpress.com/tags/letmypeoplego)

## HOW TO HELP FREE THE KREMLIN’S UKRAINIAN HOSTAGES

### LESSONS FROM THE PAST FOR THE NEAREST FUTURE

#### **1. ACCESS OF DOCTORS TO THE PRISONERS WHOSE HEALTH CONDITION CAUSES CONCERN AND THEIR RELEASE ON HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS SHOULD BE DEMANDED IN THE FIRST PLACE.**



*Mother of Sergei Magnitsky, a lawyer who died in Russian jail, at the event in memory of her son.*

As historical experience shows, authoritarian governments are often not ready to assume risks of being directly blamed for the death of a person jailed on political grounds. In the words of Maria Vaikhanskaya, a Soviet psychiatrist who helped the dissident **Viktor Fainberg** to survive forced “treatment” in a mental hospital and married him after his liberation in 1975,

*“Viktor was released due to pressure from the West... He was allowed to leave because his case was well known in the West and his persistent hunger strikes threatened his life. There would have been adverse publicity if he had died, so it was preferable to let him go.”*

Such a pattern can be noticed in a number of releases of Soviet and Chinese dissidents, as well as in the



modern cases of Ukrainian prisoners of the Kremlin **Yuriy Soloshenko**, who was in his 70s when convicted and had a bunch of chronic diseases, and **Nadiya Savchenko**, who kept several long hunger strikes. All the three were exchanged and returned to Ukraine in 2016.

*Russia should be demanded to grant independent medical examination and free the following prisoners immediately:*

- **Stanislav Klykh**, sentenced to 20 years in jail, who is suffering from serious mental disorder because of physical torture and use of psychotropics, experienced coma in September 2017 and is unable to take care for himself due to poorly operating limbs;
- **Pavlo Hryb**, who lives with a disability related to the work of blood circulatory system (portal hypertension) since childhood and may suffer fatal bleeding any moment;
- **Edem Bekirov**, who has an amputated leg with a permanent wound, diabetes, and a severe heart illness. Bekirov's lawyer and relatives suspect he is being given inappropriate medication in jail;
- **Enver Bekirov**, who has chronic hypertension, heart and vision problems, varicose veins, and many other diseases;
- **Edem Seitomanov**, who despite severe health problems has not been allowed to submit medical analyses since June 2018.

## 2. THE SUPPORT OF TOP POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND MORAL AUTHORITIES SHOULD BE ENLISTED FOR EXERCISING PRESSURE ON THE KREMLIN AND NEGOTIATING THE RELEASE OF HOSTAGES.

In countries with a highly centralized system of decision-making and lack of independent justice system such as today's Russia, personal contact of leaders is sometimes necessary to prove the hostage-holder that the problem is worth of attention and is due to be resolved. However, this should not lead to the formula "release of hostages in exchange for political concessions," as it would only give Russian leadership an incentive to fabricate more cases.

The idea of an international platform (platforms) to negotiate prisoner exchanges and other humanitarian aspects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict should be established. The platform(s) should possibly **involve recognized moral authorities rather than acting statesmen and be separated from the negotiation of political, economic, and military issues.** Russia has to be pressured in order to comply with this alternative format.

- *In 1963, on personal requests of Pope John XXIII and U.S. President Kennedy's special envoy Norman Cousins, Soviet authorities released Head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church **Josyf Slipyj**, who had spent 18 years in Gulag. This was seen as a sign of detente between the superpowers after the Cuban missile crisis.*
- **Wei Jingsheng**, whom Human Rights Watch called "China's most famous dissident," was released on medical parole in November 1997 thanks to the efforts of the Clinton Administration and other governments. Wei, a mastermind of the pro-democracy movement and European Parliament's Sakharov Prize winner, was in the second year of his 14-year labor camp sentence, which followed his first lengthy imprisonment (1979–93). His liberation took place right after Chinese President Jiang Zemin's visit to Washington.
- *In February 2004, China released one of its then longest-serving political prisoners **Phuntsog Nyidron**, a Buddhist*



*Josyf Slipyj meets Pope John XXIII upon release from Soviet imprisonment, 1963*

nun and campaigner for Tibetan independence. Her name had been repeatedly raised by the U.S. ambassador to Beijing and senior officials of the Bush Administration at meetings with Chinese leaders and in public statements. Phuntsog's liberation came in anticipation of a U.N. human rights meeting in Geneva, where the U.S. Department of State threatened to initiate a resolution condemning China for non-compliance with its human rights commitments.

- The 2016 release of the Ukrainian officer Nadiya Savchenko, who was held in captivity in Russia, took place thanks to the deep involvement of U.S. President Obama, as well as the support of the Normandy Four leaders, Angela Merkel and Francois Hollande.
- The liberation of two Crimean Tatar leaders illegally convicted by Russia, **Akhtem Chiygoz** and **Ilmi Umerov**, is credited to agreements between Turkish President Erdoğan and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

### 3. PARTICULARLY SEVERE TARGETED SANCTIONS SHOULD BE INTRODUCED AGAINST THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR PLACING THE LIVES OF THE POLITICAL HOSTAGES AT RISK.

Russian officials should be continuously reminded of the consequences the death of the lawyer **Sergei Magnitsky** in a Moscow remand jail had for their country, namely personal sanctions against the supposedly implicated persons introduced by the U.S., Britain, and Canada. To avoid the fatal outcomes for the Ukrainian political prisoners, **there is need for additional legislation allowing the sanctions for the use of torture, inhumane treatment, and other gross human rights violations.** One of the ways to enact sanctions against persecutors of the Ukrainian political prisoners of the Kremlin could be the **"EU Magnitsky Act,"** which is proposed to tackle human rights abuses in Europe, and would allow adding Russian officials implicated in torturing political prisoners to sanctions list. Adopting this Act would aid not only Ukrainian political prisoners but other victims of human rights violations.

Based on open source data and court proceedings, Ukrainian human rights NGOs have been gathering information on Russian officials responsible for conducting the politically motivated trials against Ukrainians. The list of perpetrators includes prosecutors, judges, and public servants. **Targeted sanctions against these people would allow Russian officials to think twice before engaging in politically motivated trials.**

### 4. "POWER OF SHAMING" SHOULD BE USED, BY CONSTANTLY REMINDING OF THE POLITICAL MOTIVATION BEHIND THE CASES OF UKRAINIAN HOSTAGES.



One of 7 children of Crimean Tatar Enver Mamutov, who faces up to 10 years in jail on groundless charges

**The violations of procedure, torture, inhumane treatment, drama of the children left without parental care, as well as the responsibility of the perpetrators (particularly through the mechanism of universal jurisdiction)** should be repeatedly highlighted and reminded of to Russian officials and elites.

As parts of supporting the #LetMyPeopleGo campaign, following **forms of applying the "power of shaming"** can be instrumental:

- letters to the Russian political and religious leaders, members of the government, prosecution and investigative authorities, judiciary, and penitentiary system,
- public statements and diplomatic notes,
- protests in front of Russian missions abroad and during the visits of Russian officials to other countries,
- questions on political prisoners asked at press conferences of Russian representatives,
- presence of diplomats and correspondents serving in Russia on the open court hearings and visits to prisons where the Ukrainian political prisoners are held.



The **voices and testimonies** of the Ukrainian citizens who survived modern Russian repression, including Hennadiy Afanasyev, Akhtem Chygoz, Yuriy Ilchenko, Renat Paralamov, Nadiya Savchenko, Yuriy Soloshenko, Ilmi Umerov, and Yuriy Yatsenko, should be heard in the **interviews to Western media**. Afanasyev's detailed autobiographical account on his experiences behind bars and the recently published book on the imprisoned filmmaker Oleg Sentsov, which includes his own writings, memoirs of his friends, case materials, and photos, are worth **translating into English and other languages**.

Here two comprehensive and successful transnational campaigns in support of Ukrainian political prisoners of the Soviet regime (one of left and one of right political views) dating back to the 70s are worth mentioning.

- *The Ukrainian mathematician and dissident **Leonid Plyushch**, who was in 1972 arrested by the KGB for his writing on human rights treated as "anti-Soviet propaganda." Next year, he was sent to a special psychiatric hospital where his health gravely deteriorated due to drug mistreatment. Western physicians, academics, and jurists, Ukrainian and Jewish diaspora organizations, French trade unions, socialist groups, public figures, and students joined the campaign to save Plyushch launched by Amnesty International. Supporters wrote open letters to BBC, the Voice of America, Radio Liberty, and Deutsche Welle; they were published in Le Monde, The Observer, and The New York Times.*
- *In summer 1974, the International Congress of Mathematicians in Vancouver called for his immediate release. Next year, in April, Amnesty held a special International Day for Plyushch, followed by a large rally in support in October 1975. Even the Kremlin's former ideological allies, the leaders of the French Communist Party (who distanced themselves from Moscow after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968) demanded to free Plyushch. He was released in January 1976. After his emigration to France, his book *History's Carnival: A Dissident's Autobiography* was published in the West in several languages.*
- *Another ultimate success was a campaign for historian **Valentyn Moroz**, who was held in Soviet custody since 1970. In 1974, he declared a hunger strike, which lasted 145 days and was covered by dozens of influential newspapers in various countries. Activists in Washington and Toronto held hunger strikes in solidarity with him near Soviet diplomatic missions. Members of the U.S. Congress, British Parliament and the Government of Canada appealed to the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in behalf of Moroz. In 1979, after six-month Soviet-American negotiations, Moroz was exchanged (along with four other Soviet political prisoners) for the two former UN employees Enger and Chernyayev sentenced to long prison terms on charges of spying for the USSR.*

## **5. WELL-KNOWN ARTISTS AND INTELLECTUALS SHOULD BE ENGAGED IN THE FIGHT FOR THE KREMLIN'S HOSTAGES.**

The drama of Oleg Sentsov, the Ukrainian filmmaker, writer, and activist of the anti-occupation movement in Crimea, who is currently serving his 20-year sentence in a colony north of the Arctic circle, has been already represented in the internationally screened documentary "**The Trial**" and a theatre show. The recent documentary film "**Putin's Hostages: Ukrainian political prisoners of the Kremlin**" sheds light on the phenomenon of Russia's politically motivated trials against Ukrainians and tells the stories of three other prisoners: Yevhen Panov, Pavlo Hryb, and Bekir Dehermendzhy.

Two more stories are demonstrative of the possible extent the power of art can have.

- *The dissident playwright and future Czech President **Václav Havel** and his five fellow defendants were convicted by the Czechoslovak communist authorities in 1979. In the same year, on the initiative of the International Association for the Defense of Artists, a dramatized reconstruction of their show trial was performed in Paris. The spectacle was then produced in Munich and broadcasted by West German and Austrian television. Meanwhile, Havel's own play *Protest* and his other works were being performed at the leading theatres of Vienna and even communist Warsaw—until martial law was declared in Poland at the end of 1981. Havel was released two years later, in 1983.*



- In the late 70s, the British playwright **Tom Stoppard** engaged in the advocacy for the political prisoners. In 1977, he managed to see several dissidents of communist regimes, Vladimir Borisov in a Leningrad mental hospital, Andrei Sakharov in Moscow, released Václav Havel in Prague, and exchanged Vladimir Bukovsky back in London. The same year, he finished the play *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*, where he criticized the Soviet practice of applying psychiatry as a punishment for expressing one's views (a doctor tells a dissident in the play: "Your opinions are your symptoms. Your disease is dissent"). Stoppard dedicated it to the two former Soviet prisoners, Bukovsky and Viktor Fainberg. The premiere, with the London Symphony Orchestra, took place at the Royal Festival Hall as part of Queen Elizabeth's Silver Jubilee. In the following years, BBC produced its television version, and the play was staged at the Metropolitan Opera in New York

## INTERNATIONAL STATEMENTS DEMANDING RUSSIA FREE THE UNLAWFULLY HELD UKRAINIANS:

- **European Parliament resolution 2017/2869** (5 October 2017) *On the cases of Crimean Tatar leaders Akhtem Chiygoz, Ilmi Umerov and the journalist Mykola Semena*: calls on Russia to release 47 *de facto* Ukrainian political prisoners, calls to impose sanctions against Russian officials responsible for gross human rights violations;
- **European Parliament resolution 2017/2596** (16 March 2017) *On the Ukrainian prisoners in Russia and the situation in Crimea*: calls on Russia to release all illegally and arbitrarily detained Ukrainian citizens, demands Russia reinstate the Mejlis;
- **UN General Assembly Resolution 71/205** (15 November 2016) *Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine)*: calls on Russia release Ukrainians who were illegally detained, and revoke the banning of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis;
- **PACE resolution 2112** (21 April 2016) *The humanitarian concerns with regard to people captured during the war in Ukraine*: urges Russia to release all Ukrainian prisoners captured and imprisoned in the Russian Federation and in illegally annexed Crimea on politically motivated charges, including, but not limited to, Mr Akhtem Chiygoz;
- **PACE resolution 2141** (24 January 2017) *Attacks against journalists and media freedom in Europe*: calls on Russia to release Roman Sushchenko, a correspondent for the Ukrainian national information agency Ukrinform in France;
- State leaders and politicians worldwide.

## The #LetMyPeopleGo campaign calls to free all the Kremlin's hostages.

Support the Kremlin's hostages, write them a letter: [letmypeoplego.org.ua/letter](http://letmypeoplego.org.ua/letter)

Sign up for the newsletter: [http://bit.ly/LMPG\\_news](http://bit.ly/LMPG_news)

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