

## **Ukraine-Russia prisoner swap: 70 prisoners released in all**

HRWF (07.09.2019) - The prisoner swap between Ukraine and Russia has finally taken place this Saturday afternoon but Ukrainian media and "our" media in the West almost only focus on the 35 prisoners arriving in Ukraine and fail to investigate properly about the background of the 35 prisoners claimed by Moscow.

The swap has two sides. Who are those 35 people who were in Ukrainian jails? Were they political prisoners? What were they charged with? What is their background?

This article will try to bring some light on a number of people who will find a safe haven in Russia. Western journalists are encouraged to further investigate this side of the exchange of prisoners.

### ***35 prisoners in Russia recover their freedom in Ukraine***

The press service of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has posted a full list of Ukrainians who returned home on September 7, 2019 as part of a prisoner swap between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. See

<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/ukrayinci-yaki-povernulisya-na-batkivshinu-7-veresnya-u-ramk-57137>

The list includes 11 political prisoners:

**Roman Sushchenko, Oleh Sentsov, Oleksandr Kolchenko, Volodymyr Balukh, Stanislav Klykh, Mykola Karpiuk, Oleksiy Syzonovych, Pavlo Hryb, Edem Bekirov, Yevhen Panov, and Artur Panov.**

In addition, 24 Ukrainians sailors captured by the Russian Federation in the Kerch Strait on November 25, 2018 were freed today:

- Roman Mokriak, commander of the Berdyansk armored naval boat;
- Yuriy Bezyazychny, motorist-electrician;
- Andriy Artemenko, senior seaman gunner;
- Andriy Eyder, alarm seaman gunner;
- Bohdan Holovash, graduate of the Institute of Naval Forces;
- Denys Hrytsenko, commander of the 1st Division of the Naval Command Raid Guard Ships;
- Vasyl Soroka, captain, was on board of the Berdyansk armored naval boat;
- Bohdan Nebylytsia, commander of the Nikopol armored naval boat;
- Viacheslav Zinchenko, alarm seaman gunner;
- Serhiy Tsybizov, alarm seaman gunner;
- Serhiy Popov, deputy commander of the division for electromechanical units – Chief of the electromechanical service of the 1st division of the Naval Command Raid Guard Ships;
- Vladyslav Kostyshyn, graduate of the Institute of Naval Forces;
- Andriy Oprysko, motorist-electrician of the Vyshhorod armored naval boat;
- Adnriy Drach, captain, was on board of the Nikopol armored naval boat;
- Oleh Melnychuk, commander of the Yanu Kapu tugboat.
- Mykhailo Vlasiuk, motorist-electrician;
- Viktor Bepalchenko, seaman gunner;
- Volodymyr Tereshchenko, seaman gunner; - Yevhen Semydovsky, foretopman;
- Volodymyr Lisoviy, commander of the 31st division of the logistics vessels;
- Andriy Shevchenko, Chief Petty Officer of the division;

- Volodymyr Varimez, senior radiotelegraph operator of the Smila training boat of the 31st division of the logistics vessels;
- Serhiy Chuliba, commander of the division of motorists of the Nova Kakhovka training boat of the 31st division of the logistics vessels;
- Yuriy Budzylo, commander of the radio control platoon of the 21st separate company of the naval command.

Russian security forces arrested **film director Oleh Sentsov** in Simferopol on May 10, 2014. **Student Oleksandr Kolchenko** was captured by Russia in a week. They were charged with preparing terrorist acts. Kolchenko was sentenced to 10 years in prison, and Sentsov was sentenced to 20 years in a high-security penal colony.

The Supreme Court of Chechnya in May 2016 sentenced Ukrainian citizens **Stanislav Klykh and Mykola Karpiuk** to 20 and 22.5 years in prison, respectively, for alleged gang-related activities, murder and attempted murder of Russian military servicemen. The Russian investigation alleged that Klykh and Karpiuk set up groups in Ukraine to participate in fighting against the Russian army for independent Chechnya during the first Chechen war.

**Pavlo Hryb** was just 19 when he was abducted by the FSB from Belarus on August 24, 2017, after going there to meet who he thought was a young woman he had chatted with online and fell in love with. He was tried in Russia on trumped-up "terrorist" charges as investigators claim he instructed an accomplice to set off an explosive device at a Russian schoolyard. Russia's North-Caucasian District Military Court on March 22 sentenced Hryb to six years in a penal colony for allegedly "promoting terrorism."

**Volodymyr Balukh** was detained by Russia's FSB Federal Security Service on December 8, 2016. FSB operatives claimed that they had allegedly found 90 ammunition rounds and several TNT explosives in his attic. On July 5, 2018, a Russian-controlled court in Crimea sentenced him to five years in a penal colony and a RUB 10,000 fine. On October 3, 2018, the so-called "Supreme Court of Crimea" reviewed Balukh's original verdict and reduced his term to four years and 11 months.

The FSB detained **Roman Sushchenko** at a Moscow airport upon his arrival on September 30, 2016. He was charged with "espionage," as the Russian authorities insisted he was an "operative" of Ukraine's intelligence service. Moscow's city court on June 4, 2018, sentenced him to a 12-year term in a high-security colony.

In August 2017, **Artur Panov** was sentenced in Russia to eight years in prison for allegedly planning a terrorist attack in Rostov-on-Don.

Russian authorities arrested **Yevhen Panov** in August 2016, charging him with being part of a "saboteur group" plotting a series of terrorist attacks on the peninsula infrastructure. On July 13, 2018, the "supreme court" of Russian-annexed Crimea sentenced him to eight years in a high-security penal colony.

**Oleksiy Syzonovych** in July 2017 was sentenced in Russia to 12 years in prison. He was charged with plotting terrorist attacks in Rostov region, illegal border crossing and illegal possession of explosives.

On December 12, 2018, Russian security forces detained **Bekirov** at the de-facto border between mainland Ukraine and Russia-occupied Crimea. He was accused of storing, distributing and transporting more than 10 kg of TNT and 190 rounds of live ammo.

On the morning of November 25, 2018, Russia blocked the passage to the Kerch Strait for the Ukrainian tugboat "Yany Kapu" and two armored naval boats "Berdyansk" and "Nikopol," which were on a scheduled re-deployment from the Black Sea port of Odesa to

the Azov Sea port of Mariupol. All **24 crew members** on board were charged with "illegal border crossing."

Source: Unian

Pictures and videos are available at

<https://www.unian.info/politics/10677021-ukraine-russia-prisoner-swap-official-list-of-freed-ukrainians.html>

### **35 prisoners in Ukraine claimed by Russia were released: 12 Russians and 23 Ukrainians**

On Saturday 7 September, a TU-204 plane flew from Boryspil Airport to the Vnukovo airport on board of which there were 35 citizens of Russia and Ukraine detained in Ukrainian prisons: 12 are Russians, 23 are citizens of Ukraine. Who are they?

Among them was a **Russian citizen, Evgeny Mefyodov**, a former participant in the 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2014 demonstration in Odessa and survivor of the tragic fire in the House of Trade Unions in which 42 anti-Maidan demonstrators lost their lives (\*). He was then directly sent to prison from the hospital. He was prosecuted as one of the alleged organizers of the riots leading to that tragedy, but the court acquitted him. He was however not released. He was kept in detention on charges of separatism and spent more than 5 years in jail without being sentenced.

**Journalist Kirill Vyshinsky, the chief editor of RIA Novosti Ukraine (2014-2018)** was charged with treason and backing the fighters from the self-proclaimed republics in eastern Ukraine, a claim that he denies. He had been released on bail in late August after more than a year of detention.

Another person to have been swapped is **Vladimir Tsemakh (58)**, who led the air defense of the breakaway Donetsk People's Republic (DPR). Kyiv charged him with terrorism – a standard accusation against separatists in the DPR. Tsemakh, who was arrested by Ukrainian authorities in June, had been recorded on video saying that he commanded an anti-air brigade in eastern Ukraine and hid evidence of a Buk missile system. Dutch investigators say separatists used a Russian-made Buk missile to shoot down the Malaysia Airlines jet with 298 on board, most of whom were Dutch.

Tsemakh's name made its way into the foreign press recently after the Dutch-led investigative team said it believes he is a valuable witness in the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 that killed all 298 people on board in 2014.

President Zelenskiy faced criticism at home and in the European parliament over the inclusion in the swap of a potential witness in the MH17 investigation. Recently, Dutch foreign minister Stef Blok said that the prisoner trade had been delayed so that investigators could question Tsemakh before he was sent to Russia.

Among the other released prisoners were also **Elena Bobova, Valery Pikalov, Denis Khitrov and Alexander Rakushin**, held in the Odessa a pre-trial detention center.

Investigation is open to the identity and background of all the others.

*Sources: Odessa Timer, Russia Today, Moscow Times and BBC*

#### **Footnote**

See HRWF report on the 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2014 Odessa Tragedy published after a fact-finding mission carried out in the Ukrainian seaport in the same month:

<https://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Odessa-2nd-May-2014-Tragedy.pdf>

(\*) At the beginning of the clashing pro-Maidan and anti-Maidan demonstrations in the city centre, 6 people died from gunshots: four or five pro-Maidan demonstrators were first killed and an anti-Maidan died from his injuries a few days later. Later on the same day, 42 participants in an anti-Maidan picket with tents lost their lives at Kulikovo Square/ Trade Union building: 32 died from gas poisoning, 7 fell from the building and 3 died from various injuries and burns.

This tragedy was the result of the mismanagement, negligence and non-action of the law enforcement forces as well as the firemen.