



ARE YOU WELCOME IN RUSSIA 2018

**Russia promises
hospitality to FIFA
world cup guests –
but not everybody
is welcome in this
country today**

Would you like to walk in the centre of Moscow or go sight-seeing in St. Petersburg?

- On 5 May 2018 more than 1,500 persons (700 of them in Moscow, more than 200 in St. Petersburg) were attacked, beaten and arrested in the cities of Russia just for being there, when the opposition protested against the 4th term of Mr. Putin's never-ending presidency.

Do you value all people, regardless their ethnicity, gender, religion or sexual orientation?

- Women in Russia are not allowed to be employed in 465 different occupations and jobs; there is no law against domestic violence, no law on gender equality, while most of women are not paid the same as men, are not active in politics, have no tools to oppose discrimination in private and public life.
- On 1 May LGBTI activists were arrested for displaying rainbow banners in a public demonstration. Dozens of persons have been convicted in the last 5 years for "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" (forbidden since 2013 by law of the Russian Federation)
- Jehovah's Witnesses organisations were banned and many of them are sent to prison just because of their beliefs. Last case in Vladivostok – people were filmed by FSB secret camera while praying, the criminal case was opened against (among others) 83 years old lady.
- After the annexation of Crimea, Crimean Tatars suffer from multiple forms of discrimination because of their ethnicity, religion, citizenship (many of them do not want to give up their Ukrainian passports) and identity of the Crimean aboriginals.
- Racism and intolerance are constant threats to those who look different than ethnic Russians – hundreds of serious hate crimes have been recorded in Russia against Asians, Africans, Roma and others.

Do you reject torture and inhumane treatment?

- Young critically minded people were arrested in 2018 in Penza, St. Petersburg and Moscow. They were accused of planning a revolution and were heavily tortured. Human Rights defenders who raised their voices against torture and political persecution were humiliated in the state-controlled media.
- All independent Human rights organizations in Russia are labeled "foreign agents" and face repression. Many had to close their operations or to leave the country.
- In the detention centers for foreigners in Russia thousands of migrants spend many months (sometimes years) in inhumane conditions. More than a hundred thousand stateless persons living in Russia are at risk of unlimited detention for no reason other than their lack of citizenship of any country.

ARBITRARINESS AND FOOTBALL

On the eve of the FIFA world cup, the hesitation between a feeling of hope and a feeling despair grew stronger for those who are fighting for the release of political prisoners.

Especially since the hope for a “gift” from the chief, ahead of the elections (which had led to the release of Khodorkovsky, Alekhina and Tolokonnikova before the last elections) did not come true. If they are not released before the world cup, then there won’t be any other occasion to impress the rest of the world with a sudden act of generosity.

Human rights defenders are fighting for the release of Oyub Titiev, director of the Human Rights Centre “Memorial” in Grozny who was arrested and charged with drug possession in an obvious fabricated case. He denies the charges, stating that the marijuana has been put in his car during his arrest. Antifascists who had been arrested after they took part in a rally against torture, have been charged with revolutionary plans in the so-called “network case”. Some of them admitted their guilt as they could not bear torture by electroshocks, beatings and threats anymore. Three of them later retracted their confession which had been made under torture and in a context of self-incrimination.

The main slogan during the rally on May 20 in Saint Petersburg, in support of antifascists was “the Torture World cup”. This slogan was also translated in English and many other slogans in English could be read. A first in the city. It is clear that people appeal to the international community. Not only the street signs should be translated ahead of this football event!

The most significant and dramatic expression of political prisoners’ fight for freedom in the fringe of the football event is certainly the unlimited hunger strike of Oleg Sentsov who is calling for the release of all Ukrainian political prisoners. He is ready to continue his hunger strike until a “tragic outcome” and won’t stop until he’ll obtain what he is calling for.

This demand is legitimate, just as legitimate as the demand, on legal grounds, to stop torturing anti-fascists who have been arrested and stop fabricating cases based on testimonies obtained under torture, just as legitimate as the demand to terminate the case of Oyub Titiev, given the absence of criminal act (allegation of crime cannot be proved as, supposedly all cameras were broken on that day or deployed to the wall; it is as plausible as the fact that the doctor who examined one of the anti-fascists confused bruises with traces of electroshocks.



An anti-torture protest in St. Petersburg in response to allegations in the “Penza case.” May 20, 2018.

The expression “act of desperation” that is often used to qualify Sentsov’s hunger strike does not seem right to me here. It is rather a manifestation of hope, the same hope for attention and solidarity as all people who are calling upon a reaction from those who are powerful in this world, are protecting human rights defenders who have been arrested, antifascists, Crimean and Ukrainian activists. When one commits an act of desperation (like, taking hostages or other desperate and unacceptable acts) it often means that he is discouraged. But an anticipated and well-prepared hunger strike is something different. The only thing we can do, is to support him, and fight with all legal means to fulfill Sentsov’s demands.

Sentsov started his hunger strike one month before the FIFA world cup and this month is crucial to change the situation. There won’t be any other opportunity, neither for him nor for us.

On one of the posters during the demonstration against torture was written “electroshock is confession 100% guaranteed”. The slogan is vivid, memorable and tells the truth. It is very difficult not to admit guilt, not to fulfill torturers’ demands when you are tortured. But the case of Oleg Sentsov showed us that even the most terrible acts of torture do not break everyone, even electroshocks did not push him

to incriminate himself or others. The destruction of a man’s humanity is never 100% guaranteed. Among those who are prosecuted in Penza, one of them Vasily Kuksov never confessed anything and never gave any evidence. In Saint Petersburg, after he had been tortured while being interrogated, Viktor Filinkov refused self-incrimination, told he had been tortured and did not yield to pressure again. Despite the high risk of facing torture again (they have been tortured before) they found the strength to refuse to admit the guilt of their accomplices Pchelintsev and shakursky. Julius Boayarshinov also refuses to testify although he is subjected to pressure and is suffering in a crowded cell (150 people)

People fight for their freedom, dignity and truth, risking their health, many years in prison, and their life. The rulers of their destinies – lying investigators and executioners – are confident that by torture and fakes, the results they are looking for will be 100% guaranteed. In Orwell’s famous dystopia “1984” it turned out to be possible but today, it is not. People resist, and this is a sign of hope not of despair.

Stefania KULAEVA

First published in the blog of Radio Liberty

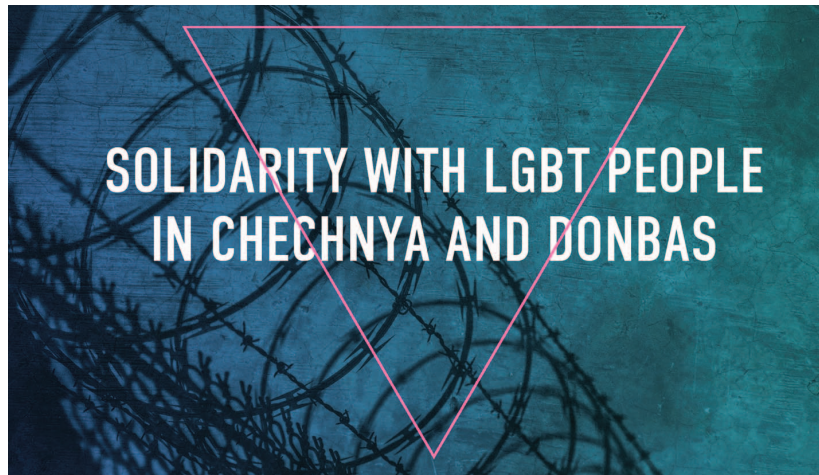
BANS ON WOMEN'S LABOR PERSIST: Russia ignores international standards and Russian court rulings

In April the Russian Ministry of Labor published an amended draft of the list of harmful, heavy and dangerous jobs prohibited for women. Despite the fact that it proposed to replace specific professions with the list of hazardous factors of production, which, according to the authorities, were unacceptable for women, this reform still fails to solve the problem of gender discrimination in labor sphere.

The Russian authorities ignored the UN CEDAW recommendations to abolish all discriminatory lists of professions prohibited for women and the Committee's decision concerning individual complaint made by vessel navigator Svetlana Medvedeva, which had recognized professional bans as violating the principle of equality of women and their right to work. Preservation of the list of occupations prohibited for women contradicts the decisions of Russian courts, including the ruling of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, which has demanded to review the case of Svetlana Medvedeva, and the Samara Regional Court, which has recognized discrimination in Medvedeva's case.

In 2010 the experts of the International Labor Organization (ILO) recommended the revision of the Russian system of protective measures that deprived women of equal opportunities in the labor sphere, pointing to the need to implement the ILO Convention No. 111 concerning discrimination in respect of employment and occupation. It is obvious that the fundamental Convention No. 111 virtually abolished the outdated ILO Convention No. 45 "Convention concerning the Employment of Women on Underground Work in Mines of all Kinds" (1935), which the Russian authorities refer to in justifying restrictions on women's work.

Preservation of prohibitions on work in certain areas contradicts the principles of non-discrimination and equality established by international norms, while it also excludes from the list the professions that no longer exist in modern production. However, this will in no way improve the actual access of women to jobs. The reform proposed by the new draft will be only nominal, and the real situation for women, such as the vessel navigator Svetlana Medvedeva, who had struggled for the right to have the desired profession for years, will not change.



RUSSIA RECEIVED MORE THAN 300 RECOMMENDATIONS UNDER THE UN HRC UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

According to the results of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Russia during the 30th session of the UN Human Rights Council, 126 delegations addressed a total of 317 recommendations to the Russian authorities. None of these recommendations were immediately accepted: at the closing session, the representative of the Russian Federation stated that decisions on the acceptability of recommendations would be known by the 39th session of the UN Human Rights Council in September 2018.

More than ten countries expressed their concern about the situation of LGBTI people in Russia who are discriminated against because of the existing homophobic legislation, as well as victims of life- and health-threatening persecution in Chechnya. They called on the Russian authorities to effectively investigate the crimes committed, which included murders, violence and disappearance of persons. However, the Minister of Justice of the Russian Federation during the meeting reported that there was no evidence of repression on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). ADC "Memorial" has repeatedly drawn attention to the violence and torture of the members of LGBTI community in Chechnya, including issuing a joint report together with the Russian LGBT network.

The problems of discrimination of other vulnerable groups, which had been raised in this report, were also reflected in the recommendations to

Russia that were made during the session. These included the need for comprehensive and internationally consistent anti-discrimination legislation, adoption of measures to protect Roma and indigenous peoples from discrimination.

Among the measures aimed at achieving equality between women and men, Russia was recommended not only to adopt the law on domestic violence, but also to create equal opportunities in employment, in particular, to abolish the list of professions prohibited for women, which had been recognized as discriminatory by the United Nations' Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (UN CEDAW) and had been repeatedly criticized by ADC "Memorial".

Several countries, which have recognized the numerous difficulties facing stateless persons, that had been described in detail in the joint report issued by ADC "Memorial", the Institute for Statelessness and Inclusion (ISI) and the European Network on Statelessness (ENS), have stressed the need for Russia to ratify the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and to adopt urgent measures in order to end discrimination against these people.

Many states have also noted that implementation and protection of human rights in Russia currently meets with various forms of stiffening, including obstruction of the activities of human rights NGOs and independent media, repression against civil society and human rights activists. They called on Russia to stop pressure on the civil society and to end the use of administrative and criminal persecution as a means of repression against opponents of the government.

JOINT LETTER TO FIFA CONCERNING THE HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS IN CHECHNYA

28 April 2018

**Mr. Gianni Infantino
President, Federation
Internationale de Football
Association (FIFA)**

**FIFA-Strasse 20
Zurich, Switzerland**

**Re: Oyub Titiev, Human Rights
Defender in Chechnya, Site of
Team Base Camp for Egypt**

Dear Mr. Infantino,

We write concerning the human rights crisis in Chechnya, the capital of which, Grozny, was confirmed by FIFA as the team base camp for Egypt. In January 2018, Chechen authorities intensified their attack against the leading Russian human rights organization Memorial, by jailing prominent human rights defender and the head of Memorial's local office, Oyub Titiev, on fabricated criminal charges.

We call upon FIFA to engage with the Russian authorities on the human rights crisis in Chechnya, in particular on the attack against Titiev and Memorial. Such engagement is consistent with FIFA's responsibility to respect human rights under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. It is also consistent with the commitment in article 3 of FIFA's statutes to promote the protection of international human rights, and would demonstrate determination to implement its new Human Rights Policy.

Background on Chechnya

For the past decade, the head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov has repressed even the mildest dissent: whether directly through his officials or through proxies acting with impunity, human rights defenders have been threatened, beaten and killed, while their offices have been set on fire. Kadyrov's security forces conduct extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances against suspected Islamist militants and critics of the government and carry out collective punishments. In May 2017, the Sports and Rights Alliance wrote to you about the anti-gay purge carried out in Chechnya, when dozens of presumed

gay men were rounded up, humiliated and tortured. Our organizations have worked on Chechnya for many years and we have documented all these abuses extensively.

In December 2017, two weeks before Titiev's arrest and just after Instagram had blocked the account of the head of Chechnya, Magomed Daudov (Kadyrov's closest associate and the speaker of Chechnya's Parliament) publicly stated that the blocking was due to the activities of human rights defenders. Daudov described human rights defenders as "enemies" who must be "separated from the normal society." After Titiev's arrest, Kadyrov himself stated: "they [human rights defenders] must know: they will not work in our region." Kadyrov then promised to "break the back of our enemies." These statements underscore our conclusion that the criminal case against Titiev is politically motivated.

FIFA can make a difference and has a responsibility to do so

We are concerned, based on our experience in the region, that Kadyrov will seek to take advantage of the use of Grozny as a training camp location to boost his credibility and prestige, and that this will precipitate a further crackdown on human rights work in the lead-up to and aftermath of the World Cup, particularly against critical voices in the region.

FIFA's Human Rights Policy requires the wide range of entities linked to FIFA to respect human rights. The Policy states that FIFA will "go beyond its responsibility to respect human rights," including by taking "measures to promote the protection of human rights and positively contribute to their enjoyment, especially where it is able to apply effective leverage." Pillar III of the Policy, "Protect and Remedy," confirms "where the freedoms of human rights defenders ... are at risk, FIFA will take adequate measures for their protection, including by using its leverage with the relevant authorities."

FIFA can immediately act on this commitment by using its leverage with the Russian authorities and directly with President Putin to protect Titiev and Memorial. Such engagement would show that FIFA's presence in the

region does not deflect attention from egregious human rights violations, but rather promotes and protects human rights.

Background on Oyub Titiev

Oyub Titiev, 60, has been director of Memorial's local office in Grozny for eight years. On January 9, 2018, Chechen police arrested Titiev on trumped-up charges of illegal drug possession. It is not the first case when the persons criticizing the authorities of the Chechen Republic are accused of the alleged possession of drugs. Also, two separate arson incidents against Memorial property in the North Caucasus, in regions neighboring Chechnya, occurred the week after Titiev's arrest.

Titiev remains in custody pending trial and faces a maximum 10-year prison sentence. Given our collective experience of working in the region, we firmly believe that only sustained international engagement can spare Titiev from a prison sentence and make it possible for Memorial, the sole human rights organization on the ground, to continue its vital work in Chechnya.

Our collective experience also leads us to conclude that Titiev will not receive a fair trial. Chechnya lacks an independent judiciary; the authorities have repeatedly harassed, intimidated and directly pressured judges and jury members. Titiev's conviction, should a trial go forward, and the forced closure of Memorial in Chechnya which would inevitably follow, would be a scandal, particularly as it will take place in a region that is a base camp for a FIFA finalist team. This scandal would cast a cloud over the 2018 FIFA World Cup and stain the efforts we know FIFA is making to announce a policy on Human Rights Defenders and Journalists.

We are convinced that the authorities have retaliated against Titiev for his human rights work in an effort to force Memorial out of Chechnya. The persecution of Titiev and Memorial threatens the very possibility of human rights work in Chechnya. It is a brazen attempt to silence all those critical of Chechen authorities and leaves victims of abuses with little or no support. We are certain that FIFA can play a crucial role in helping to remedy this situation,



#SAVEOYUB
#SAVEMEMORIAL



and that it is uniquely positioned to influence the Russian government in this regard. In particular, FIFA can call on the Russian authorities and directly on President Putin to immediately and unconditionally release Oyub Titiev, impartially to investigate attacks against Memorial and ensure a safe and enabling environment in which it is possible to defend and promote human rights without fear of punishment, reprisal or intimidation.

We thank you for your attention and look forward your earliest response.

Sincerely,

1. *Front Line Defenders,*
2. *Norwegian Helsinki Committee*
3. *FIDH (within the framework of the Observatory for the protection of human rights defenders)*
4. *OMCT (within the framework of the Observatory for the protection of human rights defenders)*
5. *Conflict Analysis and Prevention Center,*
6. *Human Rights Watch*
7. *Committee against Torture*
8. *International Memorial*
9. *Civil Rights Defenders*
10. *Amnesty International*
11. *Russian LGBT Network*
12. *People in Need*
13. *Freedom House*
14. *Civic Assistance Committee*

(Signatures of the organizations' leading representatives enclosed with the original letter)

FIFA'S RESPONSE TO THE JOINT LETTER DATED MAY 18, 2018

Zurich, 18 May 2018

SG/fad/agr

Re: Oyub Titiev

Dear signatories of the letter to FIFA President Infantino of 27 April 2018,

Thank you for your letter of 27 April 2018, in which you raise concerns about the detention of Mr. Oyub Titiev, head of Memorial's office in Grozny, and ask for FIFA's intervention. Given that the administration is responsible to implement FIFA's human rights commitments, President Infantino asked me to respond to you directly.

Let me start by reaffirming FIFA's strong commitment to implement its human rights responsibilities in accordance with article 3 of the FIFA Statutes, FIFA's Human Rights Policy and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. As you note in your letter, this includes a commitment to respect and strive to promote the protection of all internationally recognized human rights. In that respect, FIFA values the important work done by human rights defenders such as Mr. Titiev and yourselves and is, in accordance with paragraph 11 of its human rights policy, committed to respect and help protect the rights of everyone who is working to advance human rights in relation to FIFA's activities.

It is FIFA's view that, as a matter of principle, human rights defenders should be able to perform their work freely and without fear of reprisals. Therefore, and even though we have no indication that the detention of Mr. Titiev is linked to FIFA's own operations or the 2018 FIFA World Cup, FIFA is deeply concerned about the situation of Mr. Titiev. As in any such case, it is in our view of paramount importance that Mr. Titiev is granted a fair trial in accordance with international standards.

FIFA's leadership continues to be personally invested in engagements on the situation of Mr. Titiev and we hope that a solution can be found in the near future.

I thank you for your important work to promote respect and protection of human rights.

Yours sincerely,

FIFA

Fatma Samoura

FIFA Secretary General

FILMMAKER SENTSOV LAUNCHES HUNGER STRIKE UNTIL RUSSIA RELEASES ALL UKRAINIAN POLITICAL PRISONERS

Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov whom Russia sentenced to 20 years in prison has announced a termless hunger strike, demanding to free all the Ukrainian political prisoners held by Russia. He announced this is in a letter to his lawyer, Dmitry Dinze.

According to RFE/RL journalist Anton Naumlyuk, Sentsov prepared his organism for the hunger strike for one and a half months, having lost weight by cutting down on food. After writing a statement to the head of the colony, he started the strike on 14 May. According to the journalist, the colony management and representatives of the Human Rights Committee at Russia's Federal Penitentiary Service asked Sentsov not to undertake the ordeal, but he was resolute in his decision, saying that his hunger strike would help raise awareness about Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia prior to the FIFA-2018 World Cup in Russia, which is set to start on 14 June.

"If I die before the World Cup or during it, there will be a resonance in favor of other political prisoners," he told his lawyer Dmitry Dinze who visited him in Labytnagi and brought back the letter from Sentsov.

Speaking to Hromadske, Dmitry Dinze said he also tried to dissuade Sentsov from launching the hunger strike by offering him alternative methods such as filing an appeal for cassation in the Supreme Court, but the filmmaker refused, saying he doesn't believe in the Russian judicial system. Sentsov also said that he hoped his hunger strike will force the European court to look into his case, inasmuch as there had been no reaction from it yet.

According to Naumlyuk, Sentsov has been isolated and is under the observance of a doctor. He was warned that if his health will critically decline, he will be fed forcefully. He has no claims to the colony itself. Addressing the common practice of the Russian Penitentiary Service to combat hunger-strikers by announcing them insane, he reminds that his case contains the result of a psychological-psychiatric expertise determining him as fully sane.

Oleg Sentsov, a native of Crimea, was arrested on 11 May 2014 shortly after the Russian occupation of Crimea. Together with three other Crimeans, Oleksandr Kolchenko, Gennadiy Afanasiev, and Oleksiy Chirniy, he was accused of "plotting acts of terrorism" and being part of the Right Sector, a far-right Ukrainian organization Russia outlawed. These accusations are based entirely on testimonies of Gennadiy Afanasiev and Oleksiy Chirniy. Both Afanasiev and Chirniy have stated they were tortured by FSB, and after their "confessions" were sentenced to the least possible punishment for terrorism, 7 years of jail, whereas Sentsov, the "leader" of the "terrorist group," was sentenced to 20 years and Kolchenko to 10 years. On 31 July 2015 Afanasiev retracted his testimony as given under duress. After that, he was beaten again in prison. Sentsov and Kolchenko have stated repeatedly that they were tortured and beaten, and there is nothing to assume that the same didn't happen to Chirniy.

At present, Sentsov is being held in the in the "White Bear" colony in the city of Labytnagi in Siberia.

He is not the only Ukrainian political prisoner to have announced a hunger strike. And most recently, the Crimean farmer Volodymyr Balukh who was jailed for flying the Ukrainian flag above his house launched a hunger strike on 19 April 2018 and is still keeping to it.

Various filmmaking societies, intellectuals, and human rights organizations have called upon Russia to free Sentsov. And Ukrainian political prisoners held by Russia were cited as one of the reasons EU state officials should boycott the upcoming World Cup in a letter signed by 60 MEPs.

"As long as Putin is illegally occupying Crimea, holding Ukrainian political prisoners and supporting the war in Eastern Ukraine we cannot pretend that this tournament's host is our welcoming neighbour. And as long as political

I, Oleg Sentsov, citizen of Ukraine, illegally sentenced by a Russian court and currently imprisoned in Labytnagi declare a termless hunger strike as of 14 May 2018. The only condition for ceasing my hunger strike will be the release of all Ukrainian political prisoners held in the Russian Federation. Together and to the end! Glory to Ukraine!

Afanasiev was exchanged on 14 June 2016 together with another Ukrainian political prisoner, the elderly Yuri Soloshenko. Yet Sentsov, Kolchenko, and Chirniy are still imprisoned. Overall, there are at least 66 Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia who are imprisoned in both mainland Russia and occupied Crimea on trumped-up charges. The reasons for their imprisonment vary, yet most cases are used for the purposes of Russian propaganda, which portray the Ukrainians as dangerous criminal, terrorists, and saboteurs in order to justify Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

dissidents and the free press are in constant danger in Russia and beyond, we cannot turn our backs on them to shake Putin's hand in a football stadium," says the letter.

Hopefully, Sentsov's hunger strike will not be in vain and will serve as a reminder to EU politicians considering to visit the World Cup, and will shed light on a tragedy of Russian aggression which so far remains hidden from most of the world.

*By Alya Shandra
letmypeoplego.org.ua*

AS OF JUNE 4, 2018



#LETMYPEOPLEG0 LIST OF UKRAINIAN CITIZENS DEPRIVED OF FREEDOM IN OCCUPIED CRIMEA AND RUSSIA ON POLITICAL MOTIVES

Today dozens of Ukrainian citizens of various political, religious, ethnic, and professional backgrounds are illegally imprisoned by Russia on political motives. Over the last months, their number exceeded fifty. Together they constitute the #LetMyPeopleGo list of Ukrainian Kremlin's hostages.

Why are these people called “the Ukrainian hostages of the Kremlin”?

Most of them were involuntarily turned into instruments of Putin's aggressive policy towards Ukraine. Being portrayed as Ukrainian "war criminals," "saboteurs," and "terrorists" on Russian television, they are a "living proof" that Russia is allegedly at danger from attacks of malevolent Ukrainians or Crimean Tatars.

Propaganda tells such kinds of stories to reinforce the negative image of Ukraine, the country that ousted its pro-Russian president in the Euromaidan revolution and buried the plans for the restoration of Moscow's Eurasian empire. Many of these people describe how they were tortured into "confessing" to the most wicked plans in front of Russian TV cameras. And these media operations are arguably the most important aspect of the Kremlin's hybrid war against Ukraine. The Crimean Tatars, representatives of Crimea's indigenous nation, constitute the major group of the prisoners. As they are the main resistance force to Russia's occupation of Crimea, the Kremlin is arresting them en masse on fictitious "terrorism" and "extremism" charges.



'I CAVED ALMOST IMMEDIATELY.' HOW RUSSIAN FEDERAL AGENTS TORTURED CONFESSIONS OUT OF THE 'PENZA CASE' ANTI-FASCISTS

In mid-June, a court in Penza extended the arrest of several suspects in the so-called "Penza Case." Nine left-wing activists from Penza and St. Petersburg are charged with creating a "terrorist group" that supposedly plotted to destabilize the country through a series of nationwide terrorist acts during the March 2018 presidential election and the FIFA World Cup. The case is based primarily on confessions extracted by federal agents, but several suspects say they were tortured into incriminating themselves. At Meduza's request, Mediazona journalist Egor Skovoroda breaks down what you should know about the "Penza Case."

**Who's been detained?
What links the suspects?
Why are prosecutors looking at their shared interest in the competitive team sport "airsoft"?**

There are currently nine men now jailed in Penza and St. Petersburg who allegedly belonged to an anarchist "terrorist group" supposedly known as "Set" (Network). Federal agents detained five of these suspects in Penza in October and November last year, before arresting a sixth man in St. Petersburg and transferring him to Penza. In January 2018, officials detained another three suspects in St. Petersburg. At least two men living in Penza — Maxim Ivankin and Mikhail Kulkov — fled Russia and are now wanted by the police.

All suspects are men in their twenties, between the ages of 21 and 28. Not everyone knew each other before the arrests, but they did all share in common political activism and left-wing ideology (though only a few of the suspects are self-described anarchists or anti-fascists). All nine men are also fans of "airsoft," a competitive team sport similar to paintball that uses plastic BBs. Some of the suspects were bigger fans of the game than others: firearms instructor Dmitry Pchelintsev, for example, organized airsoft tournaments, while Vasily Kuksov has only participated in a couple of practice sessions. Yuliy Boyarshinov, the last man arrested, is the only suspect who's never played the game.

According to one of the defense attorneys, the case materials depict airsoft training sessions as the "illegal acquisition of forest survival skills and first aid skills."

The suspects' combined interest in left-wing ideology and practicing airsoft in the forest is apparently what prompted their arrests. Several other activists in Penza who know the suspects but never played airsoft have been named as witnesses in the case.

**What are the charges?
Were they really plotting terrorist acts?**

The evidence looks weak. In the case materials, for example, a memo from the Federal Security Service claims that the suspects intended to use terrorist attacks during the presidential election and the World Cup to "stir up the masses to destabilize the country's political situation further," supposedly leading to an "armed rebellion." The FSB initially wanted to charge the defendants with planning an armed overthrow of the government.

The evidence available to the public contains no proof that any of the suspects planned terrorist attacks. In fact, the suspects aren't directly accused of plotting any attacks — they're charged with participating in a "terrorist group" whose aim, according to one witness, was to replace Russia's "constitutional system with an anarchist system."

The FSB says this group was divided into cells operating in Moscow, Penza, St. Petersburg, and Belarus, claiming that its members gathered several times for "congresses." In St. Petersburg, the cells were supposedly called "Mars Field" and "Jordan" (also known as "SPb1") and in Penza they were supposedly known as "Sunrise" and "5.11." The suspects say these were just the names of their airsoft teams.

So what is the FSB's evidence?

A gag order is in effect until federal agents complete their investigation and the case comes to trial. Given what we know so far, most of the evidence is based on confessions taken from the suspects during interrogation.

Formally, the entire criminal case is built on the confession of Egor Zorin, the youngest suspect in custody. Zorin went to school with Ilya Shakursky, who is probably the most prominent activist among the Penza defendants, known for his frequent anti-fascist events, lectures, and environmental protests. Zorin's friends say the police detained him in the

spring of 2017 on drug-possession charges, but he was quickly released. His friends believe this was when he may have started cooperating with the FSB.

The case materials also feature the suspects' correspondence, videos recorded at airsoft practice sessions, and bugged conversations. In December 2017, for example, federal agents recorded a meeting between St. Petersburg suspect Viktor Filinkov and several of his friends at a McDonald's, where the young people discussed "politics, training sessions in the forest, methods for detecting surveillance, cryptocurrencies, and the subway system."

The FSB also bugged the Penza activists. When interrogating the suspects, investigators reportedly quoted excerpts from the young men's conversations with friends. Federal agents even watched a brawl between Dmitry Pchelintsev and Ilya Shakursky (just a few days before the latter's arrest), when the supposed terrorist-accomplices were fighting over a girl.

The FSB says its agents found a stash of weapons at the Penza homes of Vasily Kuksov, Dmitriy Pchelintsev, and Ilya Shakursky, and officers claim to have discovered a bucket of the bomb-making ingredients aluminum powder and ammonium sulfate at Arman Sagynbayev's home in St. Petersburg. Kuksov, Pchelintsev, and Shakursky say the weapons were planted, noting that they were discovered in strange places (like inside a car without an alarm system).

Sagynbayev, on the other hand, has offered a full confession, his lawyer says, in exchange for certain privileges: access to his mother, the receipt of parcels containing food, and medical treatment for an unspecified "serious illness."

Investigators found black powder (a low-power explosive common in pyrotechnics) at the home of Yuliy Boyarshinov, another Petersburg. Initially, he was only charged with illegal possession, but in April the FSB also named him as a member of the "Network" terrorist group. Boyarshinov has refused to testify, citing his constitutional right not to incriminate himself.

The FSB has also collected testimony from several witnesses, including multiple "secret witnesses," whose role in Russian criminal justice often raises serious concerns. (Dmitry Bychenkov, a former suspect in the infamously politicized "Bolotnaya Square Case," recently explained how secret witnesses are used in Russia.)

But we do know the names of some witnesses. On May 23, Russian guards at the Ukrainian border detained Victoria Frolova, one of the Penza suspects' close friends. FSB agents from Penza later showed up in a black Priora and took her away for questioning. After a few days, Frolova managed to leave the country, but not before she was apparently forced to perjure her friends and sign statements where she named Shakursky, Kuksov, and Zorin as members of the "Sunrise" cell and Pchelintsev, Ivankin, Kulkov, and Andrey Chernov as members of the "5.11" cell.

The suspects are all young men. According to Viktor Filinkov, the activist recorded at a McDonald's, federal agents told him that they were ordered to leave the girls alone — even the young women who played airsoft with the men who were arrested. "Only the guys will go behind bars," an FSB agent allegedly told Filinkov. "Feminism is all well and good, but we see things a little differently. There was no order to bring in any of the girls."

Why did the suspects confess? Is it because they were tortured?

Most of the suspects initially signed confessions, but they later recanted their testimony, saying that FSB officers had either tortured or threatened to torture them, when they first refused.

"They began to pull down my pants. I was lying on my stomach, and they tried to put wires on my genitals. I started screaming and begging them to stop. They kept saying, 'So you're the leader!' To make them stop the torture, I said, 'Yes, I'm the leader!' They answered, 'You planned to commit terrorist acts,' and I said, 'Yes, we planned to commit terrorist acts,'" recalls Dmitry Pchelintsev, who says he was tortured in the basement of the Penza pretrial detention center.

Ilya Shakursky says he was tortured in the same detention center: "They attached some kind of wires to my big toes. I felt an electric shock and couldn't help groaning and shaking. They repeated the treatment until I promised to say what they told me to say. From that time on, I forgot the word 'No' and said whatever the officers wanted."

"He alternated shocks to the leg and shocks to the handcuffs. [...] I caved almost immediately, within the first 10 minutes. I screamed, 'Tell me what to say! I'll say anything!' but the violence didn't stop," says Filinkov, who gave an extremely detailed account of everything that happened to him after his arrest at Pulkovo airport.

The striking thing about the suspects' accounts is how carefully calibrated their

torture appears to have been. For instance, Filinkov recalls that he was taken for a medical examination before he was tortured. Pchelintsev says an FSB officer wearing white medical gloves stood by as he was administered electric shocks. The man supposedly checked his pulse several times during the ordeal.

Igor Shishkin hasn't accused police of mistreating him, but there's evidence making it almost certain that he has been tortured in jail. Members of a public monitoring commission in St. Petersburg found what appeared to be burn marks from electric wires on his body, and doctors diagnosed him with a fractured eye-socket and multiple bruises and abrasions. At the FSB's detention center, Shishkin signed a document stating that he sustained these injuries while working out.

Currently, only Shishkin, Arman Sagynbayev, and Egor Zorin say they're guilty of the charges. It's unknown if Zorin was also mistreated; he is the only suspect who's been released from pretrial detention.

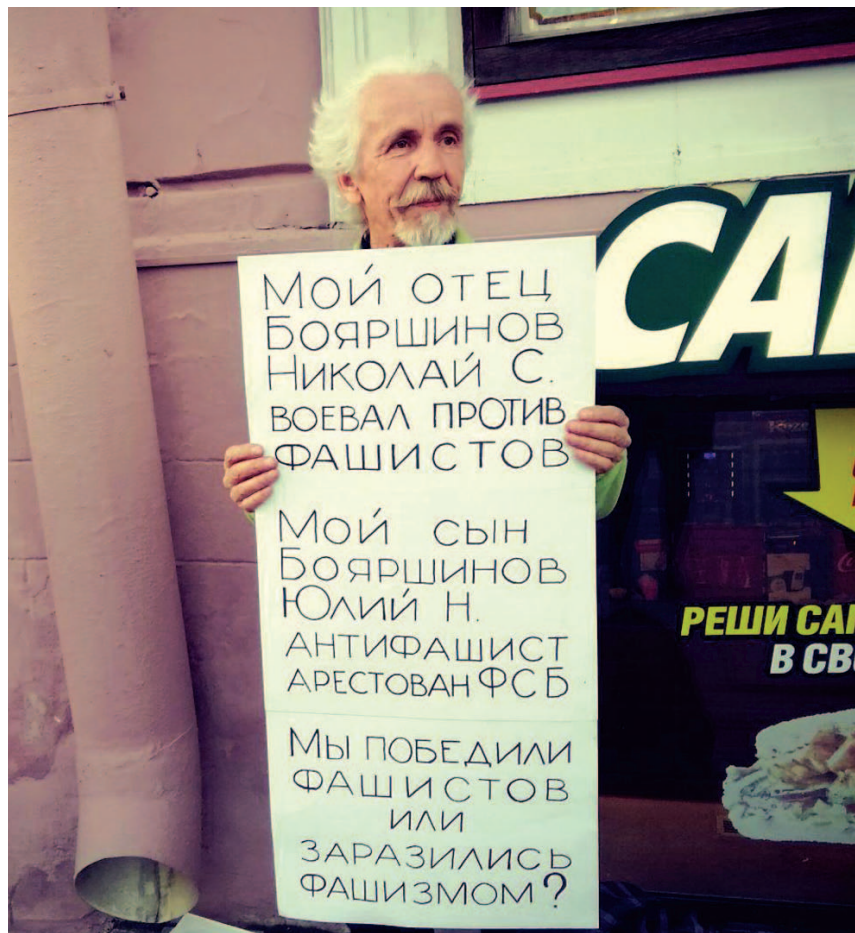
How have the Russian authorities responded to the torture allegations?

With total silence. The FSB apparently even mocked Viktor Cherkasov, Filinkov's defense attorney, by answering his complaint with a perfunctory reply folded inside pages from a dressmaking magazine.

Russia's Federal Investigative Committee refused to open a criminal case in response to Filinkov's allegations, determining that federal agents had lawfully used an electric shock device against him, after Filinkov allegedly tried to escape from FSB custody. Filinkov says he wiped blood from his face with a hat after the beatings, and the hat could have provided material evidence against the FSB officers, but someone apparently stole it from him at the detention center.

Officials have also refused to investigate the alleged torture of Ilya

Nikolai Boyarshinov, father of Yuli Boyarshinov carried out a solo picket on Nevsky Prospect every Friday: "My father, Nikolai S. Boyarshinov, fought against the fascists. My son, Yuli N. Boyarshinov, an antifascist, has been arrested by the FSB. Did we defeat the fascists? Or have we been infected by fascism?"



Kapustin, who believes he was arrested simply because he knows Boyarshinov. The Federal Security Service eventually released Kapustin and named him as a witness in the “Penza Case,” but not before torturing him with electric shocks in the back of an FSB van, he says. Justifying their decision not to pursue Kapustin’s claims, investigators cited a doctor’s report stating that the marks on the young man’s body looked more like bed bug bites than wounds from electric shocks.

State prosecutors and human rights commission officials visited Pchelintsev after he claimed to have been tortured, but he told them that he’d lied about the mistreatment “to evade criminal liability.” Before long, however, he recanted this statement, explaining that he’d been threatened with more torture, if he didn’t tell the visitors what the FSB wanted him to say.

While the torture allegations never led to any criminal charges, the FSB apparently stopped mistreating the “Penza Case” suspects after human rights officials got involved.

In April 2018, the television network NTV aired a 30-minute exposé called “Dangerous Network” that featured footage from airsoft training sessions taken from the “Penza Case” materials. The video also included a pixelated interview with someone claiming to have been involved with the “terrorist group” (presumably Yegor Zorin). The broadcast referred to the “Penza Case” suspects as dangerous radicals, claiming that their attorneys are supported by foreign grants.

NTV’s film also included edited CCTV footage from a pretrial detention center, showing Dmitry Pchelintsev smashing a toilet lid and trying to cut himself with the shards, while guards spend “a solid hour trying to bring the prisoner to his senses.” “Dangerous Network” implies that this behavior refutes Pchelintsev’s torture allegations against the FSB, supposedly proving that he injured himself.

Pchelintsev had already told his lawyer about this incident, saying at their first meeting that he’d smashed a toilet lid and cut himself on the arms and neck to force the FSB to stop torturing him. “There was blood from the cuts all over my clothes and the floor, and I collapsed. Prison officers must have seen me through the CCTV in my cell. They entered and gave me medical assistance,” Pchelintsev said.

The mothers of Ilya Shakursky and Arman Sagynbayev say an FSB investigator named Valery Tokarev blackmailed them into talking to NTV’s film crew. Mikhail Grigoryan, who was then acting as Shakursky’s defense attorney, also spoke to the TV network, surprisingly admitting that the FSB had proved his client’s guilt. Afterwards, Shakursky immediately fired his lawyer,

and his mother later filed a complaint against Grigoryan with Russia’s bar association.

Pretrial detention center administrators tried to convince the suspects to grant interviews to the government-run network RT, but the men refused.

Is this situation unique? Has Russia witnessed similar cases?

The “Penza Case” recalls an infamous trial against “Crimean terrorists” in May 2014, when federal agents arrested four activists opposed to Russia’s annexation of the peninsula. According to the FSB, the suspects belonged to a “terrorist group” created by the Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov. These men also said Russian officials tortured them in jail, and in the end the “Crimean terrorists” were sentenced to between seven and 20 years in prison. Sentsov is currently incarcerated in Siberia, where he’s been on a hunger strike for more than a month, demanding the release of all Russia’s “Ukrainian political prisoners.”

Unlike the “Penza Case,” the investigation in Crimea came after two actual arson attacks: one against the Crimea Russian Group’s office, and the other against the political party United Russia’s office. The total damage in both these incidents was a burned door and window. According to the FSB, this was terrorism. Sentsov, the group’s supposed leader, had nothing to do with either attack. Additionally, the nationalist Alexey Chirny acted alone when he tried to acquire enough explosives to blow up a local Lenin monument.

For all the flaws and absurdities of the case against the “Crimean Terrorists,” the suspects in that trial were at least accused of committing and plotting concrete acts. In the “Penza Case,” no one is actually charged with doing anything but belonging to a group.

Why would the FSB need to fabricate criminal cases?

We can only speculate. In October 2017, when the arrests started in Penza, law enforcement were also busy rounding up supporters of the Saratov nationalist Vyacheslav Maltsev, who hoped to stage a “revolution” on November 5, 2017. Many of Maltsev’s supporters have been charged with terrorist offenses, and Maltsev himself fled the country to escape prosecution for allegedly creating a terrorist group.

Federal agents may have originally targeted the “5.11” airsoft team on

the suspicion that it was connected to Maltsev’s “revolution.” The suspects themselves have offered two explanations for the name: either it refers to a popular brand of tactical clothing and gear, or it’s the day when the 17-year-old Penza anarchist Nikolay Pchelintsev was hanged in 1907 (there is a memorial at the execution site in the forest outside Penza).

Judging by the case materials, the FSB was particularly concerned about the young men’s possible ties to Ukraine. For example, Viktor Filinkov’s wife, Alexandra Aksenova, moved to Kyiv in the fall of 2017, and he visited her a couple of times. “We can assume that their presence in Ukraine involved a quest for ‘associates’ in either carrying out illegal actions on Russian territory or establishing communication with Ukrainian radicals and possibly with Ukrainian intelligence,” wrote FSB officer Konstantin Bondarev (whom Filinkov accuses of torture).

The expos aired on NTV identifies Aksenova as the group’s “chief ideologist,” claiming that she tried to create something modeled on the Ukrainian nationalist group “Right Sector,” an organization banned in Russia. Aksenova is now in Finland, where she is seeking political asylum.

Igor Shishkin, who traveled to Ukraine in 2017 to adopt a puppy from a dog breeder he knows, “has ties to representatives of radical groups in Ukraine,” according to the FSB. Shishkin was out walking his dog when Russian federal agents arrested him.

When will the “Penza Case” go to trial? Where will it happen?

The investigation could drag on until the fall or even longer. In mid-June, a court in Penza extended the arrest of six suspects. So far, the criminal cases in Penza and St. Petersburg are being investigated separately, making it possible that the nine men now under arrest will be tried in different cities.

Only a handful of military courts are authorized to hear “terrorism” cases, meaning that the suspects now detained in St. Petersburg could end up in the Moscow District Military Court, and the men jailed in Penza could be tried in the North Caucasus District Military Court — the same court, incidentally, that convicted Oleg Sentsov and his “accomplices.”

*Story by Egor Skovoroda
for Meduza, translation
by Peter Marshall
[https://meduza.io/en/
feature/2018/06/20/i-caved-
almost-immediately](https://meduza.io/en/feature/2018/06/20/i-caved-almost-immediately)*

CONTENTS

ARE YOU WELCOME IN RUSSIA 2018	1
ARBITRARINESS AND FOOTBALL <i>Stefania KULAEVA</i>	2
BANS ON WOMEN'S LABOR PERSIST: Russia ignores international standards and Russian court rulings	3
RUSSIA RECEIVED MORE THAN 300 RECOMMENDATIONS UNDER THE UN HRC UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW	3
JOINT LETTER TO FIFA CONCERNING THE HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS IN CHECHNYA ...	4
FIFA'S RESPONSE TO THE JOINT LETTER	5
FILMMAKER SENTSOV LAUNCHES HUNGER STRIKE UNTIL RUSSIA RELEASES ALL UKRAINIAN POLITICAL PRISONERS	6
#LETMYPEOPLEG0 LIST OF UKRAINIAN CITIZENS DEPRIVED OF FREEDOM IN OCCUPIED CRIMEA AND RUSSIA ON POLITICAL MOTIVES	7
'I CAVED ALMOST IMMEDIATELY.' HOW RUSSIAN FEDERAL AGENTS TORTURED CONFESSIONS OUT OF THE 'PENZA CASE' ANTI-FASCISTS	8



FIFA WORLD CUP
RUSSIA 2018

The
National Team
The Media Fail To Cover

Ukrainian political prisoners
fighting for freedom and dignity

1. Teymur ABDULLAEV
2. Uzeir ABDULLAEV
3. Talayat ABDURAKHIMANOV
4. Rustem ABILTAROV
5. Zevri ABSEITOV
6. Muslim ALIEV
7. Refat ALIMOV
8. Kazim AMETOV
9. Ernes AMETOV
10. Ali ASANOV
11. Marlen ASANOV
12. Volodymyr BALUKH
13. Envir BEKIROV
14. Memet BELYALOV
15. Oleksiy BESSARABOV
16. Rustem VAITOV
17. Valentyn VYHIVSKY
18. Pavlo HRYB

19. Mykola DADEY
20. Bekir DEGERMENDZHY
21. Mustafa DEGERMENDZHY
22. Emil DZHEMADENOV
23. Arsen DZHEPPAROV
24. Volodymyr DUDKA
25. Andriy ZAKHTEI
26. Ruslan ZEYTULLAEV
27. Server ZEKERYAEV
28. Timur IBRAGIMOV
29. Rustem ISMAILOV
30. Yevhen KARAKASHEV
31. Mykola KARPYUK
32. Stanislav KLYKH
33. Andriy KOLOMIYETS
34. Oleksandr KOLCHENKO
35. Oleksandr KOSTENKO
36. Arsen KUBEDINOV

37. Emir-Usein KUKU
38. Serhiy LYTVYNOV
39. Enver MAMUTOV
40. Nariman MEMEDEMNOV
41. Remzi Memetov
42. Emil MINASOV
43. Ihor MOVENKO
44. Seiran MUSTAFAEV
45. Server MUSTAFAEV
46. Yevhen PANOVA
47. Nuri PRIMOV
48. Volodymyr PRYSICH
49. Ismail RAMAZANOV
50. Ferat SAIFULLAEV
51. Aider SALEDINOV
52. Seiran SALIEV
53. Enver SEYTOSMANOV
54. Oleg SENTSOV

55. Oleksiy SIZONOVYCH
56. Vadim SIRUK
57. Oleksiy STOHNIIY
58. Renat SULEYMANOV
59. Edem SMAILOV
60. Oleksandr STESHENKO
61. Roman SUSHCHENKO
62. Roman TERNOVSKY
63. Ruslan TRUBACH
64. Asan CHAPUKH
65. Oleksiy CHYRNIY
66. Hlib SHABLIY
67. Mykola SHYPTUR
68. Dmytro SHTYBLYKOV
69. Oleksandr SHUMKOV
70. Viktor SHUR

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