



"Ukrainian Political Prisoners in Russia and occupied Crimea" - debate event at the EP

On Tuesday, 28 February, 2017, Members of the European Parliament hosted the Open Dialog Foundation for a debate event on the "[Ukrainian Political Prisoners in Russia and occupied Crimea](#)", at the European Parliament – Brussels. A movie screening of [Oleg Sentsov](#), Ukrainian filmmaker and political prisoner in Russia followed the debate. The event was organized in cooperation with MEPs Ms Julie Ward (S&D, United Kingdom) and Mrs Marju Lauristin (S&D, Estonia), the Mission of Ukraine to the EU and the Centre for Civil Liberties. At the event, there were also present MEPs Mr Petras Auštrevičius (ALDE, Lithuania) and Ms Anna Elżbieta Fotyga (ECR, Poland), Tunne Kelam (EPP, Estonia).

In this occasion, MEPs, representatives from the civil society, lawyers and relatives of the Ukrainian political prisoners met in Brussels to renew their commitment to supporting the citizens of Ukraine, unlawfully detained in Russia and Crimea.

The **Ambassador from the Mission of Ukraine to the EU, Mr Mykola Tochytskyi**, opened up the official debate as an opportunity to raise international attention on the issue. **MEPs Marju Lauristin, Mr Tunne Kelam and Mr Petras Auštrevičius**, stressed on the need for urgent reaction by the EP and the Member States to sanction Russia's violations of human rights towards the Ukrainian citizens. In particular, **Mr Kelam** underlined the importance of adopting Magnitsky sanctions at the European level. He affirmed that a concerted action within all the EU Member States would be necessary and beneficial to its implementation.

[See full gallery](#)

During the event, **the President of the [Open Dialog Foundation](#), Mrs [Lyudmyla Kozlovska](#)**, introduced the international advocacy campaign [#LetMyPeopleGo](#) and two guests: **Mr Dmitry Sotnikov**, lawyer of the Euromaidan activist and Ukrainian political prisoner, Mr Aleksandr Kostenko, and **Mr Igor Kotelianets**, brother of Mr Evgeny Panov, Ukrainian political prisoner from Crimea, held by Russian special services. **Mr Sotnikov** spoke out the cases of his defendant, Mr Kostenko, and the one of Mr Vitaliy Buntov. Both cases are dramatic examples of how the Russian authorities politicize the judiciary system, in the first case towards Ukrainians and in the second towards those citizens of the Russian Federation who might fill a complaint with the ECHR. Not only, Mr Sotnikov continued: "**over the last two years, the practice of exerting pressure on counsels engaged in such cases has intensified**". Therefore, it is essential to protect Russian attorneys and their defendants and to be aware of Russia's attempt to harm the ECHR independence. At the same time, **Mr Kotelianets** urged on the International community to stop the aggressive policy of Russia towards Ukrainian citizens by means of fabricated trials, tortures and psychological abuses against his brother and every hostage of the Kremlin. As for Mr Kotelianets, their relatives constantly live under fear and threat. Families, lawyers and consuls

do not have access to meet the convicts or simply provide them with medical treatments.

The event concluded with the intervention of **Mrs Kozlovska**, who reminded the necessity to support the relatives and the counsels of such victims through proper donations and ad hoc programs of financial assistance. She stressed the need for urgent reaction of the European Union to the organised attack against attorneys and people who support political prisoners in occupied Crimea (for further information please see our statement [HERE](#)). All the speakers achieved a general consensus over the escalation of repressions and gross violations of human rights from the Russian side, thus calling on urgent and immediate resolutions at the European level.

The debate was followed by the movie screening of "[Gamer](#)", a documentary screened in honour of the Ukrainian film director and political prisoner, **Mr Oleg Sentsov**, currently illegally detained in the territory of the Russian Federation. The event was widely welcomed by the audience who participated with great interest.