



Latest update date 19 July 2021

# Campaign for the release of Ukrainian sailors

Informal union

All actors • Russia

On 25 November 2018, an incident occurred next to Crimea coast when Russian warships fired at, bulked, and seized three vessels of the Ukrainian Navy – the Berdyansk and Nikopol boats and the Yany Kapu tugboat – that headed through the Kerch Strait from Odesa to Mariupol. As a result, 24 Ukrainian sailors were captured. They were accused of “illegally crossing the Russian state border” (part 3 of Article 322 of the Criminal Code of Russia). Later they were recognized the prisoners of war. All the sailors were taken to Moscow and held in Lefortovo remand prison of the FSB of the Russian Federation.

## ***Actions in relation to the conflict region***

As soon as the seizure of Ukrainian ships became known, groups of Russian citizens were formed in Moscow, and then in other cities, seeking to help them and ease the deprivations associated with their stay in the pre-trial detention center, as well as to achieve their release. The most prominent figure in the campaign was Viktoria Ivleva, a Russian writer, journalist, civic activist, and photographer. [In Moscow, St. Petersburg, single pickets were held with posters calling for the release of Ukrainian sailors. Ivleva’s group was engaged in the collection of humanitarian aid to](#)

[prisoners of Ukrainian citizens, which took place mainly on social networks](#). At the same time, the campaign was widely covered in independent media (Radio Liberty, Echo of Moscow, BBC, etc.). As soon as the case of sailors became public, they started receiving hundreds of letters of support from all over the country.

[As a result, the public campaign played a noticeable role in the release of the sailors: on 7 September 2019, an exchange of detained citizens took place between Ukraine and Russia in the format 35 to 35. All 24 sailors were among those who returned to Ukraine.](#)

The massive campaign to collect aid and support for Ukrainian sailors has become an important act of solidarity between the civil societies of Ukraine and Russia.

Upon returning home, the sailors released from captivity organized a fund for assistance for Konstantin Kotov, a Russian volunteer and civil activist who was sentenced in 2019 to 4 years in prison for “repeated violations of the law on rallies.” Kotov took part in numerous pickets and rallies for the release of sailors, and also collected humanitarian aid for them. [The sailors collected about RUR 60,000 and handed them over to Victoria Ivleva, whose assistant was Kotov, with a request to use money in favor of the Russian activist.](#)