Maksym Butkevych, captured by the Russian invaders

Denys Pilash

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It's confirmed that Maksym Butkevych, a lifelong human rights activist from the Left who joined the Ukrainian Army, has been captured by the Russian invaders in late June; nothing is known about his current status and whereabouts.

His childhood dream was to become a cosmonaut and see our planet from above, without state borders and divisions; health issues and political changes got in his way, but Max has instead found 'Cosmos' in the humanity itself, in "those who are guided not by borders and nationality, but by justice, solidarity and mercy". He emerged as a prominent anarchist and anti-fascist active in different 1990s left-wing initiatives including the "first generation" of our militant syndicalist student union Direct Action. He participated in his first student protests as a 7th grader, establishing a non-violent strike committee at his school during the 1990 'Revolution on Granite', and continued his activism while he was at the Kyiv National University Faculty of Philosophy (later he also studied applied anthropology at the Sussex University).

He went on working as a journalist for BBC World Service and Ukrainian media (he was one of the co-founders of Hromadske Radio aiming to create an independent, non-governmental and non-oligarchic radio broadcasting) and continued campaigning for social, labor, gender and other human rights, providing solidarity and help to those in the most vulnerable and oppressed positions. He was involved in the organization of many 2000s anti-war, alter-globalization, anti-fascist protests (including the annual actions in memory of Stas Markelov and Nastya Baburova killed by neo-Nazis). He also joined a number of local agencies of international humanitarian organizations, was a spokesperson for the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), an advisor to the Alliance for Public Health, a member of board of Amnesty International, and a moderator of DocuDays UA International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival events.

As a co-coordinator of the No Borders Project Butkevych and his colleagues have intervened to rescue, protect and support numerous refugees and asylum seekers from Central Asia, Belarus, Russia, Middle East, and African countries; they also lent their helping hand to the Ukrainian IDPs after the war started in 2014. He has also been working on combating racism, xenophobia, far-right extremism, and different forms of discrimination in the Ukrainian society, as well as providing numerous trainings to raise public and journalist awareness to eradicate hate speech and police violence. He's critical of human rights violations, especially those on the side of the

state, regardless of the place where they're committed, be it Ukraine or abroad. He, inter alia, made a lot to prevent deportation of foreign asylum seekers from Ukraine (the State Migration Service record is utterly terrible) and, via his activity in the Solidarity Committee, to free the Crimean activists held in Russian prisons after the annexation.

Being a staunch anti-war internationalist critical to militarization of other spheres of life beyond the army itself, Max felt he has to join the Ukrainian resistance to the current aggression of Russian imperialism. We learnt about his captivity from the videos and articles of Russian propaganda, that cynically to an Orwellian extent labels this humanist and anti-fascist "a propagandist and a nationalist (or even nazi) battalion commander". There was no information about him since, as only two of his comrades-in-arms taken prisoner with him have been allowed to make brief calls to their relatives two weeks ago.

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