

**Truth is only thing to counter Russian lies
about Maksym Butkevych – father of
captured human rights defender**

**A story of human rights defender and journalist Maksym Butkevych who was
captured by Russians near Hirske, Luhansk region.**

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July 13, 2022

Contents

Public outcry or silence regime?	3
How did Maksym Butkevych get captured?	3
‘Maksym does not betray his beliefs’	3
Fragment of an interview with Maksym Butkevych dated April 8, 2022	4

Maksym Butkevych is a human rights defender, journalist, co-founder and member of NGO 'Hromadske Radio'. With the beginning of the full-scale war, he put his efforts to help refugees, journalistic, humanitarian, educational, and human rights protection activities on hold and joined the ranks of the Ukrainian army in March 2022.

He was captured in June. Russian propagandists released a video with him and wrote that the service members, including Maksym Butkevych, were captured near Hirske, Luhansk region. On June 24, Russian invaders occupied Hirske community of Luhansk region.

Guests: Oleksandr Butkevych, father of Maksym Butkevych; Andriy Kulykov, chairman of board of the NGO 'Hromadske Radio'.

Public outcry or silence regime?

Oleksandr Butkevych: War is a tragic fact. Capture is inevitable in the dimension of war. The regime of so-called «silence», which we observed for quite a long time, is understandable for various reasons. Foremost, safety. But propaganda fakes and distortions about Maksym began to be disseminated in the Russian media landscape from the very first day.

The danger lies in the fact that they began to call him a Nazi, saying that his human rights activities are only a 'cover', 'a legend under which a fascist, commander of a punitive platoon hid'. All this, of course, is done to create a basis for removing Maksym from the ranks of prisoners of war and separately charging him with terrorism, an attack on the state system, or something else.

We have been waiting for a very long time. We thought about how to behave further. There was just constant fomenting, so we realized that we had to step in and start talking. Because it was a 'one-goal game'. A very dangerous game for Maksym. That is why we stopped keeping silence. Before starting outcry, I asked the Chief Directorate of Intelligence's advice. I provided all the information. In response, I was told: 'We heard you'. I still don't understand what that means.

We last contacted Maksym on WhatsApp on June 18. He wrote, 'everything is fine'.

How did Maksym Butkevych get captured?

Oleksandr Butkevych: The story of their capture is quite complicated. They were encircled. They were under mortar fire all night long. One of the scouts reported that the encirclement was rapidly narrowing, and they had to leave their positions and go out. He gave them the coordinates of the meeting point. They came out. When they reached the point, the scout informed them that they were at gunpoint and would be killed if they did not lay down their arms, and that he himself was a prisoner. That is, he was forced to bring them to enemy gunpoint. So they were led into a trap, and they decided to lay down their arms.

'Maksym does not betray his beliefs'

Andriy Kulykov: We kept silence for a long time, we waited. From now on, we disseminate information about the capture of our colleague, Maksym Butkevych. Featured on that Russian video, he behaves with dignity. He looks into the camera, straight into the eyes of the people he

addresses. He does not accuse anybody of leading them into a trap. He simply states the facts. This once again proves that Maksym remains faithful to his principles even in such a difficult situation.

We constantly communicate with various people and institutions to prompt Maksym's release as soon as possible.

Fragment of an interview with Maksym Butkevych dated April 8, 2022

I made a decision to join the Armed Forces and defend Ukraine a long time ago. Even before the start of the war. It had been maturing, actually, since 2014. I knew I would go to war. There were no other options in my mind and heart. On the first day of the full-scale invasion, I packed my essentials and went to the military commissariat. I understood that I was not the best candidate: I had no combat experience, I had not served before. I was told to wait for a message. I received it a week later. During this time, I helped people evacuate, coordinated the provision of aid.

I have been an anti-militarist all my conscious life, and remain so by conviction. I do not believe that a militarist structure should be extended beyond the sectors for which it was created. However, now I feel like myself. I won't serve in the army for life. I will do as much as it takes to protect the most valuable'.

Oleksandr Butkevych: The only thing we can and must do is to cover and disseminate the truth about Maksym as much as possible. This will neutralize the terrible Russian propaganda that continues to spread and is extremely damaging. This is immensely important. The truth and only the truth is the only thing to counter Russian lies.

I am very grateful to everyone who supports and joins us in the cause of Maksym's release.

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