



## CASE STUDY ON SASHA SKOCHILENKO: ANTI-WAR RUSSIAN POLITICAL PRISONER

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### Summary:

Sasha Skochilenko has been imprisoned since March 2022 for the act of placing anti-war leaflets, disguised as price tags, on goods in a grocery store in St. Petersburg, Russia. Under Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, she was sentenced to seven years in a Russian penal colony for circulating “fake news” about the Russian Armed Forces. This case study documents the harsh conditions of her imprisonment and its effects on her physical and mental health. It also examines the questionable investigation and prosecution of her case on the grounds of “spreading false information,” arguing that during Skochilenko’s trial, the principles of adversarial process and equality between the prosecution and the defense were constantly violated. Arguments from the prosecution and the defense are included. Skochilenko was released on August 1, 2024 as a part of a larger prisoner swap between Russia, the United States and several European countries, but only after she had experienced more than two years of harsh detention.

### Context:

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. By the time of the invasion, Russia had already developed not only a legislative framework that restricted people's rights to freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, but also a broad practice of administrative detentions, criminal cases, and police violence against peaceful protesters.

In early March 2022, two new laws were introduced, specifically aimed at restricting freedom of speech related to critical statements about the actions of Russian troops in Ukraine. Article 207.3 of the

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Criminal Code of the Russian Federation pertains to the public dissemination of knowingly false information about the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in Ukraine (commonly referred to as "fake news" about the Russian Armed Forces). Article 280.3 pertains to public actions aimed at discrediting the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. The maximum possible sentence for spreading "fake news" about the Russian Armed Forces is 15 years, and for discrediting the Russian Armed Forces, it is 7 years. In practice, criminal cases under both articles have been initiated for anti-war pickets and actions, posts, reposts, and comments on social media, as well as for private conversations and words. To date, 315 criminal cases have been initiated under the "fake news" article, and 191 criminal cases under the discrediting article.

The human rights project OVD-Info has analyzed all the anti-war criminal cases, including those under other criminal articles. [Read the analysis here.](#)

### **The Case of Sasha Skochilenko:**

At the end of March 2022, Sasha Skochilenko left several [anti-war leaflets](#), disguised as price tags, in an ordinary grocery store in Saint Petersburg. Before this, Sasha had been detained at a rally against Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. After the detention and an administrative fine, she sought other ways to protest, and the idea of using price tags she found on the Internet seemed safe enough to her. Here is the information that was contained in the price tags:

- "The Russian army bombed an art school in Mariupol where about 400 people were hiding from shelling."
- "Russian conscripts are being sent to Ukraine. The cost of this war is the lives of our children. Stop the war."
- "In the first three days, 4300 Russian soldiers died. Why is this not being talked about on television?"
- "Putin has been lying to us on television for 20 years. The result of these lies is our readiness to justify the war and senseless deaths."
- "My great-grandfather participated in WW2 for four years not for Russia to become a fascist state and attack Ukraine."

For this, Sasha Skochilenko was sentenced under point D of part 2 of Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (the "fake news" about the Russian Armed Forces) to 7 years in a penal colony.

### **Who is Sasha Skochilenko?**

Sasha Skochilenko is a musician, artist, and writer. She is openly lesbian.

She graduated from Smolny College (Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences), a dual degree program between St. Petersburg State University and Bard College in New York in 2017 (in 2021 Bard was the

first higher education institution to be named an undesirable organization by the Russian government and since the start of the war in Ukraine Smolny has been systematically dismantled by St. Petersburg State University). She also studied at the Theater Academy of Cinema and Television.

Skochilenko was actively involved in music: she recorded her own songs, performed at festivals and concerts, and organized "free jams" — events where people of any level of preparation, age, gender, physical, and mental abilities could play various musical instruments together.

Sasha is an advocate for mental health awareness. She created the comics "The Book about Depression," which has been translated into English, Spanish, and Ukrainian.

Sasha worked for the independent media outlet "Bumaga" and filmed reports from protest rallies and demonstrations in Saint Petersburg and Moscow for other media outlets too. In 2016, she was an independent observer at the elections to the Legislative Assembly of Saint Petersburg, where she was able to document violations and present them in court.

Sasha participated in many educational and charitable projects: she helped NGOs prepare manuals on working with people with bipolar disorder, organized musical evenings as art therapy for people with disabilities, went on an anthropological expedition to the Arkhangelsk region to record interviews with the oldest local residents, engaged in cathedral restoration and learned to do basic home repairs, filmed videos for her friends' poetry and music, and recorded lectures for the feminist project "Eve's Ribs" in Saint Petersburg and other scientific and educational centers.

Additionally, Sasha worked as a counselor at a children's camp in Ukraine, teaching children and teenagers video editing and filming skills. After the full-scale invasion began, Sasha actively spoke out against Russia's military actions in Ukraine: she participated in anti-war rallies, made anti-war posts on her social media pages, published anti-war postcards she drew, and performed anti-war songs she wrote.

## **The Beginning**

On April 11, 2022, Sasha Skochilenko received a call from a childhood friend who told her that the police had searched his place. Shortly after, he messaged that the police had left and asked her to come and support him. Sasha went there, but it turned out that the officers hadn't left at all. They were looking specifically for Sasha and used her friend's messenger to lure her to his apartment. Five operatives and investigators detained Sasha. They behaved aggressively, trying to humiliate and intimidate her:

*There were many sexist remarks and openly homophobic statements (like 'when will you come to your senses and get a husband and children?'). There was physical violence and insinuations of possible [sexual] assault. One of the operatives said he wouldn't rape me because he has eyes.*

The interrogation with the investigator lasted until three in the morning (Sasha was detained around noon). Sasha did not hide that she had placed the price tags in the store, but she was surprised that her

actions were considered a criminal offense rather than an administrative violation. The investigator told Sasha's lawyer that the case was “controlled from Moscow.” She spent two days after the arrest and interrogation without food and water in the temporary detention center, awaiting the court hearing on the preventive measure.

The preventive measure chosen by the court determines the restrictions imposed on a person during the investigation and trial processes. Most often, this is pre-trial detention in a SIZO, or house arrest, or prohibition of certain actions (for example, a curfew, restrictions on internet use and other means of communication, or limitations on communication with certain individuals).

As a preventive measure, the court placed Sasha in detention in SIZO-5, where she remains to this day. Among the arguments for her detention, the judge said that Sasha: is accused of committing a serious offense against public safety; would continue her criminal activity if released; might abscond from the investigation and court, destroy evidence of the crime, exert pressure on the victims and witnesses; refused to provide the password to her phone to law enforcement officers; “has a sister in France” and “has friends in Ukraine.”

In a [letter written by Skochilenko](#) from the temporary detention center about her arrest, she said:

*Whatever my prosecutors try to do to me, however they attempt to drag me through the mud, humiliate me, put me in the most inhumane conditions, I will only take the brightest, the most incredible and beautiful things from this experience—that is what the essence of being an artist is.*

As arguments for changing the preventive measure from detention in SIZO-5 to at least house arrest, Sasha's lawyers presented medical certificates showing Sasha's deteriorating health condition in detention, as well as a notarized consent from the owner of the apartment where Sasha could live and independently monitor her health and diet according to her health needs. The lawyers pointed out that Sasha is officially self-employed and pays taxes, meaning she can support herself financially. Sasha's “crime” is non-violent and she cannot flee abroad as she does not have a foreign passport. The Federal Penitentiary Service (FSIN) could monitor her. The lawyers provided more than 180 personal sureties for Sasha, including from several local opposition deputies and politicians.

Read [Sasha's speech during one of the court hearings on extending the preventive measure](#).

Every month or every few months, the court extended Sasha's detention in SIZO-5, despite the fact that with each hearing, the prosecution's arguments for keeping Sasha in SIZO-5 were struck from the case, and more defense's arguments for mitigating Sasha's preventive measure were added to the case. The court hearings on the preventive measure were closed, and listeners were not allowed to attend.

### **Pre-trial Detention in SIZO**

In April 2022, Sasha was placed in an 18-person cell of 35 square meters in detention in SIZO-5. The cells in SIZO-5 are old, cold, damp, and covered in mold. They can also be in disrepair: in one of the cells, the ceiling collapsed, and some of the consequences of the collapse were cleaned up by the

inmates themselves. Sometimes it gets so cold in the cells that inmates sleep hugging bottles filled with hot water to keep warm.

A typical walking yard is 2 by 5 meters for a cell, in Sasha's first cell, shared by 18 people. The entire hour-long daily walk consists of moving in a circle at a slow pace, practically nose to tail. It's also possible to stand in the corner for a while, facing the sun.

The ceiling in the showers is black with mold. Female inmates are taken to the shower twice a week (while men are taken three times a week), and hot water is often unavailable. Many cells have prepared bottles of water in case both hot and cold water are turned off.

Many cells in the SIZO-5 have their own internal, often harsh rules and hierarchies. Examples include: permission to eat only at certain times, using the toilet in turns and only at specific hours, cleaning the floor by the duty person of the cell three times a day, combing hair only near the door, not sitting on the top bunks even if it is your sleeping place, or keeping windows wide open even in the dead of winter.

Sasha and her lawyer filed complaints about the conditions of her detention in SIZO-5, which displeased her cellmates. Cellmates began to subject her to psychological pressure: they constantly told her she smelled bad, forced her to wash all her clothes every day, and continually criticized her cleaning of the cell. An elder cellmate forbade Sasha from eating her gluten-free food outside of meal times and sometimes even made her throw her food away. Eventually, Sasha's support group managed to get her transferred to a two-person cell although even there she faced threats, theft, and violence from a cellmate.

In July 2023, Sasha was subjected to constant searches in her cell by SIZO-5 staff during which staff confiscated some of her medications and tore up her book. Soon after, 24-hour video surveillance was installed in all cells and Sasha, like other inmates, was threatened with a punishment cell for attempting to lie down during the day or wash in the cell with any kind of screen for privacy.

Despite all this, SIZO is not a real prison; it is only a detention center where people are held pending investigation. Sometimes support can come from fellow inmates and SIZO-5 staff. Sasha even receives support from women with fundamentally different civic positions (pro-war in Ukraine) and FSIN officers.

### **Sasha's Health and Imprisonment**

Detention in SIZO has caused significant harm to Sasha's health. Sasha lives with celiac disease, an incurable genetic autoimmune disorder that categorically prohibits gluten, a protein found in wheat and rye. This means Sasha cannot eat bread, pasta, cookies, or anything containing common wheat and rye. With celiac disease, it's crucial to maintain a strict diet:/ The failure to do so can lead to vitamin deficiency, osteoporosis, and intestinal cancer.

In SIZO-5, where Sasha has been for over two years, the problem of providing gluten-free food has still not been fully resolved. Although Sasha's support group has achieved some improvements in this area over time, the kitchen in SIZO-5 constantly makes mistakes and does not meet basic sanitary standards.

Sasha was not provided with a diet-compliant meal during the three-week psychiatric evaluation or during the week-long unlawful transfer to a temporary detention center. On court days, Sasha goes without food from morning until late evening because the dry ration given to her for the day does not include gluten-free products.

Due to her incapacity to follow a gluten-free diet, Sasha experiences constant symptoms of food poisoning — vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain. The pain has become so severe that it prevents her from sleeping. Despite numerous appeals to the Commissioner for Human Rights in St. Petersburg and to the President of the Human Rights Council of the Russian Federation, Sasha has not been provided with the full necessary diet. The Commissioner for Human Rights in St. Petersburg stated that "(Sasha) has no right to receive dietary food [in places of detention] — only regular food."

Responsibility for Sasha's nutrition falls on her family — her girlfriend, Sonya, delivers packages to SIZO-5 every 3-4 days. However, these packages, which mostly contain snacks and instant or dry food, cannot replace hot meals. The water in SIZO-5 is of very poor quality, so Sonya also delivers bottled water to Sasha.

During her incarceration, developed severe arrhythmia and shortness of breath and began experiencing intense heart pain. A private cardiologist detected severe heart murmurs and temporary stoppages lasting one to two seconds and prescribed urgent examinations for Sasha. Only six months after seeing the private cardiologist Sasha was granted permission for an examination outside the prison hospital. The private cardiologist monitoring Sasha's health insists that staying in SIZO is threatening her life — and that heart interruptions could require immediate medical assistance at any time and potentially the installation of a pacemaker, neither of which is possible under incarceration conditions.

In 2014, Sasha was also diagnosed with bipolar affective disorder. Following her detention, she has exhibited symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Her sleep is disrupted by heart and stomach pain, and her right to a daily one-hour walk is not always upheld. Additionally, Sasha has faced various forms of violence and psychological pressure, from sexualized aggression by an FSIN employee to bullying by cellmates. The administration sometimes obstructs her meetings with a psychotherapist and SIZO-5 staff sometimes forget to give Sasha the necessary medications her family has bought for her.

Sasha's lawyers prepared reports from several private doctors — a gastroenterologist, a cardiologist, and a psychotherapist — who are monitoring her health. All agree that it is impossible to provide Sasha with proper medical care in SIZO.

## Psychiatric Examination

Sasha has bipolar affective disorder and, due to severe depression at age 18, she was almost placed under observation at a local psychiatric facility in Saint-Petersburg. Over time, Sasha managed to get off the registry at the local facility and her medical record was archived in 2017. However, after Sasha's arrest, her record was retrieved from the archive. At the investigator's initiative, Sasha was taken to the local facility where she had an excellent conversation with the district psychiatrist. The psychiatrist wished Sasha luck, said she would sign a petition for her freedom, and formally confirmed Sasha's sanity.

Nevertheless, the investigator handling Sasha's case was not satisfied with this and insisted that Sasha be sent for a forensic psychiatric examination at the city psychiatric hospital. There are two types of examination: a simplified three-hour one and an extended three-week one. The investigator chose the latter, even though it is used less frequently and for more severe cases. The examination and the wait for its results delayed Sasha's case by two months in total. Eventually, Sasha returned to SIZO-5 with yet another confirmation of her sanity. Following this, Sasha was also scheduled for an interview with the local psychiatrist at SIZO-5. The specialist confirmed the verdict of her colleagues and deemed Sasha sane for the third time. Surprised by such a thorough psychiatric check on Sasha, the SIZO psychiatrist remarked, "Is dissent really equated with mental disorder?"

Here's how Sasha describes her experience during the extended psychiatric examination:

*The commission was also tasked with questions concerning the motives of my 'great crime,' my ability to understand the responsibility, and signs of remorse for it. It seems to me that standard templates of forensic psychology were applied to me, which I think are used for thieves, murderers, rapists, and fraudsters. Thus, pacifism and anti-war advocacy easily get incorporated into the list of criminal deviations from the conventional law-abiding norm.*

*The attitude towards detainees in the Federal Penitentiary Service FSIN system leaves much to be desired. For instance, upon my arrival for examination at the psychiatric hospital, several staff members in uniform were spying on me while I was changing (and showering). Later, one of them, who introduced himself as Petrov, tried to convince me that: a) it didn't happen, I just 'imagined' it; b) FSIN staff "have no gender" like doctors, so they can observe detainees at any time "for security reasons.*

A certificate of insanity significantly affects a person's status in the penitentiary system. SIZO staff may stop taking the detainee's complaints seriously as 'unreliable sources,' and other detainees may start bullying, harassing, and abusing the person. Based on an insanity certificate, a court can order compulsory treatment in a psychiatric hospital, which can last an indefinite period of time. This happened, for example, with another Russian political prisoner, Vika Petrova.

There are two staff psychologists at SIZO-5. One offered Sasha a consultation but failed to arrange a confidential setting, instead suggesting they "whisper in the corridor." Later, she admitted, "Our main task is to find out why you put up the price tags." In other words, her task was not to provide psychological help to the individual but to assist the investigation. The second psychologist inexplicably

gave Sasha a test on the knowledge of what criminal or administrative penalties might be faced for crimes related to terrorism. Then, the same psychologist persistently invited Sasha to church.

### **Visits in Detention**

For almost a year after arrest, Sasha was unable to see or call her loved ones. During the first eight months of her detention, she only had two visits. The investigator allowed her to see blood relatives and a priest, claiming there was an order from higher authorities to restrict her contacts. Although Sasha is not a religious person, she decided to meet Father Grigory Mikhnov-Vaitenko, who has condemned the war in Ukraine from the beginning, supports political prisoners, and the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, Sasha's sister, who currently lives in France, was able to visit her.

Sasha's closest relatives are her girlfriend, Sonya, and her friend, Lyosha. Sasha and Sonya met six years ago and have been together since, but according to Russian law, they cannot be considered a family. In Russia, the LGBTQ+ community is considered an 'extremist movement' and same-sex marriages are banned, so Sasha and Sonya do not have the right to marry and legalize their relationship.

Sonya and Lyosha were made witnesses in Sasha's case, summoned for interrogations during the investigation and trials and Sasha was forbidden from communicating with the witnesses. If Sasha and Sonya were married, Sonya would have had the right to refuse to testify as a witness in Sasha's case. Sonya and Lyosha could not call Sasha, visit her in SIZO, or even attend some court hearings just to see Sasha.

Almost a year after Sasha's arrest, these restrictions were lifted, and Sonya and Lyosha were finally allowed to visit and call Sasha, as well as attend all of Sasha's open court hearings. Sonya visits Sasha twice a month in SIZO-5, where they talk for an hour through two panes of glass and bars; they manage to call once a week, and if lucky, twice a week. Read [Sasha's open letter about Sonya](#).

In June 2023, Sasha learned that Sonya was diagnosed with cancer:

*Over the past year, I have faced many trials, but some time ago, the worst happened. My beloved Sonya told me she had cancer. I am still in shock and trying to process this information. I should have been by her side, holding her hand when the test results came in. Sonya will undergo surgery, and I should have been able to visit her in the hospital. All this is impossible, and it causes me great pain. I am terrified for my loved one. At the same time, I feel grateful to those who have supported us and donated money. Thanks to you, we were able to pay for the necessary procedures and tests. I am confident: we will win, we will cope. We will be together.*

Apart from her arrest, Sasha did not face discrimination in detention based on her sexual orientation (unlike in male SIZOs and prisons) Everyone in SIZO-5 knows that Sasha has a girlfriend and both her cellmates and the SIZO-5 staff are understanding and seem even touched by Sasha and Sonya's story.



## Investigation and Evidence of the Prosecution

Sasha was accused of spreading deliberately false information about the Russian Armed Forces and other Russian military formations and individuals, under the guise of reliable reports, and doing so with political, ideological, racial, national, or religious hatred or enmity, **based on hatred or enmity** towards a social group. This is how the law under which Sasha is accused — the law on "fake news" about the Russian Armed Forces — reads.

This action with the price tags might have had no consequences for Sasha if not for the report to the police made by a 72-year-old store visitor who noticed one of the price tags. It stated that the Russian army had bombed an art school in Mariupol where 400 people were hiding. "I was extremely outraged by the slander I read because I am very worried about Russian soldiers in Ukraine and watch all the news about it," the woman's testimony reads. [The full testimony of the pensioner can be read here.](#)

The investigation into Sasha's case lasted from early April 2022 to late September 2022. The investigator who initially led the investigation eventually resigned from law enforcement to avoid dealing with such political cases. The investigator who signed the indictment for this case told Sasha's lawyers that he neither investigated the case nor read the indictment — he just signed it. Sasha's case consisted of 5 volumes and more than one thousand pages.

The court began considering Sasha Skochilenko's case on its merits only on December 15, 2022. The hearings on the merits were open to listeners, unlike the hearings on the preventive measure. However, the judge prohibited photo and video recordings during the sessions, even though this is allowed by law.

At the first hearings, the prosecutor read the evidence of Sasha's guilt, which included, for some reason, the job descriptions of a baker, cashier, and store manager where Sasha had left the price tags, as well as the instructions for operating the supermarket's automatic doors and the fire evacuation procedure. The prosecutor also spent a long time reading the protocol of the search of Sasha's apartment, her computer, guitar case, anti-war leaflets, trousers, and hat. The prosecution also repeatedly requested to adjourn the hearings, thereby clearly dragging out the process. "They want to see what the verdict will be in other cases and somehow adapt. They don't want Sasha's case to be the first one decided in St. Petersburg," commented one of Sasha's lawyers.

At one of the subsequent hearings, Sasha's childhood friend, whose apartment was used by the operatives to lure Sasha, testified as a prosecution witness but admitted in the court that the interrogation protocol contained many phrases he did not use, such as "(Sasha) condemns the actions of the Russian Federation," "(Sasha) is thus hostile to the Russian state," and "deliberately false information". These phrases repeat exactly the wording of Sasha's indictment. The friend couldn't remember signing this interrogation protocol because he was under pressure from law enforcement officers — for several hours after Sasha's arrest, he was held in the investigation department, suspected, as he said, of distributing the same price tags. But the judge was not interested in these circumstances, only the interrogation protocol: "Your signature is on the interrogation protocol, isn't it? You read it before signing, didn't you?"

As evidence of Sasha's guilt, the prosecution submitted the testimonies of several Russian military personnel who participated in the invasion of Ukraine. During the investigation of Sasha's case, the investigator simply invited these servicemen for interrogation, showed them Sasha's price tags, asked a few questions, and recorded their testimonies. From the defense's perspective, these people are not witnesses. They don't know Sasha, they didn't see her actions, they can't speculate about her motives. Everything these soldiers say is purely their opinion. Moreover, when one of the soldiers later testified in the court, he responded to the prosecutor's question, "What do you know about the placement of the price tags?" by saying he had no idea what price tags were being referred to. As a result, the prosecutor had to read out his previous testimony given during the investigation, and the soldier simply agreed with it.

Additionally, as evidence of guilt, the prosecutor read in court Sasha's messages with acquaintances from Ukraine and notes seized from her phone. Conversely, the defense believes that the messages prove Sasha's innocence (specifically, that the information on the price tags was not deliberately false for Sasha — Sasha believed in what she said and wrote):

Notes on Sasha's phone read: "Now it is impossible to stay silent. I know information from people who are in Ukraine: bombs are falling there and there are casualties. This is reality. And it is the truth. They write and ask to speak the truth... We should not be at war; we should cooperate and strengthen friendly ties! No to anxiety, depression, hostility, and war!... I will continue to do everything I can to bring about the end of hostilities and urge all people to do the same. This is a test of your humanity. You have the chance to pass it."

Moreover, the prosecution requested a linguistic examination of the texts on the price tags at a special center at St. Petersburg State University to check the "falsehood" of this information and the presence of "motives of hatred." According to Article 207.3, under which Sasha is accused, the deliberate falsehood of the disseminated information plays a significant role, and the presence of a motive of hatred in the crime increases the maximum punishment under this article of up to 10 years in prison. Similar examinations are conducted in many political criminal cases, sometimes by the same experts.

Linguist Anastasia Grishanina and political science expert Olga Safonova, who conducted this examination, came to the following conclusions:

*A linguistic study using additional methods of psychological and political analysis was conducted on the statements placed on fragments of paper similar in size to store price tags. These "price tags" contained unreliable negative information about the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, disseminated in the form of statements about facts, the reliability of which could have been verified at the time of placing the 'price tags' in the store.*

*The examined texts revealed linguistic and psychological signs of discrediting the use of the Russian Armed Forces for the protection of the interests of the Russian Federation, its citizens, maintaining international peace and security, and the exercise of the powers of the state authorities of the Russian Federation outside its territory for these purposes.*

*The examined informational materials revealed signs and motives of political hatred and hostility towards a social group united by their affiliation with the military personnel of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, towards the state authorities of the Russian Federation, and President Vladimir Putin.*

*The communicative goal of the examined text is to promote the author's own negative assessment of the actions of using the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation during the special military operation in Ukraine, which are actually aimed at protecting Donbas from the aggression of the current Kyiv authorities, demilitarizing and denazifying Ukraine, protecting the interests of the Russian Federation and its citizens, and maintaining international peace and security.*

In court, Anastasia Grishanina, a lecturer from the Faculty of Journalism at St. Petersburg State University, expressed the opinion that "the use of the term 'war' instead of 'special military operation' misleads the reader." She also highlighted negatively that Sasha used information from media outlets recognized as "foreign agents" in Russia.

Olga Safonova, a lecturer from the Faculty of Political Science at St. Petersburg State University, expressed the opinion that Russia is a democratic state and that "attacking another state is unacceptable, it is a socially condemnable act, it is aggression, but if there are certain legislative acts that allow the invasion of another state's territory, then there must be a valid reason, justification, a procedure of approval by the authorities, and a specific goal."

It is unclear what exactly, according to the prosecution, is the "false information" about the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation that Sasha spread on the price tags. Some of the price tags do not mention the Armed Forces at all; some cannot be considered fake because they present evaluative opinions rather than facts. For example, the phrase "Putin has been lying to us from the screens for 20 years." Where is the mention of the army here? What is fake about it? Or the words "my great-grandfather fought in WW2 not for Russia to become a fascist state" — these cannot be understood as a fake about the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. Sasha's lawyers asked questions to the prosecutor in court, requesting the prosecution explain what it considers to be "false information" on the price tags, but they received no response from the prosecutor.

## **Evidence of the Defense**

Once again, Sasha was accused of spreading deliberately false information about the Russian Armed Forces, under the guise of reliable reports, motivated by political hostility and hatred. Sasha's lawyers built their defense on the following arguments: Sasha believed in the truthfulness of the information on the price tags because she read many independent media sources and communicated with her friend who was in Kyiv at the time. Sasha's actions were driven by humanitarianism and compassion for the people living in Ukraine, not political hatred towards the Russian Armed Forces. A few years ago, Sasha worked at a children's camp in Ukraine, teaching children filmmaking, and she formed very warm relationships with them. Since the end of February, Sasha was very worried about their lives. Furthermore, the price tags did not appear to be reliable messages; a reliable message is a scientific article or some brochures, but definitely not price tags with slogans instead of prices.

In response to the prosecution's arguments, the defense provided extensive evidence of Sasha's innocence.

The lawyers submitted two independent linguistic reports, one by Svetlana Drugoveyko-Dolzanskaya and the other by Irina Levinskaya. Both philologists concluded that the prosecution's experts, Safonova and Grishanina, exceeded their competence by answering legal questions instead of linguistic ones — experts do not have the right to determine the truthfulness or falsity of information; this is a question for the court. The prosecution's experts based their conclusions about the falsity of the information on the price tags on data from the Russian Ministry of Defense — that is, anything that does not match the data from the Russian Ministry of Defense, and thus from the Russian authorities, is considered a lie. They did not consider whether Sasha was aware of the supposed ‘falsity’ of her statements or whether, from her perspective, she was reporting the truth.

The defense also pointed out to the court that one of the price tags stated that Russian conscripts were being sent to Ukraine. This information was later confirmed even by the Russian Ministry of Defense. This information cannot be false even according to the prosecution's experts' logic.

Svetlana Drugoveyko-Dolzanskaya, who provided a report for Sasha's defense, lost her job at St. Petersburg State University: the university's ethics committee concluded that she spoke sarcastically about her colleagues (the prosecution's experts also work at St. Petersburg State University) and undermined their expert competence, as well as the competence of St. Petersburg State University as a whole. An open letter in support of Svetlana Drugoveyko-Dolzanskaya was signed by more than 3,500 people, but this did not affect the university administration's decision.

In contrast to the prosecution expertise, the defense prepared its own one. The authors were linguist Igor Zharkov, psychologist Veronika Konstantinova, and political scientist, and professor at the Higher School of Economics Dmitry Goncharov.

Linguist Igor Zharkov, whose methodological works were cited by the prosecution's experts Safonova and Grishanina, characterized their report as "pseudo-scientific gibberish" — lacking references, containing incorrect references or references to non-authoritative works, and most of the prescribed research methods were not used.

In his report, Zharkov, unlike the prosecution's experts, examined not only the texts on the price tags but also the price tags themselves, including the phrases on each one saying: "stop the hostilities." That is, the prosecution's experts substituted the object of the study by just analyzing words taken out of context, without the call to stop the hostilities — which is a crucial part of the price tags. Moreover, the price tag with the words: "Russia uses mobile crematoria. 0 zinc coffins with the bodies of our sons will be returned this time" completely disappeared from the Sasha's case materials.

Psychologist Veronika Konstantinova concluded that there were no grounds to assert that Sasha aimed to spread false information, nor were there grounds to speak of hatred towards any social group.

She explained that in the first weeks after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Sasha "suffered, experiencing severe cognitive dissonance, irrational guilt and shame, and intrapersonal conflict, which should not be confused with intergroup conflict." Sasha's behavior is explained by a "high propensity for empathy." Sasha wanted to end the traumatic situation, the suffering of people, and the hostilities. The psychologist describes Sasha's actions as "reactive" and "impulsive": "to do something; not for a purpose, but because it hurts and she has to do something."

Additionally, psychologist Konstantinova stated in court that the lie and truth of certain information for different people in this process are determined by the sources from which they draw information. Thus, for Sasha, the information on the price tags was true. For the prosecution witnesses — the pensioner who made the report to the police, and the military personnel — the information from official Russian sources is true.

Political scientist Dmitry Goncharov stated that the price tags do not present a subject for political science research at all. "The prosecution, by involving scientific expertise, attempts to substantiate its illegitimate claims against Russian citizens, in this case, Sasha, by leveraging the authority of scientific knowledge. Essentially, this is a significant effort to discredit the social sciences, which are being used to restrict the constitutional rights of Russian citizens." In this context, the prosecution seeks to restrict the right to criticize the authorities and the right to freedom of speech, said Goncharov.

Goncharov also argued that the army, as a state institution, does not exist independently but executes direct orders from the head of state. Therefore, it cannot be considered a social group. (Sasha is accused of a crime motivated by hatred towards the Russian Armed Forces as a social group.)

The defense lawyers also called political scientist Alexander Sungurov, a professor at the Higher School of Economics and a former member of the Presidential Human Rights Council. He stated that it is impossible to discuss political hatred as a motive based solely on five small texts. "You are talking about thoughtcrime. Read Orwell's '1984.' He writes about what thoughtcrime is: it doesn't matter what you did, but what you thought," said Sungurov.

In addition to the lawyers, a public defender participated on the defense side in the court, presenting data from the OSCE report on the full-scale war in Ukraine and comparing this data with the information on the price tags posted by Sasha. Sasha's defense also presented numerous publications in Russian and foreign media outlets that corroborated the information used on the price tags.

Sasha's lawyers requested that the linguistic expertise of the prosecution be deemed inadmissible evidence after six defense expert testimonies refuted its conclusions and the legality of its execution. If the court had recognized the expertise as inadmissible, there would be no evidence of the subjective side of Sasha's "crime," which could lead to the dismissal of her case.

Additionally, Sasha's defenders requested to include in Sasha's case another court ruling that fined a person under administrative law for posting identical price tags to those Sasha posted. However, Sasha is facing criminal prosecution and is in custody. The judge refused to admit this information into Sasha's case.

## Pressure and Torture

During Sasha's trial, the principles of adversarial process and equality between the prosecution and the defense were constantly violated. Judge Demyasheva almost always sided with the prosecutor: systematically granting unfounded motions from the prosecution and denying well-founded motions from the defense; the defense's requests to summon their witnesses to court were rejected; procedural violations by the prosecution were ignored, while Sasha's lawyers received multiple warnings. Disciplinary proceedings were initiated against one of Sasha's lawyers, including because of his defense of Sasha. These proceedings were specifically scheduled to coincide with Sasha's trial, preventing the lawyer from attending her hearings.

When it was the defense's turn to present their evidence, Judge Demyasheva started scheduling hearings back-to-back, disregarding the schedules of Sasha's lawyers and Sasha's appointments with private doctors. Previously, during the prosecution's presentation of evidence, the judge allowed weeks-long breaks between hearings. Sonya, Sasha's girlfriend, recounts, "Sometimes our lawyers had to work through the night because the hearing would last until late evening, and the next one would be scheduled for the next morning, ignoring the pre-agreed schedule." Hearings could last 6 to 13 hours, sometimes ending after the court's official closing time.

The daily hearings were hardest on Sasha. She couldn't manage to have breakfast, lunch, or rest. During one hearing, Sasha felt unwell in the courtroom, and an ambulance was called. Afterward, Sasha said that due to the hearing schedule, she hadn't had a meal in two days.

"On court days, she is taken from her detention cell early in the morning, before breakfast. In a cramped prison van and then in a stuffy, smoke-filled convoy room, Sasha sat without food, and when she was brought into the courtroom, she wasn't even allowed to bring water. I've attended many court sessions, both political and regular, and those in custody almost always had a bottle of water with them. But Sasha's case, unfortunately, was different. Judge Demyasheva kept Sasha in the cage for hours on end, not allowing breaks for her to drink water, take medication, change the batteries in her cardiac monitor (which was installed for tracking her heart issues), or even go to the bathroom. It's unbearable to see a loved one in a cage and watch them cry from thirst," says Sonya, Sasha's girlfriend.

Closer to the conclusion of Sasha's case, hearings began with the examination of strange scraps of paper marked "can be transported by prisoner van" (probably from SIZO-5 to the court). These seemed to be medical certificates, although no doctors had examined Sasha in SIZO-5, and often these notes lacked any signature or doctor's stamp. Perhaps these "certificates" were meant to justify the frequent transfers of Sasha from SIZO-5 to the court and Judge Demyasheva's harsh treatment of Sasha during the hearings.

Sasha's lawyers repeatedly stated that Judge Demyasheva's treatment of Sasha amounted to torture. They filed a motion to have Judge Demyasheva removed from Sasha's case, but this motion was rejected. Sasha's support group prepared a detailed "public motion" against Judge Demyasheva, outlining how she violated both the Constitution and the Criminal Procedure Code, as well as numerous provisions of the Code of Judicial Ethics. This document was signed by more than 2,500

people, but the St. Petersburg Qualification Collegium of Judges did not investigate Demyasheva's actions for compliance with the Code of Judicial Ethics. Sasha's lawyers also filed a motion to remove Prosecutor Gladyshev from the case, but Judge Demyasheva denied this motion as well.

Each court session essentially became a contest between the defense not only against the prosecution but also against the court. However, Sasha's lawyers did not despair and did everything possible to defend Sasha and maintain her connection with the outside world. One of Sasha's lawyers said in an interview about the case: "Listen, everyone already knows that our judges are not independent. So what now? I have to do my job. I must defend her in such a way that in a year, two years, three years, someone will pick up this case, look at it, and immediately say: 'But Sasha Skochilenko is not guilty!' This is a worthwhile endeavor, even when, as you say, the courts are not independent. That's your assessment, that's what you think, but I must not think in those terms. I must fulfill my professional duty, and I will do so at the proper professional level."

### **Methods of Supporting Sasha**

A petition on Change.org calling for Sasha's immediate release from custody has been signed by nearly 170,000 people. The Russian human rights organization "Memorial" and Amnesty International have recognized Sasha as a political prisoner. At a session of the UN Human Rights Council, there was a call to release Sasha Skochilenko and all political prisoners in Russia. Sasha was included in the BBC's list of the top 100 most influential women of 2022.

Sasha has social media accounts: a Telegram channel (a popular messenger in Russia), pages on Instagram, Twitter, and a personal website, which are managed by her close friends. These platforms publish news about Sasha and other political prisoners, as well as fundraising efforts for lawyer fees, sending packages to SIZO — food and clothing, medical examinations and medications, and other needs of political prisoners. During Sasha's first month in custody, her support group, friends, and others managed to raise 890,656 rubles to support her.

One of the other main ways to support Sasha is by attending her court hearings. Initially, the hearings on the preventive measure were closed to the public, but later, a limited number of spectators were allowed to attend the hearings on the merits — for instance, only 12 out of the 40-50 people who came were permitted to enter, and sometimes these included consuls from other countries: Finland, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Germany, Poland, and Slovakia; notable Russian director Alexander Sokurov also came to support Sasha several times. As the trial neared its conclusion, the pressure on spectators who came to support Sasha increased — when Sasha was being escorted from the convoy room to the courtroom and back, spectators were pushed away from the courtroom so that Sasha wouldn't see how many people were there to support her. Several times, Judge Demyasheva refused to allow Sasha to be taken to the convoy room to drink water until the spectators left the area near the courtroom, claiming they were "interfering with Sasha's escort." Once, a bailiff threatened to use gas and a service weapon against the spectators who were being pushed away from the courtroom. After the hearing, spectators felt that gas had been sprayed in the corridor; Sasha's girlfriend Sonya was taken to the hospital by ambulance because she has asthma and was affected by the gas. Another time, bailiffs first prevented

Sasha's friend Lyosha from entering the courtroom, then detained and took him to the police station, where he was unjustifiably fined 500 rubles for "petty hooliganism." Additionally, activist Anush Panina, a frequent attendee of political court hearings, was roughly detained after one of Sasha's last hearings and then fined for disobeying a bailiff.

Here's how Sasha herself describes the overwhelming support in court:

*They put handcuffs on me and five guards escort me through the corridors and staircases of the courthouse. My lawyer says she's seen even murderers being escorted by just one guard. But I'm much more dangerous — that's why there are five of them. Sometimes even the guards joke about it. Then one of the most pleasant moments of the day happens. I see familiar, dear faces, and unfamiliar, but bright and friendly ones; I see my beloved Sonya. ... Cameras click, people raise their phones as if I'm some kind of celebrity walking the red carpet. People clap and shout words of support. You can't imagine how important it is for me that you come, even though terrible conditions are created for the spectators: they are made to wait for many hours, not allowed into the courtroom, and the hearings are closed. The first time I saw a crowd of people in the corridor, I was stunned. It was the day after my arrest, and I thought no one but my close ones would come so early. I felt so bad, but then I saw all of you, and I felt better. I still feel better now when I see your bright faces, feel your warmth and support. Thank you. They bring me into the courtroom, put me in the cage, and take off the handcuffs.*

In 2023, Sasha Skochilenko celebrated her 33rd birthday in detention in SIZO-5. At the first court hearing after her birthday, her girlfriend Sonya and friend Lyosha came with balloons, and the spectators chanted 'happy birthday' as Sasha was escorted into the courtroom.

Attending trials of political criminal cases also provides a space for anti-war Russians to gather, be among like-minded people, communicate without anxiety or self-censorship, build horizontal connections among activists, and express their protest in a still-legal and safe manner.

Another main method of supporting Sasha is sending her letters in SIZO-5. In various cities across Russia and among Russian migrant communities, activists often organize letter-writing evenings for political prisoners. They gather information about various Russian political prisoners and invite people to start corresponding with them. Through letters, political prisoners feel a strong connection to the outside world, receive news, and find new friends. This greatly supports them during their imprisonment.

Here's how Sasha describes the experience of receiving letters in SIZO:

*Here in prison, nothing is more valuable than letters. Here, they are the only ray of light... Isolation from loved ones and like-minded people is the scariest thing imaginable; I was shocked when I suddenly realized how many people face this situation and how severe their suffering is... I see what isolation does to people and what emotions any prisoner experiences when they receive letters. Everyone cries when they get them. They cry when they write them. I myself am crying now because it is such a powerful emotional experience.*

Thanks to crowdfunding, Sasha's comic "The Book of Depression" was reprinted while she was in SIZO, along with "Notes on Depression" and "What is Mania?" which were published in print for the



first time. The new edition of the comics was successfully presented in Berlin and Lisbon, but the presentation in Moscow was disrupted by law enforcement. Lyosha, one of those who organized the book presentation in Moscow, was harshly detained and beaten by the police, and then fined for ‘trading in unauthorized places’ (although all books were given away for donations). During Sasha's arrest in April 2022 and the search of her apartment, law enforcement officers confiscated Sasha's computer and did not return it, using it as physical evidence of Sasha's “crime.” It was very difficult for Sasha's friend Lyosha to restore all of Sasha's books entirely, as all the materials for the comics were stored on that computer. The computer may even be destroyed by court order, in which case the rest of Sasha's creative work — music, videos — will be irretrievably lost.

Members of Sasha's support group and others wrote hundreds of appeals to the Human Rights Ombudsman, the Human Rights Council in Russia, the Ministry of Health, the Prosecutor's Office and other authorities to improve Sasha's specific conditions of detention.

In Russia and abroad, protests and pickets are held for the release of Sasha and all political prisoners in Russia — Sasha's mother, living in France, actively participates in them. Benefit concerts were organized in support of Sasha; her drawings were presented at exhibitions and printed on clothing; Sasha's open letters and interviews were published in independent Russian media; and Sasha's comics and open letters were voiced by well-known public figures and cultural figures; artists, musicians, writers, directors, journalists, politicians, activists, and many others recorded videos in support of Sasha; Pussy Riot held a demonstration for Sasha's freedom near the Russian embassy in London.

For example, Dmitry Skurikhin, the owner of a grocery store in a village in the Leningrad region, held an action in support of Sasha in his store — like Sasha, he placed price tags in his store demanding freedom for Sasha. After some time, Dmitry was arrested under the article on “discrediting the Russian Armed Forces.” (Skurikhin's arrest was not connected with his support for Sasha.)

Director Vsevolod Korolev, who made a documentary film about a festival in support of Sasha, was detained on charges of “fake news about the Russian Armed Force’.” The case against him was initiated due to a post on VKontakte (a more conservative social network popular in Russia) about the war crimes of the Russian army in Bucha, Borodyanka, and Donetsk in Ukraine.

Director Evgenia Berkovich and artist Ksenia Sorokina recorded a video in support of Sasha, and Ksenia passed on the theater award “Golden Mask” to Sasha, which she received for creating costumes for the play “Finist the Bright Falcon,” directed by Evgenia. Later, Evgenia was sentenced to six years in a penal colony on fabricated charges of “calls for terrorism” for staging this play.

Four hundred doctors signed an open letter demanding Putin to release Sasha: “As a medical community, we have serious concerns about Sasha's health. She has been diagnosed with several severe chronic diseases that require proper medical supervision and a special diet. Being in a penal colony could lead to a significant deterioration in Sasha's health.”

In collaboration with Amnesty International, a school project was created to support Sasha and spread information about her case in Europe — Sasha was very happy to receive in SIZO-5 three bags of

letters with drawings from children from various countries, they were told about Sasha's case at classes in European schools.

## **Closing Arguments and Verdict**

On November 8, 2023, the closing arguments began. The prosecutor requested an eight-year sentence in a general-regime penal colony for Sasha:

*The defendant, Skochilenko, tells us that she acted solely out of peaceful motives: to stop military actions, solely so that people, civilians, would not die. The defendant Skochilenko did not speak in squares, in other public places, about peace for the world,' with the biblical commandments 'thou shalt not kill,' no. She exclusively criticized the armed forces of the Russian Federation.*

*Conducting the special military operation was and is necessary to protect the citizens of the Russian Federation from (Ukrainian) aggression. And the defendant Skochilenko did not stand for peace — she stood against conducting this military operation.*

*To speak out against those who defend their Homeland and to discredit them, succumbing to panic or for some other beliefs and interests — I believe this is not just unacceptable, but a crime.... No, the defendant continues to tell us that she is innocent, that she is being oppressed, not given a chance to speak, not given freedom of speech.*

*Please, speak up! Speak based on accurate information. No one forbids you from expressing your opinion. But to lie, and lie deliberately against the actions of our Homeland's defenders, I believe, Your Honor, is unacceptable.*

The defense attorneys requested that Sasha be acquitted due to the absence of criminal elements in her actions:

*The judicial investigation of a criminal case that should never have existed has concluded. Just a couple of years ago, this story would have seemed absurd, and to many, it still seems so now. Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation is unsound, illogical, and its application restricts Russian citizens' rights to freedom of speech, thought, and belief. We have witnessed harsh sentences, torture, and criminal cases under this article.*

*Let me remind you, the defense did not try to prove the truthfulness of the texts on the price tags — that is not the most important thing. What is important is that we proved that Sasha believed in the accuracy of this information, as it is confirmed by Russian and foreign sources. Yes, it may be incorrect, it may be unpleasant for some, but it exists, and it is included in the case materials. You cannot dispute its existence. It doesn't matter whether it matches the so-called official information [from the Russian Ministry of Defense]. Alexandra believed in it and spread it not to lie, but to help people and stop the fighting.*

*Your Honor, this was the purpose of her act. It is described in her phone notes [which were presented as evidence by the prosecution]:*

*I had an idea — what if I quietly leave peace cards on the shelves in stores under the products? There are still many people who don't know what a miracle human life is, how beautiful and precious it is, and that violence is*

*not the solution to problems. Maybe we are in different 'information bubbles' with these people — we read different news, attend different events, listen to different music, but most likely, we go to the same stores. Today, a store is a place where even the most obstinate person might think about the situation in the world. The language of the price tag is understood by everyone today <...> All the agitation is extremely peaceful and supportive'*

*Here, she mentions stores, price tags, and that all the agitation is extremely peaceful and supportive. About the miracle of human life, about peaceful cards. What political hatred and enmity are we talking about? There is none. Neither you nor the prosecution will succeed in bringing this into the verdict.*

*You cannot be punished for dissent and different feelings. You cannot be punished for objective criticism of the government and its decisions. You cannot be punished for misunderstanding. You cannot be punished for mistrust or trust in the propaganda of any country. Sasha Skochylenko cannot be punished.*

At the final hearing, Sasha delivered her [closing statement](#):

*Article 207.3 is fundamentally discriminatory, as it punishes only certain individuals — those who do not serve in state organs. Just think about it: the information I spread gained such wide circulation only thanks to my investigators, and this information, unlike me, was knowingly false for them. They spread this information among their investigative department, among the prosecution, among judicial bodies, insulted six military personnel with this information, and created such a reason for huge public resonance that this information was known far beyond Russia.*

*If I hadn't been arrested, only one granny, a cashier, and a security guard at a [grocery store] would have known this information. And of these three, according to the materials of the criminal case, this information did not make any impression at all on two of them.*

*If these five pieces of paper are really as dangerous as the state prosecutor claims, then why was this trial initiated at all? So that we could discuss and re-discuss these five theses dozens of times? Even the state prosecutor uttered them — and didn't blush. Let's have an appeal, a cassation, to talk more about Putin, about television — well, we haven't finished yet, we can refer this to all instances and keep talking, talking, talking, maybe for many years.*

*Yes, we have said these five texts hundreds of times. And what happened?... The state prosecutor repeatedly mentioned that these five pieces of paper are exclusively dangerous for our state and society. But what weak faith our prosecutor has in our state and society if he believes that our statehood and public safety can collapse from five small pieces of paper?"*

Judge Demyasheva sentenced Sasha to seven years in a general regime penal colony. The listeners present at the announcement of Sasha's sentence started shouting "Shame!" at the judge. The next day, the Qualification Collegium of Judges of St. Petersburg recommended Judge Demyasheva for the position of deputy chair of the Kalininsky District Court of St. Petersburg. The EU included Judge Demyasheva and Prosecutor Gladyshev in their sanction lists.

Even the pensioner who initiated Sasha's case was surprised by such a lengthy sentence: "She apparently thought she would get off easy and become a heroine at the same time. I don't sympathize with her. Especially after the campaign that unfolded and the ruffraff surrounding her. Oh my! It's just a pity that they raised such youth who are already non-Russian in their beliefs. They are already non-Russian by nationality too... Of course, she might be punished less for the pieces of paper... Give a scolding and let her go."

### **What's Happening with Sasha Now?**

Sasha is in detention in SIZO-5, waiting for appeal hearings of her sentence in the higher court. She is working on finalizing her "Book about Depression" and preparing with her support group to republish her comics for the second time; Sasha also plans to create a new comic. Additionally, Sasha is preparing illustrations for the book "Guide to Bipolar Disorder."

In detention, Sasha continues to draw — her works have been published by independent Russian media outlets "Paper" and "Meduza." Sasha remotely participated in the exhibition of political prisoners' artworks titled "Autonomous Zone," which took place in Moscow in June 2022. The police seized works from the exhibition, including Sasha's. Nevertheless, her drawings and copies of them were exhibited later in Halle, London, Glasgow, Paris, and St. Petersburg.

Unfortunately, Sasha cannot pursue her main passion — music — while in detention. Any musical instruments and even music theory textbooks are prohibited there. So Sasha plays on matchboxes, grids, tin cans, tables, her own body, and sometimes sings in the courtyard during walks. Despite being in detention, Sasha managed to release her musical single on music platforms, thanks to musician Vadim Borisov. Sasha plays noise music, and her project is called Lastochka Plus.

Sasha continues to educate in the field of mental health, drawing comics and collaborating with psychoactivists. In detention, she wrote an article about the horrific trials faced by her cellmate, who entered detention in a state of psychosis, and asked readers to help her.

Sasha is also continuing her anti-war action: "My main performance is "Imprisonment." Who has managed such a long political action, and at the state's expense, no less? I am going to prison as a protest against the war, for freedom of speech and expression. My artistic action cannot be stopped by the authorities because they are the ones producing it."

"Thank you to everyone who followed and covered my case. My trial was brilliant, it was perfect in terms of being illustrative. Every word spoken during the trial was documented. Can you imagine, together we created a document of the era!

Many people ask me, 'Was it worth it? You got seven years because of all this noise. Why did you do it?' My answer is: 'Yes, it was worth it! Absolutely!' Firstly, it was fun... But seriously, yes — it had to be done loudly. Otherwise, what was the point of my action? To do it and then hide my head in the sand? Or even worse, to say that I deeply regret it, showing the regime that it is stronger than a person who desires peace? I showed many people that there is repression in Russia. I drew attention to the

problems of political prisoners, even for those who had never been interested in them before. I showed what can be endured in the fight for peace. I inspired many. Is seven years a high price for that?"

"My trial had the power and impact of ten thousand actions like the one for which I am being tried."

## Postscript

On August 1, 2024, Sasha was released in a prisoner exchange, together with: Evan Gershkovich, Paul Whelan, Alsu Kurmasheva, Vladimir Kara-Murza, Lilia Chanysheva, Ksenia Fadeyeva, Oleg Orlov, Ilya Yashin, Kevin Lik, Rico Krieger, Dieter Voronin, Patrick Schobel, German Moyzhes, Vadim Ostanin, and Andrei Pivovarov.

## For further information:

1. Sasha's Diary about her imprisonment with illustrations: <https://diary.skochilenko.ru/en>
2. Photo story about Sasha's case: [https://paperagency.team/skochilenko\\_en](https://paperagency.team/skochilenko_en)
3. Film about Sasha's case with English subtitles: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4u-1zvVyvE>
4. Petition for Sasha's freedom: <https://www.change.org/p/the-pre-trial-detention-center-may-kill-her-we-demand-an-alternative-form-of-pre-trial-detention-for-sasha-skochilenko>
5. Sasha's English Twitter: <https://x.com/Freedomforsasha>
6. Sasha's music project: <https://lastochkaplus.bandcamp.com/>
7. Sasha's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@Skochilenko>
8. Sasha's anti-war poem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIPr3yOFUuQ&feature=youtu.be>
9. Materials on the case in English, including direct quotes from Sasha and her defenders:  
<https://telegra.ph/Open-Letter-04-20>  
<https://telegra.ph/Yana-Nepovinnovas-Commentary-04-25>  
<https://telegra.ph/Yana-Nepovinnovas-Commentary-04-29>  
<https://telegra.ph/Sonya-on-harassment-Sasha-faces-in-detention-05-05>  
<https://telegra.ph/On-Sashas-new-cell-05-07>  
<https://telegra.ph/Sasha-Skochilenkos-Open-Letter-05-11>  
<https://telegra.ph/Sashas-3rd-Letter-05-12> <https://telegra.ph/Open-Letter-05-20>  
<https://telegra.ph/On-poor-food-and-lost-letters-05-27>  
<https://telegra.ph/About-the-hearing-on-the-pre-trial-measure-extension-for-Sasha-Skochilenko-05-30>  
<https://telegra.ph/On-health-deterioration-new-starvation-tortures-moral-pressure-and-a-collapsed-ceiling-06-07>  
<https://telegra.ph/On-no-oxygen-walks-and-the-meaning-of-proverbs-06-18>  
<https://telegra.ph/On-heart-murmurs-and-videowaivers-06-24>  
<https://telegra.ph/On-sexless-persons-07-05>  
<https://telegra.ph/On-promises-and-Cream-of-Wheat-07-08>  
<https://telegra.ph/On-meeting-with-Sasha-and-the-appeal-hearing-at-hand-05-12>

<https://telegra.ph/On-the-linguistic-and-forensic-psychiatric-examinations-05-15>  
<https://telegra.ph/On-harassment-and-transfer-for-the-psychiatric-evaluation-06-07>  
<https://telegra.ph/On-meeting-with-Sasha-at-the-psychiatric-hospital-06-12>

10. More materials about Sasha: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/russia-artist-detained-amid-clampdown-on-anti-war-feminists/>  
<https://en.zona.media/article/2024/04/01/skochilenko>