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Russia: Stanislav Dutov: “I can’t explain what I went through in Russian prisons: my comrades are still there”

Ukrainian soldier and former prisoner of war

Wednesday 5 March 2025, by [DUTOV Stanislav](#), [MAS Cristina](#) (Date first published: 14 February 2025).

Stanislav Dutov (Dnipro, 1990) was a chemistry student until he joined the Ukrainian Azov battalion in 2015. He fought in the city of Mariupolo against the Russian invasion and was besieged for seven months in the Azovstal steel plant with his comrades. He was captured and imprisoned in Russia for two years, until he was released last October in a prisoner of war exchange. A Russian, he now lives in Kiev, where he continues his rehabilitation.

You fought in the siege of Mariupol, the main Ukrainian city under Russian occupation. What was that experience like?

— I was in Mariupol from the beginning to the end. We tried to do everything we could to defend the city. In the end, we had to take refuge in the Azovstal steel plant, where we held out as long as we could. We had no food, no water, and no medicine. It was very hard because we were under a very strict siege: the Russian army controlled a 120-kilometer perimeter around the city. From time to time, food and medicine were brought to us by helicopters, which also evacuated the wounded. The defenders of Azovstal did heroic work in horrible conditions. The Russian soldiers came closer every day, and there were saboteurs in the city. We had no anti-tank ammunition and could only retreat. The last three weeks we ran out of medicine and could no longer save the wounded. But nevertheless, we had a goal and we did everything we could. Until one day our commander came and told us that to save our lives we had to surrender. We had 600 or 700 wounded...

And then they took them prisoner.

— First we evacuated the wounded, and then the various units surrendered: there were about three thousand of us. We left the plant, were taken to a bridge, and then put on buses. We were taken to the Olenivka camp, where there were many prisoners in a very small space. In our unit, they reserved a whole hut for us, and one day there was an explosion, killing 60 or 70 prisoners. Then we were dispersed: some to Donetsk, others to Russian prisons. There are many witnesses from liberated Ukrainian prisoners who have described the horrors of Russian prisons, but I cannot speak: my comrades are still there.

Why did you join the Azov battalion in 2015, after the war in Donbas broke out and Russia annexed Crimea?

— Some friends of mine joined us and I followed them. The media was talking a lot about it at the time and we wanted to see it with our own eyes.

Russia says it is a far-right unit.

— Russian propaganda says a lot of things. If we look at all these years of existence of this unit, no crime has been committed. Russia has a lot of resources to finance its propaganda, and in Ukraine we do not have so many means, and that is why we are losing the information battle. The Azov unit is part of the National Guard of Ukraine: we are soldiers who love our land.

Where are your friends from 2014?

— One is still alive, although he has just been wounded for the fourth time. The other unfortunately died before the siege of Mariupolus.

Do you regret becoming an Azov soldier?

— Would you regret joining people who love their country to defend it?

But he has paid a very high price.

— In Ukraine, everyone has paid a high price. Civilians too. We had no other choice. We have not invaded anyone: we have only defended ourselves.

Do you think that Volodymyr Zelensky's government has been up to the task?

— I am not a politician, I am not interested in politics: I am a soldier. And I can only say one thing: that our enemy has done everything to achieve its objective, to get to the situation we are in now.

Trump has said that he has begun to talk with Putin about peace in Ukraine. What does peace mean to you?

— While they are talking, my colleagues in Ukraine are doing their job right now: they are protecting their country. Amidst all the talk, the invasion is not over: it continues every day.

Should Ukraine give up territory in exchange for peace?

— It's a very tough question. Do you think that with this *peace* Is it all over? Since 2013, Russia has not stopped conquering territories.

Stanislav Dutov

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Interview by Cristina Mas