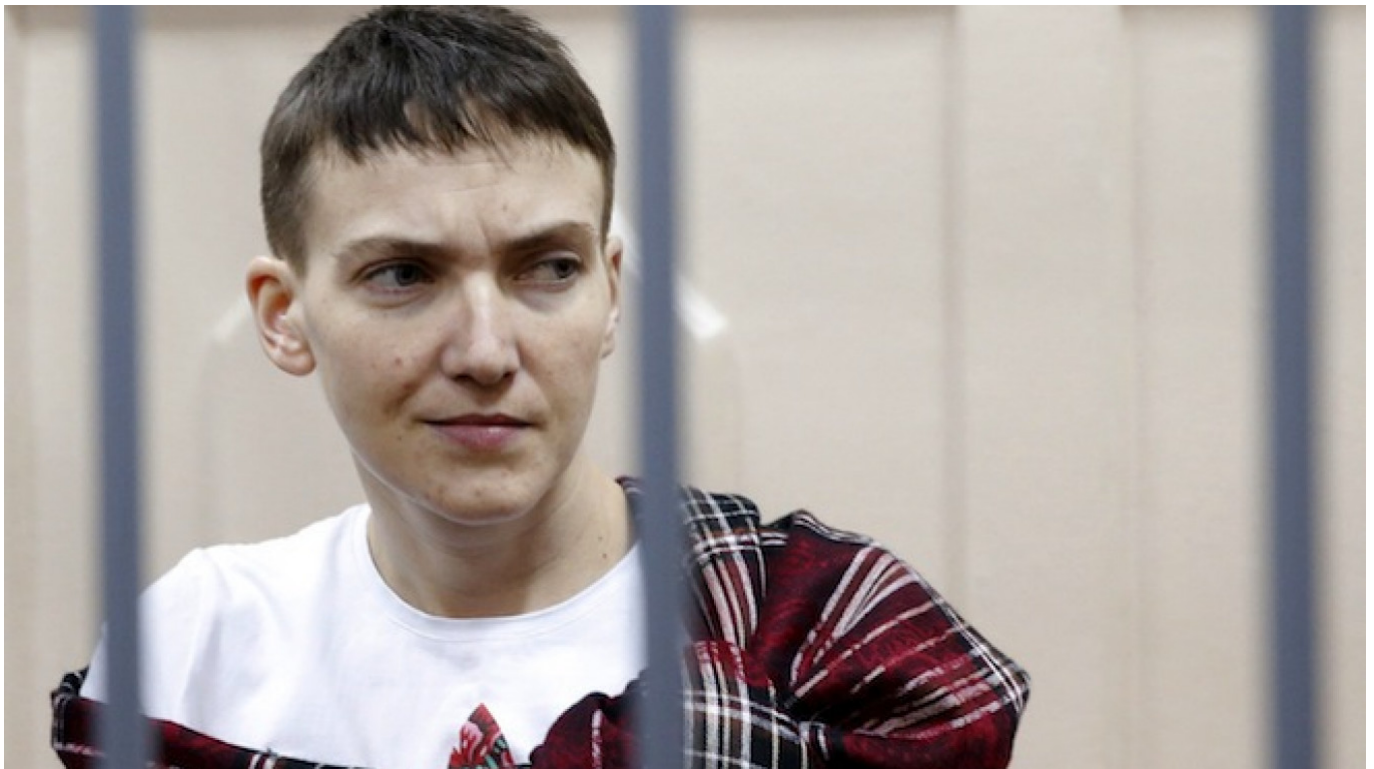


Five Days and Counting: Savchenko's Hunger Strike Enters Critical Phase

By [Anton Naumlyuk](#)

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"You have only a week to deliver your verdict. I may not live to see it." Nadezhda Savchenko.

DONETSK / MOSCOW — When they finally came, Ukrainian officer Nadezhda Savchenko's last words in court were short and sharp. "If you wanted to show how Russians were fascists, you've done well," she said, predicting Russia would soon see its own popular revolution.

Savchenko finished by standing on a bench, offering a middle-finger salute to the presiding judge, and singing the Ukrainian national anthem.

She is accused of "abetting the killing" of two Russian journalists in Metallist, near Luhansk in separatist-controlled eastern Ukraine in June 2014. The trial has been condemned by many neutral observers: held in a country not officially involved in the war, and with charges that border on the absurd.

Savchenko was due to be given a final word in court on March 3. Things took a dramatic turn,

however, when the judge decided to postpone proceedings until March 9. Savchenko responded by announcing a dry hunger strike.

In court, Savchenko's translator read out the statement the Ukrainian officer had prepared for the earlier hearing (the text was later published online by Savchenko's sister.)

In that statement, Savchenko compared Russian President Vladimir Putin with Hitler and Napoleon, and declared that she would continue her hunger strike if her sentence was postponed for more than a week.

"This court has stolen a week of my life, and now you only have a week to deliver your verdict. It is possible that I may not live to see it," she said in court.

When the judge announced sentencing would begin on March 21, Savchenko shouted that she would continue her hunger strike, then began singing the Ukrainian anthem. She was joined by her sister, and a number of activists who had travelled to Donetsk in Russia's southern Rostov region to support her.

Nadezhda Savchenko's 78-year-old mother Maria was also in the courtroom. As the judge announced the date of sentencing, she held her head in her hands. Later, she tried to speak to the judges, but they hurriedly left the chamber.

Outside the courtroom, Maria Savchenko revealed the message she had attempted to relay. "I wanted to tell them that I hoped their children would be tried as unjustly, illegally, as my Nadya," she said. "I held Nadya's hand in the courtroom. It was cold. She told me she wouldn't live to March 21."

"She Might Yet Die"

Clearly, if Savchenko continues the hunger strike, there are two possible outcomes: she will die, or authorities will forcibly treat her.

According to the British Nutrition Association, humans can survive for up to 8-10 days without food and water. Russian law allows for intervention if "life is in danger."

Now five days without food or drink, Savchenko is showing signs of physical deterioration. Speaking to The Moscow Times, her sister Vera said that her condition had worsened "significantly" since Friday. "Her legs are swollen, she's experiencing tachycardia and convulsions," she said. "Nadya shed 4 kilograms overnight."

One of Savchenko's lawyers, Ilya Novikov, said he did not believe Russia was ready to resolve the situation. "Russia is still not ready to make the right decision, and unfortunately something major will have to happen for them to see the light."

Some in the Kremlin "might think" Savchenko's death or serious injury would solve the problem. "In fact, it will make things worse on so many levels," Novikov said.

In the meantime Savchenko refuses to deal with Russian doctors. A team of Ukrainian medics has been deployed to her — they are currently held on the Russian border awaiting permission to enter the country. According to another of her lawyers Nikolai Polozov,

the court has refused to issue necessary permits, citing a lack of judges available to authorize the documents.

"Apparently, someone in Moscow decided to exacerbate the situation," he said.

On Thursday evening it was confirmed by Moscow officials that Ukrainian doctors have been kept from Savchenko on orders from the court because of her "inflammatory behavior."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in a phone conversation with his Ukrainian counterpart Pavel Klimkin, explained that Ukrainian doctors were initially going to be granted access to Savchenko, but after the hearing, the court decided against it.

"Savchenko's inflammatory behavior during the court hearing, and the insults she addressed to the court, changed the situation and made this visit impossible," Lavrov was quoted as saying in an online statement on the ministry's website.

The statement went on to say that Savchenko's health "doesn't elicit concerns" — she feels "fine," and Russian medics are consistently monitoring her condition.

Reaction in the West

Savchenko's declining health has attracted widespread attention in the West. The European Union issued a statement saying reports about her dry hunger strike were "extremely worrisome," and called on Russia for her immediate release. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry echoed these concerns. In a statement, he said Savchenko's trial and imprisonment demonstrated "disregard for international standards, as well as for Russia's commitments under the Minsk agreements."

Russian top-ranking officials immediately condemned these statements, describing them as an attempt by the West to influence and interfere with independent court proceedings.

Her lawyers believe the West will impose new sections against Russia if the Savchenko case is not resolved quickly. Novikov, who is currently in the United States, told The Moscow Times he believed Western officials are ready "to go quite far." "It's not just words; it looks like a procedure of imposing new sanctions is about to start," he said.

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