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Russia Readies Handover of Sentsov to Ukraine in Possible Prisoner Swap

By The Moscow Times

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Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov

Russia's Justice Ministry is preparing to hand four imprisoned Ukrainian citizens to Kiev, including film director Oleg Sentsov, in a possible prisoner swap, the Interfax news agency reported Friday, citing a statement from the ministry.

In the statement the Justice Ministry said it had asked the prison service "to prepare the necessary documents for the transfer of prisoners Alexander Kolchenko, Gennady Afanasyev, Oleg Sentsov and Yury Soloshenko." It added that Ukrainian authorities had been informed of the move.

Sentsov, Kolchenko and Afanasyev were charged with masterminding terror attacks in Crimea after Russia annexed the region from Ukraine in 2014. Sentsov was sentenced last year to 20 years, while Kolchenko received a 10-year jail term.

Their case has been widely viewed as politically motivated and has been condemned in Ukraine and the West.

Soloshenko was convicted of espionage and is serving a 6-year sentence.

The Justice Ministry said a Russian court would take the final decision on a handover.

Igor Morozov, a Russian senator and member of the senate's committee on international affairs, said authorities were likely preparing to exchange Ukrainian convicts for two Russians currently on trial in Kiev. “Most probably, Ukraine will send Russian citizens [Alexander] Aleksandrov and [Yevgeny] Yerofeyev ... to Russia,” he was quoted as saying by the RIA Novosti news agency.

Aleksandrov and Yerofeyev were arrested in Ukraine last year and accused of being Russian servicemen fighting alongside separatists in eastern Ukraine. Russia has denied that the pair were on active service.

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