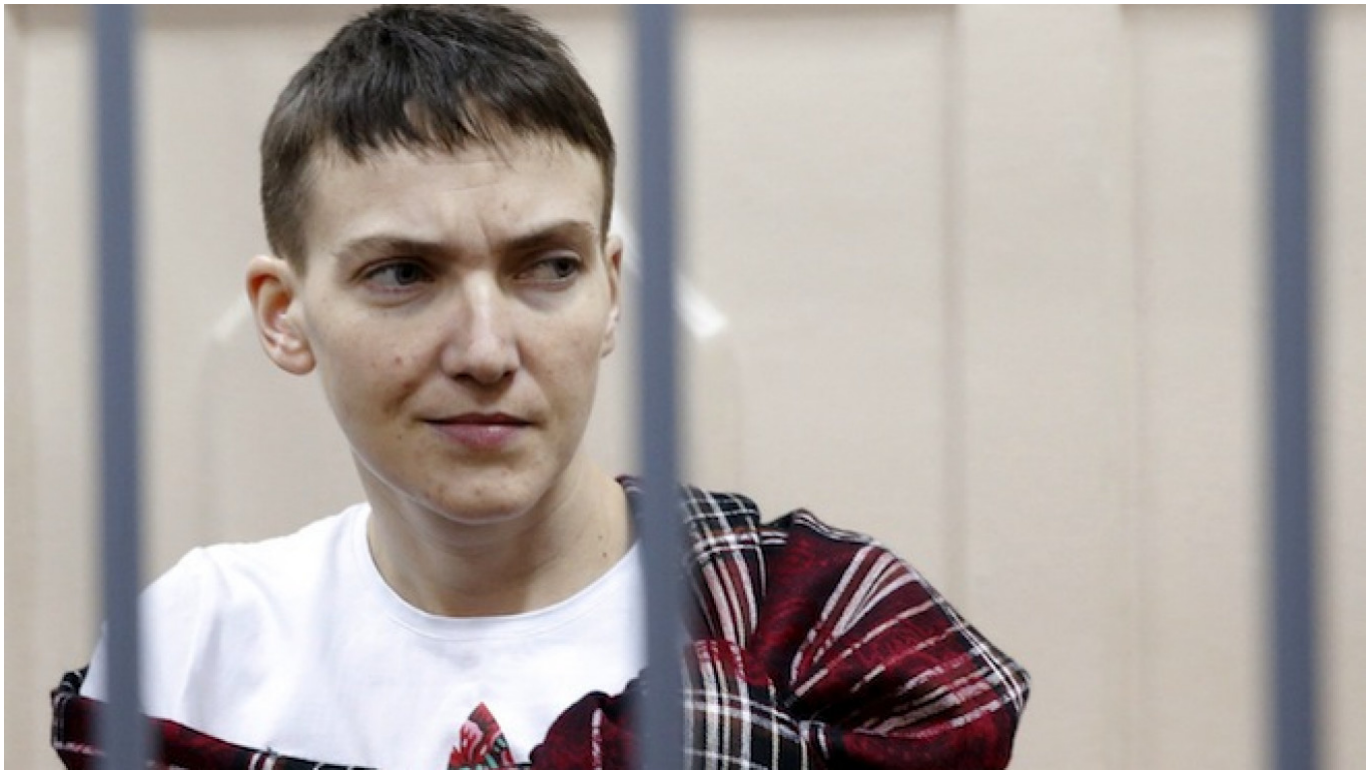
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No Prisoner Exchange for Savchenko - Justice Ministry

By The Moscow Times

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Ukrainian pilot Nadezhda Savchenko

The Russian Justice Ministry has announced that a long-awaited prisoner exchange between Moscow and Kiev would not happen.

Jailed Ukrainian military pilot Nadiya Savchenko was due to be extradited in exchange for two Russian soldiers, Alexander Alexandrov and Yevgeny Yerofeyev, following high-level talks.

Russian Justice Minister Alexander Konovalov told the RIA Novosti news agency on Tuesday that the deal would only go ahead if Savchenko served the punishment given to her by the Russian court in her native Ukraine.

“The prisoner transfer process is a long one,” said Konovalov. “It doesn't happen on the basis of an exchange. It's the same international process the Russian government follows with any country it has a bilateral agreement with. These transfers often fall through.”

While a more informal prisoner exchange can be arranged through diplomatic channels, the practice doesn't come under Justice Ministry jurisdiction, he said.

Following talks in late April, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko had announced in media interviews that Savchenko would be "returning home in a few weeks."

More recently however, Alexandrov's and Yerofeyev's lawyer had told reporters that an exchange seemed unlikely.

"[For the exchange to happen,] Ukraine needs to recognize Savchenko's verdict and Russia needs to do the same with Erofeyev and Alexandrov," said lawyer Olga Sokolovskaya in an interview with Radio Free Europe. "It's obvious that neither side will do that."

Savchenko was given a prison sentence of 22 years by a court in Rostov on charges of involvement in killing Russian journalists in eastern Ukraine. Alexandrov and Yerofeyev were sentenced to 14 years by a court in Kiev for "participation in armed aggression against Ukraine" in the Donbass region.

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