The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Jails Prominent Human Rights Lawyer 12 Years for Treason

November 12, 2026



Maria Bontsler. **@novaya_europe / Telegram**

A court in Russia's Baltic exclave of Kaliningrad sentenced prominent human rights lawyer Maria Bontsler to 12 years in a penal colony on treason charges for allegedly spying for Ukraine, the legal rights project Slovo Zashite reported Thursday.

Bontsler, 66, was arrested in Kaliningrad last May on charges of "confidential cooperation with a foreign state," which were later upgraded to treason charges.

Prosecutors accused Bontsler of passing information to Ukrainian intelligence services about Federal Security Service (FSB) officers who investigated espionage, treason and terrorism cases. They allege she gathered the information while representing defendants in those cases.

Bontsler, who became well-known for taking on some of the toughest politically motivated cases throughout her decades-long career, denied the charges.

Her lawyers maintained that all the information she allegedly passed to Ukrainian intelligence

was public and disclosed in open court hearings.

The Nobel Peace Prize-winning human rights group Memorial considers Bontsler a political prisoner.

“My administrative and criminal prosecution stems from my professional work in human rights advocacy and legal practice — specifically, from providing qualified legal assistance to dissidents, members of the opposition, and others,” Bontsler said in her final statement to the court.

“This is, in effect, a political reprisal against me,” she added.

Bontsler’s trial was held behind closed doors, with independent lawyers and Bontsler herself barred from attending hearings.

Bontsler said she suffered a number of health problems during her trial, including an instance of cardiac arrest for which she said she did not receive adequate treatment.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2026/11/12/russia-jails-prominent-human-rights-lawyer-12-years-for-treason-a94248