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Twin sisters from Donetsk address the parliament of the Netherlands as Shakhtar Donetsk carries "Invest in Ukraine" into the Champions League



Olha and Alina, 19-year-old twin sisters from Donetsk, spoke at the parliament of the Netherlands about ten years of life under Russian occupation and their decision to continue their education in Ukraine. They travelled as participants in "Youth Chooses Ukraine", a pilot project of the [Rinat Akhmetov Foundation](#), part of SCM, together with **Foundation Director General Kseniia Sukhova** and a representative of the Office of the Ukrainian Ombudsman. The delegation also visited the Embassy of Ukraine in the Netherlands. The visit coincided with the UEFA Champions League match between PSV Eindhoven and [Shakhtar Donetsk](#), our football club and a partner of the project.

Olha and Alina are twin sisters from Donetsk who lived for ten years in the occupied city while keeping their pro-Ukrainian position. In their address in The Hague they spoke about the importance of supporting young people who have returned from occupation or from unlawful transfer, and about how those young people settle back into life in Ukraine.

Under occupation, the sisters say, a Ukrainian accent could mean lower marks, humiliation and complaints from teachers, and speaking Ukrainian openly was not safe. Alina studied the language by herself and prepared for entry to a Ukrainian university. The sisters eventually escaped occupied Donetsk for Kyiv on their own to continue their studies.

"I always understood that I wanted to gain a profession, to develop and to achieve results in life. But under occupation I did not see such a future for myself. I chose Ukraine, because this is where I see my future. And I am very grateful to the Foundation for the support that helps me build that future. Only after returning to Ukraine did I really feel what freedom is," said Olha.

"For me it is very important that through this project I can build my future and receive support. We meet mentors who help us make our dreams real. I want to become an architect and, after victory, to help rebuild my home city of Donetsk. It hurts to see how the city has declined over the

years of occupation. That is why I want to develop here in Ukraine," said Alina.

Why did the delegation travel to the Netherlands?

The visit is part of international advocacy work on support for young Ukrainians and their return home. Kseniia Sukhova, Director General of the Rinat Akhmetov Foundation, said the Netherlands matters for international work on Ukraine because The Hague is home to the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court. Cooperation with these institutions is important for holding Russia to account for crimes committed in Ukraine.

At the Embassy of Ukraine in the Netherlands, the delegation discussed the needs of Ukrainian young people. Kseniia Sukhova also presented the Foundation's "Heart of Azovstal" programme of systemic support for the defenders of Mariupol and their families, and handed commemorative bracelets to embassy representatives.

What is the "Youth Chooses Ukraine" project?

"Youth Chooses Ukraine" is a pilot project of the Rinat Akhmetov Foundation for young people who have returned from the temporarily occupied territories or after unlawful deportation. It provides support, mentoring and help with education as they settle in Ukraine.

"Together with the state we are working out a clear route which in future may become a protocol of support for young people returning from the temporarily occupied territories or after unlawful deportation... We want every such young person to know: Ukraine is waiting for them, there are opportunities here for study, work, development and life, and the state and partners are ready to help them along this path," said Kseniia Sukhova.

How is Shakhtar Donetsk involved?

Shakhtar Donetsk, our football club, is a partner of "Youth Chooses Ukraine" and helps present the project internationally. In Eindhoven, Olha and Alina joined Kseniia Sukhova at Shakhtar's open pre-match training session, seeing their favourite team live for the first time, and then supported the club from the stands during the match against PSV.

The game was the first in which the team played in shirts carrying the Rinat Akhmetov Foundation logo, alongside the SCM logo and a call to "Invest in Ukraine". Through the Champions League, the shirts will help introduce an international audience to the stories of young people taking part in the project.