



PRESS KIT

THE GUTUL CASE

ANATOMY OF POLITICAL PERSECUTION

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ABOUT THE BOOK

“**The Gutul Case. Anatomy of Political Persecution**” is a documentary account of political repression in modern-day Moldova (an EU candidate country) and a real story of a leader caught between the country’s government and her own people.

The book reveals what happens when the head of a small, distinctive autonomous region defends her identity, history, and traditions – even at the risk of prison.

THE BOOK FEATURES

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LETTERS

by political prisoner Evghenia Gutul, Governor of Gagauzia, an autonomy that is part of Moldova.

They were written in the torture cell of Chisinau Prison No. 13 and are addressed to:

children who cannot be hugged right now;

President Maia Sandu, on whose initiative Gutul ended up behind bars;

the European Parliament, to show the real picture of what is happening in the country;

independent journalists, calling on them not to hide the truth; her own people, whom she has not betrayed.

- **This book is for everyone** interested in the modern history of Eastern Europe and who wants to understand what is happening in the post-Soviet region right now.
- For Europeans who hear about Moldova in the news but do not know the stories of the people living there.
- For those who follow politics and human rights and want to see from the inside how political persecution works.
- For those who want to understand how small peoples live and what they fight for.

WHO IS EVGHENIA GUTUL

Evghenia Gutul is the main political target for the Moldovan authorities. She consistently defends the special status of the Gagauz Autonomous Region and opposes the harsh policies of the authorities in the Moldovan capital of Chisinau. The entire arsenal of political and criminal persecution has been deployed against her.



Evghenia Gutul's journey is a classic grassroots story: she was born in the Gagauz village of Etulia, earned a law degree from the State University of Moldova, and made her way from a rank-and-file employee to the highest official of the region. The turning point came in **2023**, when Gutul won the election for the Baskan, or Governor, of Gagauzia thanks to overwhelming support.

As a governor of the autonomous region, Evghenia Gutul enjoyed genuine love of her people. She immediately set about fulfilling her campaign promises and, together with her team, implemented numerous infrastructure and social projects, despite enormous pressure from the country's authorities. Under her leadership, Gagauzia built **more than 100 kilometers of roads**, renovated schools and hospitals, and opened the first large-scale amusement **park in southern Moldova – Gagauziyaland** – completely free for children and adults.

She put a lot of focus on social support: **40,000 pensioners and public sector employees** received monthly bonuses, and regular assistance was provided for seriously ill children. The autonomy launched programmes to preserve the Gagauz language and national culture.

WHAT IS GAGAUZIA

Gagauzia is a small autonomous region in southern Moldova, with its capital in Comrat, located one hundred kilometers from Chisinau. This region is inhabited by a unique people: the Gagauz speak a Turkic language but practice Orthodox Christianity.

The foundation of Gagauz society is their deep bond with their native land and painstaking observance of traditions. Preserving historical memory, generational continuity, and protecting the ancestral language serve as the main unifying force for local residents.

It was this unconditional love for their native land and the sincere desire to protect their identity that allowed the Gagauz people to defend their right to self-determination in the 1990s, securing official recognition of the region's autonomous status.



POLITICAL PERSECUTION

In 2023, Evghenia Gutul, a candidate from the opposition, lawfully won the election for the head of Gagauzia. However, the central government of Moldova, led by President Maia Sandu, refused to recognize the election results and to include Gutul in the Government, as required by law.

The election victory was followed by unprecedented pressure: the autonomy began to be stripped of its legal rights. The Gagauz were to be punished for their choice – the region's budget was cut, social support programmes were blocked, the Comrat Court of Appeal was abolished, and Gagauzia was deprived of the right to participate in the appointment of a prosecutor. Furthermore, Gagauz language teachers were removed from kindergartens.

Criminal cases were opened against the head of the autonomy, exhausting her with endless court hearings and interrogations. The authorities offered a deal: they would drop the case altogether if she voluntarily gave up her mandate. **Evghenia Gutul refused.**

The response was a harsh guilty verdict.

The young politician and mother of two was sentenced to seven years on charges that international observers call politically motivated. Evghenia Gutul was sent to Prison No. 13 in Chisinau – a facility known to human rights defenders for its inhumane conditions. She has been in a solitary torture cell for nearly a year.



QUOTES FROM THE BOOK

“I am Gagauz. I say this to myself every day in my cell: in the morning, when I wake up, and in the evening, before I fall asleep. It is my anchor. It is what prevents me from breaking. I am from Etulia. It is a village in the very south of Gagauzia. When they ask me why I am in prison, I close my eyes, remember my childhood, and see the street where I grew up. Vineyards along the road. Houses with brightly coloured shutters. Wells in the yards where the water was cold even in the July heat. I remember running barefoot on this land in the summer. My feet burned; Mom yelled: "Put your shoes on!" And I couldn't. I wanted to feel the earth with my soles and for it to feel me. Even then I knew: 'This is our land.'”

“The defense insisted on interrogating more than 170 witnesses who could confirm my innocence. The court refused, and the judicial investigation was concluded. Paradox: the prosecution's witnesses themselves, in the appeal, did not confirm key elements of the accusation. They said they had not seen my actions, could not confirm that I had taken money. But even that did not lead the court to reconsider its position. At the same time, the court rejected all of the defense's evidence but did not explain why. The court refused to interrogate witnesses but gave no reasons.”

“The court decided that I must remain in prison, despite there being no risk of flight and despite my having two young children. I was deprived of the opportunity to be present in the courtroom and personally participate in the process that shaped my fate. The appeal took place remotely: I was in Penitentiary No. 13, the connection was via video conferencing. In fact, I could hardly hear what was being said in court because the microphone was malfunctioning or not working at all. I could not follow the course of the hearing, and I did not understand which issues were being discussed. I had no opportunity to communicate confidentially with my lawyers.”

“On the eve of the appeal hearing, I was visited in Penitentiary No. 13 by two international lawyers – William Julié from France and Gonzalo Boye from Spain. They came to meet with me and prepare for the proceedings. After the visit, William Julié gave a public comment about what he had seen: 'This is a farce. I have never seen anything like this anywhere in the world. This is my first case like this.'”



QUOTES FROM THE BOOK

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Ms. Sandu, how do you sleep at night?
I sleep on a hard prison bed in a cell of Prison No. 13 — a prison that has been internationally recognised as having inhumane conditions. It is damp and mouldy; cockroaches and mice run around at night. From the window, I cannot see the sky — only a concrete wall with barbed wire and a guard tower. I wake up several times each night, because sometimes I hear the mice. But my conscience is clear.

I know that you sleep in your apartment — the one you love to show off in interviews. An ordinary building, an ordinary apartment, no luxury. You carefully cultivate the image of a simple person: you go hiking with walking sticks, you tell stories about how you take care of your elderly mother, you demonstrate that your whole life is only work and concern for the country. Just a modest woman who serves the people.

But we know what goes on behind the facade of this ostentatious modesty. You have vices far worse than palaces and limousines: a thirst for power and a panic-stricken fear of disappointing your Western handlers. That is what drives you.

”I still cannot understand the first-instance verdict. Judge Ana Cucerescu, who handed down such a harsh decision — she is my neighbour. We live in the same building. She’s on the first floor, we’re on the eighth. And I imagine how she regularly meets my children in the stairwell — Dan and Mark. Doesn’t her heart skip a beat when she sees two underage children growing up without their mother?”

”Sandu has stolen the word "Europe." She has betrayed the real Europe for the sake of geopolitical games. She took the concepts sacred to Europeans — freedom, democracy, human rights — and turned them into empty slogans to cover up repression. Moldova under Sandu is a warning to all of Europe: this is what happens when "European values" become a cover for: the elimination of national sovereignty, the impoverishment of the population, political repression against dissenters, geopolitical games to the detriment of ordinary people.”

QUOTES FROM THE BOOK

“I am scared that I will miss seven whole years of my children’s lives. That Mark will forget my voice. That Daniil will learn to get by without me. That I will come out of here a stranger to them. Sometimes at night I wake up from these thoughts and cannot fall back asleep. Artyom told me that Mark has started talking. He started speaking late. When I was still free, he could only say a few words. It pains me so much that I am missing these moments of his life. It hurts to realise that I do not hear his first phrases. My heart bleeds at that thought. Those moments cannot be brought back.”

“Mark, I give you my word: I will return. I imagine this day every minute. You will run up to me, and I will lift you in my arms, you are already so big, but I will lift you anyway! We will hug for a long, long time. And until I am far away, remember one thing: there is an invisible thread between your little heart and mine. It cannot be broken. When you are sad, think of me and tug on this thread with your thoughts. I will immediately feel it and send you my love. Grow up strong, my boy. Listen to Papa and your brother; they are your protectors.

* * *

“Look at what has happened to Moldova. The inflation rate over 5 years has increased by more than 75% in total. Food prices have risen 2–3 times. 34% of the population lives below the poverty line. Pensions are among the lowest in Europe. The national debt has tripled. One third of the farmers are on the brink of bankruptcy. And most importantly, people are leaving: during the rule of the PAS, another 400,000 people have left the country (that is 15% of what remains). Young people are leaving – the most active, educated, talented. Those who could be building our country.”

“The regime thought it would break me with the verdict, but the opposite happened. When the regime tries to break me, to make me renounce my beliefs, to force me to betray my people, I remember an old Gagauz proverb: Taştan su çıkmaz. You cannot squeeze water from a stone. It is impossible. They think a woman in prison won’t hold out. That she’ll give in, renounce her mandate and betray those who voted for her.

My people have survived for centuries where others gave up. We squeezed water from a stone when there was nothing left. That is our character. I will not give in.”

APPEAL BY EVGHENIA GUTUL TO INDEPENDENT JOURNALISTS OF ALL COUNTRIES

DEAR COLLEAGUES,

My name is Evghenia Gutul. I am writing this letter from Prison No. 13 in Chisinau, where I am being held for political reasons. I have been sentenced to seven years of imprisonment for defending the rights of my people.

I am not addressing you so that you will take my word for it. I am addressing those among you who still remember that journalism is not retelling official press releases, but investigation and the search for truth. A real journalist does not take sides until they have examined all the facts. And all the facts of my case are publicly available.

If such journalists still exist in the world, this letter is for you.

WHAT REAL JOURNALISM IS?

If journalists had their own professional oath, it might sound something like this: "I will verify facts, not retell other people's opinions. I will publish material only if it is truthful. I will listen to both sides before drawing conclusions. I will not sell my independence for money, for access to power, or for security."

That is the essence of journalism: to give people evidence to inform their decisions about their lives and their country. A real journalist remembers that their job is not to serve the authorities, but to hold them accountable.

WHAT IS HAPPENING TODAY IN MOLDOVA?

In our country, freedom of speech is being ruthlessly strangled. A huge number of media outlets have been shut down in recent years. Journalists are summoned to the Information and Security Service for "preventive talks". After such talks, some fall silent forever.

This is not journalism – this is propaganda. Only those who agree with the authorities remain on the air. Any critical opinion is called a "threat to national security."



APPEAL BY EVGHENIA GUTUL TO INDEPENDENT JOURNALISTS OF ALL COUNTRIES

MY CASE: THE FACTS

That is why I am turning to you.

I have been accused of "illegal financing of a political party." The authorities claim that I received money from abroad to finance political activities. Examine the materials of my case. Check the facts, and you will not find a single piece of real evidence.

There is not a single witness who knows me personally. The people brought as prosecution witnesses testified under oath that they had never seen me, that they do not know who I am.

There is not a single document proving the transfer of money. There is not a single banking transaction. There is nothing except a political decision to imprison an inconvenient person.

And still, I was sentenced to seven years.

I am not asking you to take my word for it. I am asking you to do what any real journalist does: verify the facts, study the documents, ask the uncomfortable questions.

Why is a person sentenced to seven years without a single piece of evidence of guilt? Why do the witnesses not know the accused? Why does the court accept such testimony? The answers to these questions are in the case files, and they are waiting for someone who is not afraid to look into them.

WHY WAS I IMPRISONED

In reality, I was imprisoned because I became inconvenient. I refused to obey Chisinau and defended the rights of Gagauzia. I opposed the course that the current authorities are imposing. In the referendum on European integration, Gagauzia voted 94.84% against, and I did not force my people to vote "correctly."

I did not remain silent when our autonomy rights were taken away, when international aid to farmers was blocked, when television channels were shut down and freedom of speech was strangled.

It works simply: take an inconvenient politician, find a law, invent an accusation, hold a show trial, and the person disappears for seven years.
Clean. Legal. "European style."



APPEAL BY EVGHENIA GUTUL TO INDEPENDENT JOURNALISTS OF ALL COUNTRIES

MY APPEAL TO YOU

I understand: investigating the case of a political prisoner from a small country that few have heard of is a risk. It is uncomfortable. It may spoil relations with those who consider Moldova a "European success story."

But this is not only about me. It is about the world in which your children will live. The truth is the foundation of any society, and this is not a question of who is right: me or the Moldovan authorities. It is a question of whether people can be sent to prison without evidence, whether television channels can be shut down without a trial, whether censorship can be called "fighting disinformation."

If this is possible in Moldova today, it could become possible tomorrow in your country, with you, with your children. Today I am sitting in prison, but tomorrow it could be a journalist who asked an uncomfortable question, an activist who went to a rally, an ordinary person who dared to say "no" to the authorities.

If you remain silent, the world will remember: it is possible. The authorities of Moldova and the authorities of other countries will remember: the world is not watching.

But if even one of you looks at the materials of my case and writes an article based on facts – **that will mean that journalism is still alive, and that the truth matters.**



**PLEASE,
TELL THE TRUTH.**

I have two children. They were left without a mother not because I committed a crime, but because I refused to remain silent.

Perhaps my voice is not loud enough to change the whole world. But perhaps your voice can bring a mother back to two children. And if that is the only thing that changes, it will already be enough.

THE WORLD MUST KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING IN MOLDOVA.

*With respect and hope,
Evghenia Gutul
Baskan of Gagauzia
Prison No. 13, Chisinau*