

'Empty Beds' Stands Inside EU Commission as Coalition Meets Monday on Ukraine's Abducted Children

A life-size replica of an abducted Ukrainian child's bedroom stands inside the Berlaymont as the Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children meets May 11.

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM, May 11, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On Monday, May 11, the [International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children](#) convenes inside the European Commission headquarters in Brussels. The meeting brings together EU High Representative Kaja Kallas, European Commissioner for Enlargement Marta Kos, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha, Canadian Foreign Minister Anita Anand, and ministers and officials from coalition countries. Its stated aims include advancing concrete actions to secure the return of deported Ukrainian children, introducing new EU sanctions on Russia related to their abduction, and holding Russia accountable.

Standing inside the same building is "Empty Beds," a life-size replica of the bedroom of Artem, a composite 13-year-old built from the verified testimonies of Ukrainian children deported by Russia. The installation opened to the public at the Berlaymont on May 9 for Europe Day and will form part of the reception following the Coalition's official session on May 11.

The installation has already begun shaping European policy. Following his visit at the European Parliament and a conversation with Zhanna Galejeva, Co-Founder of [Bird of Light Ukraine](#) and Co-Creator of "Empty Beds," Italian MEP Pasquale Tridico drafted an amendment to the European Parliament's 2024 EU budget discharge report. The amendment has since passed the European Parliament, calling on the Union to contribute to international efforts to identify deported Ukrainian children, support family tracing and reunification, and hold Russia



Visitors at the European Commission's Berlaymont building on Europe Day read about the "Empty Beds" exhibit, an installation highlighting the realities of abducted Ukrainian children.

accountable.

The Commission placement is the third time in eight weeks the installation has been positioned inside an EU institution at the invitation of its officials. "Empty Beds" opened at Europa Experience in Luxembourg on March 23, alongside Ukraine's Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights, [Dmytro Lubinets](#). Nobel Peace Prize laureate Oleksandra Matviichuk spoke from the stage that evening, saying that "childhood has an expiry date." It opened at the European Parliament in Brussels on April 14 at the invitation of Vice-President Pina Picierno, who called the abduction of Ukrainian children "a weapon of war."



An attendee reflects on the details of the "Empty Beds" exhibit at the Berlaymont. The installation meticulously recreates the personal space left behind by a deported Ukrainian child.

Among the MEPs who visited during the three weeks at the European Parliament was Vice-President Ewa Kopacz, the European Parliament's Coordinator on the Rights of the Child. Speaking inside the installation, Kopacz said: "These 20,000 children should return to their rooms, to their homes, to their parents."

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*Ewa Kopacz, Vice-President,
European Parliament*

Since 2022, Russia has documented the deportation or forced transfer of more than 20,000 Ukrainian children. Just over 2,100 have been returned. Ukrainian officials and international monitors believe the actual number taken is significantly higher.

"It feels like time is passing and decisions that have to be made are not being made," said Zhanna Galeyeva, Co-Founder of Bird of Light Ukraine. "Ukraine needs this today. Right now. This moment. Not just in words. Not just in summits. In real actions and real decisions."

"Empty Beds" began in 2024 as a photography exhibition in New York, covered by The New York Times and The Guardian, and traveled to Tokyo in 2025 with national coverage on NHK and in the Sankei Shimbun. The current installation, built in Ukraine, evolves the work into a fully three-dimensional environment engineered for placement inside institutional venues.

Following the Commission placement, "Empty Beds" continues its European tour, with the Italian

Parliament expected as the next stop. Further placements, including a major public venue in Paris, are in development.

The exhibition is organized by Bird of Light Ukraine and B&K Agency, with the support of the Ombudsman Office of Ukraine.

Interviews with Zhanna Galeyeva and Isaac Yeung, Co-Founders of Bird of Light Ukraine, are available upon request.

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The "Empty Beds" installation on display at the Berlaymont for Europe Day. The exhibit features a 1:1 scale recreation of an abducted Ukrainian teenager's bedroom to raise awareness of the ongoing crisis.

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