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UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Russian Federation

Submission
from non-governmental organisation

**Recruitment of convicted prisoners by
the Wagner Group and their use in the war in Ukraine**

Submitted by European Prison Litigation Network & Russia Behind Bars

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Introduction

This submission is intended to draw the attention of the Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Russian Federation to the problem the widespread recruitment campaign among prisoners serving their custodial sentences in the Russian (as well as Russia-controlled) penitentiary institutions by the private military unincorporated contractor known as “Wagner Group”, their subsequent transfer to the territory of Ukraine and adjacent regions of Russia, and their deployment in the war in Ukraine on the side of the Russian military forces.

This submission is lodged by two NGOs, *European Prison Litigation Network* and *Russia Behind Bars* («Русь Сидящая») in accordance with paragraph 4 of the Human Rights Council Resolution 51/25 of 11 October 2022 “Situation of human rights in the Russian Federation”. The Submitting Organisation respectfully asks the Mandate of the Special Rapporteur to take this submission into account for the purposes of the forthcoming Mandate’s comprehensive reports to the Human Rights Council at its fifty-fourth session and to the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session.

Submitting organisations:

- (1) [Русь Сидящая](#) (Russian Imprisonment / Russia Behind Bars Foundation), the foundation providing legal assistance to the victims of human rights violations on the part of law enforcement, judicial, and penitentiary systems of the Russian Federation.
- (2) [European Prison Litigation Network](#), is an international NGO bringing together 25 national NGOs and bar associations from 18 States. It was founded in 2013 by a group of jurists, lawyers, and researchers active in the penitentiary field. EPLN focuses its activities on enhancement of the judicial protection of the fundamental rights of prisoners in the Member States of the Council of Europe. EPLN holds a participatory status with the Council of Europe.

Facts

A. General overview

According to multiple sources (inmates, their relatives, human rights activists, and NGOs, as well as Russian and international independent media), since the start of the Russian full-scale invasion in Ukraine in February 2022, the Russian-backed private military contractor known

as “Wagner Group” has been conducting a massive recruitment campaign among convicted prisoners detained in numerous correctional facilities across Russia, as well as in the occupied territories in Ukraine.

The Wagner Group has gained notoriety for the heinous acts carried out by its members in various countries, including Mali, the Central African Republic, Lybia, Syria. The group provided support to the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics during the 2014-2015 period and has been extensively involved in the aggressive invasion of Ukraine by the Russian military since at least March 2022.¹

Russia Behind Bars has received numerous letters from inmates and their relatives all over the country, describing the recruitment campaign taking place in various penitentiary facilities. The recruiters have reportedly been visiting correctional colonies and encouraging prisoners to enlist with the Wagner Group and take part in the war in Ukraine. They are offering financial compensation and release after six months of “service”, or compensation to the prisoners’ relatives in case of their death.

Multiple sources, including reports from inmates, their relatives, human rights activists, NGOs, as well as Russian and international independent media, and sources among prison officers, have indicated that by the end of 2022 the Wagner Group recruiters have visited at least 97 correctional colonies in 45 Russian regions, successfully recruiting at least 10,360 prisoners.^[2] These numbers align with the figures collected by an independent media Important Stories in September 2022, which reported 5,786 prisoners had been recruited of which 2,036 had been sent to Ukraine.^[3] According to the human rights outlet Avtozak Live, the actual number of recruited prisoners could be twice as high (around 15,000 by mid-October 2022).^[4]

Information about regions, facilities, and number of recruited prisoners (where available) is summarised in the table below:

Region of Russia	Facilities	Approximate (minimum) number of recruited prisoners
St Petersburg	IK-7, IK-6	40
Adygeya Republic		
Bashkiriya Republic	IK-4	300 ^[5]
Karelia Republic	IK-1, IK-7, IK-9	100
Mari El Republic	IK-3, IK-4	277
Komi Republic	IK-19, IK-25	130
Mordovia Republic	IK-5, IK-17, IK-10	370 ^[6]
Tyva Republic		
Udmurtiya Republic	IK-5	

Yakutiya Republic	IK-1, IK-7, IK-6	450
Arkhangelsk Region		300
Bryansk Region		150 ^[7]
Chelyabinsk Region	IK-1, IK-2, IK-6, IK-8, IK-10, IK-25	335
Irkutsk Region	IK-7, IK-32	150
Ivanovo Region	IK-5	100
Kaliningrad Region	IK-9, IK-13	312
Kaluga Region	IK-3, IK-4	500 ^[8]
Kemerovo Region	IK-44, IK-37, IK-29	320 ^{[9][10][11]}
Kostroma Region	IK-1	134
Krasnodar Region	IK-11 ^[12]	
Krasnoyarsk Region	IK-5, IK-7, IK-15, IK-17, IK-27 ^[13]	400
Leningrad Region	IK-3	30
Lipetsk Region		
Murmansk Region		300
Novgorod Region	IK-7	70
Novosibirsk Region	IK-2, IK-3, IK-8, IK-12, IK-13, IK-14, IK-18	1400 ^[14]
Nizhniy Novgorod Region	IK-1, IK-6, IK-7, IK-14, IK-17	625
Orenburg Region	IK-1, IK-8, IK-9 ^[15]	
Perm Region		
Primorsky Region	IK-33	150
Pskov Region	IK-6	72
Rostov Region	IK-1, IK-2, IK-9, IK-14, IK-15	1000 ^[16]
Ryazan Region	IK-2, IK-3, IK-5 ^{[17][18]}	550
Saratov Region	IK-10	100
Smolensk Region	IK-6	
Stavropol Region	IK-4	140 ^[19]
Sverdlovsk Region	IK-2, IK-5, IK-10, IK-13, IK-54, IK-55, IK-26, IK-62, IK-63	632 ^[20]
Tula Region	IK-1, IK-4, IK-5	320 ^[21]
Tyumen Region	IK-1	150 ^[22]
Tver Region	IK-10	270
Vladimir Region	IK-6 ^{[23][24]}	
Vologda Region		
Voronezh Region	IK-2	150
Yaroslavl Region	IK-2, IK-3, IK-12	680 ^[25]
Zabaikalsky Region	IK-3, ^[26] IK-7 ^[27]	250

Russian independent media Mediazona has reported that, these numbers are corroborated by publicly available prison statistics, according to which the number of convicted prisoners in the Russian penitentiary decreased by 23 thousand in October-November 2022: from 349,000 in August to 325,000 in November. There were no similar decreases since 2010, even during the most recent amnesty of 2015. The decrease was observed only in correctional colonies of common and strict regimes for male offenders.^[28] Russian NGO Public Verdict Foundation

commented that there were no recent amendments to the criminal law, multiple court orders authorising early release, or other commutation of sentences, which would explain such dramatic decrease. At the same time, as emphasized by Public Verdict, one of the ways to “exclude” inmates from the prison statistics is a prolonged transfer, during which an inmate is deregistered from one correctional institution of but not yet formally admitted to another (thus avoiding the general prison statistics).^[29] This analysis and the estimations of the number of the recruited prisoners were criticised by Judith Pallot from the University of Helsinki, as overrated.³⁰

According to John Kirby, the strategic communications coordinator at the US National Security Council, by the end of December 2022, the US estimated Wagner had about 50,000 personnel deployed in Ukraine, of which 40,000 could have been convicts recruited from Russian prisons, some of them suffering from “serious medical conditions”.^[31] Ukrainian authorities estimated about 20 per cent of recruited prisoners deployed in Ukraine were suffering from HIV (based on the infection rate among captured prisoners).^[32]

In sum, the recruitment campaign in Russian prisons was carried out in several “waves”: the first active phase, which covered correctional institutions of the central Russia, took place between June and September 2022. The second and more “productive” phase, covering Ural and the Far East, lasted from September to December 2022. In the beginning of January 2023, the Wagner Group started visiting correctional colonies in the Chechen Republic. It set the stage for the third “wave” of the recruitment campaign.

According to Mediazona, in the end of 2022, the Wagner Group recruiters began revisiting correctional colonies from which they had recruited inmates during the initial wave of the campaign. However, the number of prisoners who expressed interest in joining to group was significantly lower, with only several dozen inmates in some colonies compared to the hundreds recruited during the first wave. The decrease in the recruitment activity was indirectly confirmed by the prison statistics that showed the reduction in the dramatic decrease of the prison population observed in August – November 2022.^[21]

B. Recruitment procedure

Early reports about the Wagner Group visits to the correctional colonies originated from the Leningrad Region, where they were recruiting prisoners from IK-7 “Yablonevka” (at least 40 prisoners joined the group) and IK-6 “Obukhovo”. After they left, “activists” within the prisoners, co-operating with the prison administrations,^[33] continued to exert pressure on their fellow inmates to accept the recruitment offer. On 5-6 July 2022 around 50 inmates from these colonies were transferred to the Rostov Region.^{[34][35]} The Department of the Federal

Penitentiary Service of Russia (the FSIN) in St Petersburg and the Leningrad Region denied this information.^[36] Relatives of inmates from “Yablonevka” were unable to send them letters through the electronic correspondence service of the FSIN: messages were returned with automatic replies that the addressee has left to another facility. Meanwhile, the prisoners have not informed their relatives of any planned transfers. Three relatives reported that after the transfer, prisoners contacted them asking for passport details to issue written authorisations for the relatives to receive their salaries.^[37] Since July 2022, the recruiters have visited these colonies at least on two occasions.

CNN reported that in July 2022 ten “volunteers” from IK-17 Mordovia left the colony to join the Wagner Group for the war in Ukraine, additional 50 inmates from an unnamed colony were preparing leave, with 400 more expressing interest to follow them. According to the CNN investigation, prisoners in various facilities were offered amnesty or pardon after six months of participation in the military conflict, the extinguishment of their criminal records, and a monthly allowance ranging between 100 and 200 thousand Russian rubles (EUR 1,600 – 3,200) to be paid directly to prisoners or their relatives.^[38] Reports from the inmates’ relatives have provided further evidence to support the information. According to them, the recruiters were also offering compensation of up to RUB 5 million to the families of prisoners in the event that they were killed in action, and 300 thousand roubles if they were injured.^{[34][2]} In April 2023 a number of relatives of recruited prisoners who were killed in Ukraine, reported the Wagner Group refusals to pay the promised compensations.^[39]

In general, the recruiters extended invitations to any prisoner who was interested in joining, regardless of their military experience, with the exception of those convicted of rape, paedophilia, extremism, or terrorism. However, it seems that they were more discerning in the Leningrad Region, where they specifically targeted inmates who were nearing the end of their prison terms.^[34] At the start of the recruitment campaign, during its “first wave”, Wagner was mainly interested in prisoners who had prior experience of military or law-enforcement service.^[2] Later on, the recruiters have reportedly started enlisting prisoners convicted of sexual offences. One detachment formed entirely of such prisoners was created in IK-7 Nizhniy Novgorod.^[40] A prisoner serving his 10-year term, interviewed by CNN (anonymously), said that he decided to join Wagner hoping to see his family as soon as possible.

In some cases, Wagner recruiters were accompanied by the officers of the regional Department of the FSIN or FSB (Federal Security Service),^[37] including Mr Ivan Prokopenko, the head of the FSIN Department in the Tula Region. He was present during the Wagner Group’s meeting with the inmates of IK-4. In some cases, the recruiters were openly carrying firearms during meetings with inmates.^[2] Head of a small colony in Mari El Republic personally disseminated information about the opportunity to join Wagner among the inmates.^[41] According to an

acquaintance of a prisoner from IK-9 Shakhty (Rostov Region), an application form for joining the Wagner Group was publicly available on the notice boards inside the dormitories. Prisoners were able to submit applications via the colony's administration.^[37]

After each visit from the recruiters, roughly 20% of inmates were applying to join the Wagner Group. During the ensuing interviews, prisoners were asked to share information about themselves, including why they wanted to participate in the war, their views on the Russian authorities, and whether they intended to defect to Ukraine. In some cases, polygraph tests were used during the interviews. After the recruiters left, "activists" among the prisoners often managed to persuade an additional 10% of inmates to join the group. The recruiters were particularly interested in prisoners who had been convicted of murder or robbery and who were in good physical shape.^{[37][21]}

A former inmate from IK-3 "Fornosovo" in the Leningrad Region, which the recruiters had visited in July, confirmed the aforementioned procedure. He informed the recruiters that he was soon to be released and requested that they send him details via email. The inmate later received a message from an email account under the name "Wilhelm Richard W", which contained a brief job announcement and contact details. The email address from which the message was sent (wag-2022@yandex.ru) and one of the telephone numbers listed in the letter were also featured in Wagner's public job advertisements. When a reporter from "Important Stories" called this number and introduced himself as a convicted prisoner from Omsk, he was told to wait for the recruiters as "there is a special program for [prisoners]."^[37]

In an attempt to prove the truthfulness of the recruiters' promises, on 10 October 2022 news agency "FAN" (linked to Yevgeny Prigozhin) published a video, allegedly from a hospital in Luhansk. The video showed four prisoners, some of whom had amputated limbs, being awarded medals of the Wagner Group and receiving documents resembling prison release certificates, which were referred to as "document on pardon" in the video. One of the prisoners, Stanislav Bogdanov, was sentenced to 23 years' imprisonment in 2013 for murdering a judge.^[42] Another prisoner, Rustam Borovkov, was convicted of robbery and manslaughter in 2013 and sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment.^[43]

Despite the absence of information about repercussions against prisoners who declined the offer, at least in two colonies (IK-19 in the Komi Republic and IK-7 in the Republic of Karelia), prisoners who had agreed to go join the Wagner Group but then changed their minds, were placed in disciplinary wards. On 17 September 2022, Internet media Sota reported, with reference to an anonymous prisoner from IK-4 Mari El Republic, that the forceful recruitment and relocation of prisoners commenced in the colony.^[44] In November 2022, similar reports came from the relatives of inmates from IK-37 Kemerovo Region.^[10] According to them, inmates who refused to join Wagner were beaten, handcuffed to radiators, and threatened with

new criminal charges against them. In Yakutiya (allegedly in IK-7 and IK-6) prisoners were threatened with extension of their prison terms if they refuse to join the Wagner Group.^[11]

On 11 October 2022, human rights defender Anfisa Boldyreva reported that her partner, Aleksandr Boldyrev, a convicted prisoner from IK-9 Kursk Region, was recruited against his will.^[45] A prisoner from a correctional colony in Sverdlovsk Region reported instances of his co-inmates being forced by the administration to join Wagner Group on pain of placement in a disciplinary ward.^[21] Vladimir Spiridonov, a prisoner from IK-6 Irkutsk Region, who had been previously subjected to torture in detention, was reportedly recruited by the Wagner Group against his will and sent to Ukraine in January 2023.^[46]

On the other hand, in several reported cases, prison administrations have implicitly opposed the recruitment. Thus, prisoners from one colony reported that after the recruiters had left the head of the colony told them “to think wisely and decline the offer”.^[2] Administration of IK-4 in Tula Region prevented prisoners from joining the Wagner Group, reportedly, preferring them to stay and work at the colony.^[21]

Only in very few cases the transfer of recruited prisoners was prevented, with the active involvement of their families,^[47] who managed to, at least, postpone the recruitment and subsequent transfer of recruited prisoners to Ukraine, by lodging multiple complaints with the supervising authorities. However, these instances were sporadic.^[48] On 3 November 2022 relatives of inmates from IK-14 Novosibirsk organised a manifestation near the colony, demanding that they be allowed to see their loved ones and that their deployment to the war be prevented. Relatives were allowed to talk to the head of the prison administration, but he refused to give any direct answers. Nevertheless, the transfer of recruited prisoners, whose relatives had visited the colony, was cancelled.^{[14][49][50][51]}

In December 2022, an MP of the regional parliament of the Sverdlovsk Region of Russia, Vyacheslav Vegner, suggested that female prisoners be recruited by the Wagner Group and sent to the war in Ukraine as well. He referred to a request which he had allegedly received from female inmates themselves.

“What’s the point if they will be in prison, snub themselves, if they can help their country in the difficult time.”

According to Vegner, he had visit correctional colonies together with the Wagner Group, and to encouraged inmates to volunteer. Head of the Wagner Group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, endorsed this suggestion and said that female prisoners can work not only as paramedics and communication staff, but also as snipers and that Wagner “is working in that direction”.^[52]

C. Transfer

Prisoners recruited by the Wagner Group from various correctional colonies across Russia were allegedly transported in small groups of 30-36 people to IK-2 in the Rostov Region (south of Russia) reportedly used by the Wagner Group as a training ground. There the recruited inmates underwent constant training for approximately two weeks in constant training (according to the inmates and their relatives, prisoners were training 20 hours a day). Reports from relatives further indicated that prisoners were transferred without any identification.^[34] The first group of prisoners from IK-2 left for Ukraine on 20 July 2022. An anonymous prison officer from IK-7 “Yablonevka” (Leningrad Region)^[37] and one of the prisoners during phone calls with his wife and fellow inmates confirmed this information.^[2] It was reported that before joining the Wagner Group, or immediately after the transfer, prisoners had to sign contracts, although no copies or photos of any such contract have surfaced.^[34]

D. Access to recruited prisoners and inquiries

Following the recruitment, communication with several correctional colonies was disrupted: visits were restricted, payphones and prison electronic message service “FSIN-letter” were shut down, cell phones were jammed. These measures were implemented at least in correctional colonies in the Republic of Mordovia, Republic of Udmurtia, Republic of Yakutiya, Chelyabinsk, Kemerovo, Kirov, Kostroma, Krasnoyarsk, Kursk, Novosibirsk, Perm, Sverdlovsk, Orenburg, Primorsky, Tyumen Regions. Numerous colonies have been closed for “quarantine” before, during, and after the visits by recruiters, which prevented relatives, lawyers, and human rights defenders from entering the facilities. On several occasions, lawyers of Russia Behind Bars (as well as other NGOs), prisoners’ relatives, and human rights defenders were denied access to prisoners who had been recruited.^{[2][15][45][29]}

According to a relative of a recruited prisoner from IK-2 Chelyabinsk, he was forced to sign a written statement allowing the administration not to disclose his location to the relatives.^[53]

The FSIN, the Russian Ministry of Defence, and the Ombudspersons have not responded to CNN’s, Verstka’s, Important Stories’, and other media inquiries concerning the recruitment campaign.^{[2][3][38]} The Department of the FSIN in the Rostov Region has denied the information about recruitment, calling it “false”, in a response to internet media 161.ru.^[47] The head of IK-7 “Yablonevka” reportedly refused to meet with relatives of the inmates. When interviewed on phone, he denied any recruitment initiatives at the facility and said that the transfer of prisoners, if any, would be conducted “according to the plan”.^[34] Wife of one of the prisoners reported with reference to the regional Public Monitoring Commission, that her husband indeed had left the colony where he had served his sentence (IK-5 Ivanovo). The Commission declined to reveal his location.^[3] Similar attempts by relatives of other disappeared convicts were also

futile: colony administrations, Ministry of Defence, and the Wagner Group themselves (when reached through publicly available contacts) consistently refused to provide any information or assistance to the families seeking the recruited prisoners.^[5]

On 17 September 2022 members of the Presidential Council for Human Rights asked the Prosecutor General to clarify the grounds for early release of prisoners who were deployed in Ukraine.^[54] Additional requests were sent to the FSIN (Federal Service for the Execution of Sentences). Members of the Council were prohibited from raising the question of inmates' recruitment at their meeting with President Putin in December 2022.^[55]

According to Nataliya Yevdokimova, a former member of the Council, in the beginning of January 2023, they received replies from the Prosecutor General and the head of the FSIN. They denied any knowledge of the recruitment campaign and merely reproduced the relevant provisions of the domestic law. Seven out of ten members of the Council who signed the requests were excluded from it by the President's decision in November 2022.^[56]

On 7 October 2022 the Ombudsman of the Perm Region, Pavel Mikov, confirmed that:

“indeed representatives of a company, I do not know which one, visited the correctional institutions of the Perm Region, talked to convicts, told them the mechanism, how they can be released today, and, so to say, pay their duty to the Homeland, fulfil their constitutional duty to defend the Homeland.”

The recruitment itself in his view was not illegal, but pursuant to the domestic law, prisoners can join “volunteer battalions” only after being pardoned by the President.^[57]

In March 2023 similar statements were made by the Ombudswoman of the Sverdlovsk Region, Tatyana Merzlyakova. In her view the recruitment of prisoners by Wagner is acceptable: “if people decided to atone for their guilt in such manner, let them atone for it.” Merzlyakova claimed that she had discussed the recruitment with the head of one of the regional colonies, who re-assured her that the convicts had joined the Wagner Group of their own free will.⁵⁸

According to an internet media Agentstvo, by mid-November 2022 relatives of inmates lodged several dozens of criminal complaints with the Investigative Committee of Russia against the FSIN officials alleging that the recruitment constituted an abuse of power on their part.^[59]

On 13 January 2023 the Russian Ministry of Defence publicly acknowledged the participation of the Wagner Group in the military conflict.^[60]

E. Deployment of recruited prisoners

According to several inmates' relatives, recruited prisoners were deployed in the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions of Ukraine to undergo military service within the Wagner Group formations. Others alleged that the inmates were used for "rebuilding the infrastructure" in the Ukrainian cities occupied by Russian forces.^[34] A former mercenary of Wagner and the relatives of a military serviceman confirmed that convicts were used at the front lines.^{[61][62]}

On 24 January 2023 CNN reported with reference to the Ukrainian intelligence report of December 2022, that the recruited prisoners had been used by the Wagner Group in the fights near Bakhmut. According to the report, convicts frequently formed the first wave in an attack and took the heaviest casualties – as high as 80%.^[63] The use of prisoners as "cannon fodder" in the fights for Bakhmut was corroborated by captured inmates interviewed by The New York Times in January-February 2023.^[64] In February 2023 a recruited prisoner interviewed by a Russian media 47news.ru, reported a usual practice of torturing captured Ukrainian servicemen by the Wagner Group fighters.^[65]

One of the recruited prisoners, whose identity was verified by online media The Insider, reported that the deployed prisoners are regularly threatened and ill-treated by their superiors. According to him, several prisoners were executed for attempted escapes, many prisoners had their fingers publicly cut off as a warning for the others.^[66]

There were also numerous reports of recruited prisoners who escaped from the front lines or from the Wagner Group's training camps.^[67] One of them, Igor Matyukhin, interviewed by New York Times, described a climate of fear instilled by Wagner to keep convicts fighting. He said they were threatened with summary executions, and at least one man in his unit was taken away after disobeying orders and disappeared. Matyukhin claimed that he had escaped when his training camp had come under an attack by Ukrainian armed forces. He said he has since been trying to return to his prison from a hiding place in Russia.^[68]

F. Yevgeny Prigozhin ("Putin's chef")^[69] involvement in the recruitment

In August 2022, three prisoners informed human rights organisations that Yevgeny Prigozhin, a Russian oligarch, founder, and unofficial head of the Wagner Group, has personally visited their colonies to recruit the inmates.^[2] On 21 August 2022 pictures surfaced on the Internet showing Prigozhin at the Old Petergof Cemetery in St Petersburg, laying flowers at the grave of Aleksandr Romanovskiy, who had multiple convictions for robberies and murder, and was serving his 27-year' imprisonment that was to end in 2033. On 1 August 2022 Romanovskiy was killed in a military engagement near Bakhmut and was posthumously awarded the Russian medal "for courage".^[70]

Prigozhin himself commented the photos in the following way:

“I was indeed at the cemetery and laid flowers on the grave of a man who had recently been a convict, and on 1 August died defending the interests of our homeland against the enemy. With my visit, I wanted to pay my respects to these people. To the men who, with arms in their hands, stand to the death for Russia.”^[71]

Two prisoners from IK-2 Rybinsk (Yaroslavl Region) and IK-4 Plavsk (Tula Region) confirmed that Prigozhin had personally visited the colonies, inciting the inmates to join the group. The inmates recited his speech:

“We are not the Armed Forces, more like a proper crime syndicate embedded with the military. My boys used to move into some African country leaving no survivors in a couple of days. And they are doing the same in Ukraine as we speak. Join the PMC and sign a deal with the devil. Follow me out, and you either come back a free man or die. You will follow orders and you will kill our enemies. If you try to run, you will be executed on the spot.”^[72]

On 14 September 2022 a video of another such visit surfaced, showing a man resembling Prigozhin making a similar speech to a large group of prisoners at IK-6 Mari El Republic:^[73]

“I represent a Private Military Company. You must have heard of PMC Wagner. The war is difficult. It’s nothing like the Afghan or Chechen wars. I have ammunitions expenditure two and half times higher than in Stalingrad. The first sin is deserting. No one falls back. No one retreats. No one surrenders into capture. During training you’ll be told about two grenades you must have with you when surrendering. The second sin is alcohol and drugs in the combat zone, while you’re with us for half a year, you’re always in the combat zone. And the third sin is looting, including sexual contacts with local women... flora, fauna, men... anyone. The minimum age we are taking is 22 years old, if younger, you need a paper from close relatives that they are not against it. The maximum age, roughly, is 50 years old, but if you are strong, right here at the interview we do basic tests to see how strong you are. Good physical shape is essential. We look at how strong you are and then make a decision to take you. The first convicts who served with me, it was on 1 June, the assault of [Vuhlehirska Power Station]. 40 people from St Petersburg. Strict regime. Recidivists. 40 people entered the enemy trenches, stabbed them with knives, [they lost] 3 dead and 7 wounded. From those killed, one was 52, he served 30 years. Died like a hero. We are paying careful attention at those who serve [sentence] for drug article, judging on whether there was an addiction. If we have questions, we reserve the right ... to run you on a lie detector to determine how stable the person is. We are very careful about those who serve [sentence] for sexual [offences] but understand mistakes can be made. Whom do we need? We only need assault infantry...”. 60% of my boys are infantry, and you’ll be one of them. You will not differ from us in any way. You will be treated in the same way sometimes even more plausibly than those who have been

fighting alongside me for many years and with whom we came through dozens of wars. Fire support units and other units that ensure offensive, I have in the PMC aircrafts of several types ... [we have] RSZOs [multiple rocket launch systems], there are tanks, there is everything which is needed to offence effectively. ... Those who move forward, those who are most [swift or courageous], they are surviving better. Those who fall back, [who] don't understand what to do, naturally, they get [in trouble]. After I tell you everything, there will be an interview. I will attend it for a short time, then several people will stay who will talk to each of you during 2-3 hours, look you in the eyes, ask several questions. ... All deceased, their bodies will be transported to a place you indicate in your testaments, to your relatives, or buried where you say. Everyone will be buried at the alleys of heroes in the towns where they exist. Who don't know where to be buried, [we] are burying near the chapel of the PMC Wagner in Goryachy Klyuch.^[74] Then, after six months you go home, having obtained [presidential] pardon. Those who wish to stay with us – stays with us. Therefore, there are no chances to return back to [prison]. Those who arrive [to the training camp] and say during the first day, that they got to a wrong place, we make a note “deserter” and the execution by shooting follows. Guys, questions. After questions, everyone, form the line for the interview. Time to take the decision is 5 minutes, when we leave, time is up, and then depending on the luck. ... Questions of guarantees and trust, are the following. Do you have anyone who can relieve you of 10 years' term [of imprisonment]? There are only two who take [you] out [of prison]: these are God and Allah but [they take you] only in a wooden box. I'm taking you alive. But I don't always return you alive. ...”

Prigozhin's “press-service” commented that “...the man in the video looks an awful lot like Yevgeny Viktorovich [Prigozhin]. Judging by his rhetoric, he is somehow involved in the implementation of the tasks of the Special Military Operation [a name used by the Russian authorities to call the war in Ukraine.], and he seems to be successful at it.”^[75] Prigozhin himself later added:

“Of course, if I were a prisoner, I would dream of joining this friendly group, to be able not only to redeem the debt to the motherland, but to give it back in full. ... those who do not want PMCs and prisoners to fight, who argue on this subject, who do not want to do anything and, in principle, who do not like this topic, send their children to the front line. Either PMCs and convicts, or your children - you decide.”^[76]

Reports from inmates, their relatives, and prison officers from other colonies allegedly visited by Prigozhin (including Mari El Republic, Kaluga,^[8] Saratov^[77], Tula, and Bryansk^[7] Regions) suggest that he openly guaranteed the prisoners a “right” to looting (in Ukraine), claiming that he represents “an organised criminal group helping Russian army”. It was further reported that before Prigozhin's visit, inmates were interviewed by the prison officers who asked them whether they wanted to go to Ukraine as volunteers. In IK-6 Mari El Republic prisoners' relatives as well as ex-prisoners alleged that several dozens of inmates agreed to join Wagner, of which 77 were accepted. They left the colony on 16-17 September 2022.^[41]

On 10 September 2022, in response to a media request, Prigozhin mentioned that he had “recently came across an interesting website called Gulagu.da. It has some funny videos on it. Maybe you should take them on board”.^[78] The name of the website mentioned by Prigozhin is a play on words of the well-known Russian anti-torture media project, Gulagu.net, which in particular had extensively covered the recruitment of prisoners. Gulagu.da posted ten videos of allegedly Russian prisoners who claimed to have joined the war in Ukraine, instead of serving their sentence, and urging other prisoners to follow their example. Prisoners were described on the website as “heroes who made the right choice”.^[79]

Russian media, Verстка, identified two prisoners shown on the videos: Aleksandr Chubotaru, from the Republic of Komi, convicted of child molesting and thefts, most recently in January 2022, and sentenced to twenty-six months’ imprisonment. The second identified prisoner was Mikhail Kuvshinov, from one of the colonies of the Yaroslavl Region, convicted of violent rape in 2016 and sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment. Kuvshinov was reportedly killed in action in Ukraine on 23 August 2022.^[40]

Prigozhin persistently denied his affiliation with the Wagner Group over the years. However, on 26 September, after the publication of the videos of his recruitment speeches, in response to a media request, he explicitly acknowledged his role as the founder and the owner of the Wagner Group. He also confirmed that the group was present and active in Africa, South America, “Arab Countries”, and the occupied Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, since 2014:

“Let us briefly run from the origins, as it was.

In 2014, when the genocide of the Russian population in Donbass began, when Russia jumped on the last steam train and managed to block the arrival of the Ukrainian army in Crimea, I, like many other businessmen, went to the fire ranges where the “Cossacks” were gathering and tried to scrap money in order to recruit a group that would go and protect the Russians. But very quickly I realized that half of all these “Cossacks” and other paramilitary comrades were crooks, and [another] half took money, hired volunteers, and sent them naked and barefoot to the real death. So I flew to one of the ranges and did it myself. I cleaned the old weapons myself, sorted out the bulletproof vests myself, and found specialists who could help me do it. From that moment, on May 1, 2014, a group of patriots was born, which later acquired the name of BTG [probably “battle tactical group”] Wagner. Their courage and bravery made it possible to liberate Luhansk airport and many other territories, and radically changed the fate of the LNR and DNR.

After that, for 8 long years, during which every nosy journalist and every shameless scumbag was picking at the sweaty underwear of Wagner PMC in an attempt to find the negative. These brave guys, who knew only one thing - to fight, to protect the disadvantaged, to stand to the death on the side of good and justice, were always in a precarious position. They could not turn their backs on their favorite cause, in which they were professionals of the highest level, and sit on the bench of the unemployed. So, from an assault unit commander who catches bullets and shrapnel in his shabby bulletproof vest every day, one could go to be a security guard for some flighty micro-oligarch whose wife would make him carry bags through the stores.

I am proud that I was able to assert their right to defend the interests of their country. There have been hard and very hard times, every dog tried to spit his saliva on them, and as you know, on me as well, attributing all non-existent [small and large] sins.

And now it's time for a revelation, please don't confuse it with the judgment day. These guys are heroes who defended the Syrian people, other peoples of Arab countries, disadvantaged Africans and Latin Americans, became one of the pillars of our homeland. Without blinking or questioning for a second, shall [they] live or die. Live by the rules, do what you must and be as it may.

Now the answer to your question.

For a long time I have been dodging the blows of a lot of opponents with one main goal in mind - not to screw these guys, who are the backbone of Russian patriotism. And I have won victories on this issue in numerous courts, including those abroad, because in any case there should always be a place for sport and matches should be won on the opponent's field."^{[80][81][82]}

This and similar statements have been published by the press-service of the Concord company group on their official page in the Russian social network VKontakte on behalf of Prigozhin.^[83] Concord group of companies, including the head company, Concord Management and Consulting LLC^[84], as well as Concord Catering and other affiliated entities have been founded, owned, and/or controlled by Prigozhin since 1995 (temporary CEOs of the company were Prigozhin's mother, Violetta Prigozhina,^[85] and Dmitry "Wagner" Utkin, co-founder and commander of Wagner Group).^[86]

In November 2022 an office building named "PMC Wagner Centre" was opened in St Petersburg. According to Prigozhin's press-service, the building was designed as a "space for free accommodation for inventors, planners, IT specialists, experimental production and start-up spaces ... The centre's mission is to provide a comfortable environment for generating new ideas to improve Russia's defence capabilities, including informational".^[87] After the opening of the Centre, Prigozhin became the director of "Ritale" LLC, a Russian company

listed as the building's owner. On 27 December 2022 another legal entity, "ChVK Wagner Centre", was registered in the Russian State Register of Legal Entities, with its official address located in the Wagner Centre.^[88]

In the end of 2022 – beginning of 2023, Yevgeny Prigozhin reportedly stopped personal recruiting visits in the correctional colonies, sending low-rank recruiters instead.^[21] On 9 February 2023 he announced through the press-service of Concord group of companies, that the recruitment from prisons was "fully stopped".^{[89][90]} Despite the announcement, Wagner recruiters reportedly continued their visits to the correctional colonies. One of such visits took place after the announcement, at IK-4 Tula Region.^[91]

On 27 June 2023 President Putin stated that "the financing of the entire Wagner group was fully ensured by the state... We fully financed this group from the Defence Ministry, from the state budget." According to him, from May 2022 to May 2023, the state alone allocated 86.2 billion roubles (USD 1 billion) to Wagner Group in the form of "salary to fighters and incentive rewards". He further explained that "of that sum, remuneration amounted to RUB 70.38 billion, incentive rewards amounted to RUB 15.87 billion, insurance payments amounted to RUB 110.17 billion".^[92]

G. Prisoners released after the completion of their contracts

On 5 January 2023 Russian state media RIA Novosti and news agency "FAN", linked to Yevgeny Prigozhin, published videos showing Prigozhin talking to a group of men, allegedly ex-prisoners that had been "pardoned" after finishing their 6-months' contracts with the Wagner Group, and returning to Russia. Prigozhin awarded them with Wagner Group medals and congratulated them on completing their service. He also stated that their criminal records had been extinguished.^{[93][94][95][96]}

Russian internet media Agentstvo identified several prisoners shown on the video. All of them served their sentences in St Petersburg and the Leningrad Region:^{[97][98]}

- Dmitry Karavaychik was sentenced to 17 years' imprisonment in 2019 for organising a criminal drug-trafficking group,
- Aleksandr Suetov, sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment in 2020 for a series of aggravated robberies,
- Denis Kinev, sentenced to 17 years' imprisonment in 2011 for robbery,
- Stanislav Usachev, sentenced in 2016 to 13 months' imprisonment for car theft,
- Dmitry Karyagin, sentenced to 14,5 years' imprisonment for murder of his grandmother, a World War II veteran,
- Daniil Savelyev, sentenced in 2019 to 6,5 years' imprisonment for robberies,

- Viktor Varnakov, sentenced in 2017 to 13 years' imprisonment for fraud,
- Yevgeny Rubezhanskiy, a recidivist from the Donetsk Region of Ukraine, convicted, in particular, of theft, in 2006,
- Vladimir Ryashentsev, sentenced to 2,5 years' imprisonment for theft in 2015,
- Aleksandr Kobchenko, also convicted of theft.

BBC identified another prisoner, Anatoliy Salmin, a recidivist convicted of desertion, multiple thefts, and murder (most recently sentenced in 2021).^[99] Additional identification was performed by Important Stories.^[100] Internet media "Rotonda" established the identities of several other prisoners shown in videos published by RIA "FAN":

- Ivan Anurin, a recidivist from St Petersburg, convicted of robberies and drug possession,
- Aleksandr Nikitin, from the Leningrad Region, who had been convicted of multiple robberies and thefts,
- Vitaliy Gorbunov from St Petersburg, most recently convicted of aggravated robbery in 2019,
- Rail Khusainov from the Tatarstan Republic, convicted of attempted drug sell in 2018 and sentenced to 7 years' imprisonment,^[101]
- Pavel Zakharov, convicted in 2017 of aggravated murder of his mother-in-law and sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment (before that he had been convicted of robbery, theft, and threats of murder),^[102]
- Anton Ionov, convicted in 2018 and sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment for aggravated violent robberies.^[103]

Another convict, Aleksandr Tyutin, who had been convicted of aggravated murder in 2021 and sentenced to 23 years' imprisonment, was reportedly recruited by the Wagner Group in June 2022 from IK-9 Republic of Karelia, and returned to St Petersburg in December 2022.^[104]

On 17 January 2023, Dmitry Shimonistov, who had been shown on the videos alongside other allegedly released prisoners and who was subsequently identified by Rotonda, published on his page in a social network VKontakte a copy of a written "commitment". According to it, as a member of the Wagner Group, he fulfilled his contract and undertook not to re-offend "during his vacation". The commitment was typed on an official form of Interregional NGO "League of the protection of the interests of the veterans of local wars and military conflicts". The head of the NGO is Andrey Troshev, one of Wagner Group's commanders.^{[105][106]} Shimonistov was convicted of theft on multiple occasions, most recently in 2021 (sentenced to 2,6-years' imprisonment).^[107]

According to Prigozhin's media RIA "FAN", there were three groups of prisoners who returned home after the completion of their service at the Wagner Group: on 5, 8, and 13 January, allegedly with several dozens of prisoners in each of them.^{[108][109][110]}

Internet media Agentstvo identified the aircraft shown on of the videos published by RIA FAN, allegedly used for transfer of prisoners to Russia, as a Russian military aircraft IL-76 number RA-78842.^[97]

On 17 January 2023 one of Prigozhin's Telegram channels published a video with, allegedly, the fourth group of prisoners returning to the Russian Republic of Karelia after having finished their contracts.^[111] One of the prisoners shown in the video was identified by Important Stories as Viktor Vinogradov, convicted of desertion and later, in 2020, of drug-selling and sentenced to 10,5-years' imprisonment.^[112] According to prisoners and human rights defenders, at least six prisoners shown in the videos published by RIA "FAN" were "activists" (i.e., inmates ill-treating and torturing other prisoners at the orders of prison administration).^[21]

On 9 January 2023 Eva Merkacheva, member of the Presidential Council for Human Rights told state media RIA Novosti that the recruited inmates had been pardoned by a classified decree of President Putin before their transfer from the correctional colonies where they served their sentences.^[113]

In February 2023, an independent Russian journalist, Adnrey Zakharov, claimed with reference to the police database, that at least two convicted prisoners shown in the videos, were listed as "released from sentence pursuant to the President's decree 'On pardon' of 6 July 2022", and that their criminal records were also extinguished. BBC confirmed the authenticity of the documents published by Zakharov, and concluded that they documents supported their version, that the recruited prisoners had been pardoned before being sent to the frontline. BBC further noted that prisoners who are released on the basis of pardon shall be served with the pardon documents immediately upon their release, but those recruited by the Wagner Group only received them after six months of "service."^[114]

In March 2023 Yevgeny Prigozhin stated that more than 5,000 prisoners were pardoned after serving their contracts with the Wagner Group. According to him, less than one per cent of recruited prisoners re-offend during the first month after the release, which lead to a "10-20 times decline in the crime rate."^[115]

On 13 June 2023 Vladimir Putin, during a meeting with "military journalists" stated that he indeed had signed decrees on pardon of convicts who took part in the war (without specifying numbers and whether the decrees were signed before the deployment of prisoners or after the completion of their contracts with the Wagner Group).^[116] On 18 June 2023 Yevgeny Prigozhin

reported that 32,000 prisoners returned home after completion of their contracts with the Wagner Group.^[117]

Upon their return to Russia, a number of prisoners have allegedly committed various new grave criminal offences and were detained on charges of murders, rape of minors, drug-related offences, thefts, public disorder, and assaults.^[118]

H. Casualties

Since the beginning of the recruitment, there have been reports from family members of injured prisoners being hospitalised in Luhansk.^[63] These prisoners were allegedly recruited from IK-7 “Yablonevka” and were registered in a hospital under nicknames. At least 12 prisoners have been hospitalised in Luhansk and five were reportedly killed in the occupied territories of Ukraine in July-August 2022,^{[119][2]} including Svyatoslav Matveyev, a 29-year old prisoner from Yablonevka.^[3] He had joined Wagner in July 2022 along with several co-inmates who were identified by their group photo on which they posed with firearms: Aleksandr Suetov, convicted in 2019 for robberies and sentenced to 10 years’ imprisonment, and Ruben Martirosyan, a recidivist, most recently convicted of robbery in 2021 and sentenced to 7 years and two months’ imprisonment.^[120]

Despite scarce information about the fate of the recruited convicts at the early stages of the recruitment campaign, several reports surfaced in the media shedding some light on the outcome of their agreement to join the ranks of Wagner Group:

- In August, a Russian filmmaker and propagandist Nikita Mikhalkov on his YouTube channel told a story of Konstantin Tulinov, a convict infamous for his involvement in the torture of a prisoner in SIZO-1 St Petersburg in 2019, who reportedly was killed in Ukraine, despite formally serving his prison sentence which was about to end in 2023.^[121]
- On 24 July 2022 another prisoner, Yevgeniy Yeremenko, from IK-9 Republic of Karelia, who had yet to serve 8 years’ imprisonment, was killed in Bakhmut. FSIN Regional Department in Karelia did not reply to Mediazona’s inquiry about how Yeremenko found himself on the war eight years before the end of his prison sentence.^[122]
- Ivan Neparatov, a leader of an organised criminal group sentenced to 25 years’ imprisonment in 2019, was killed in Bakhmut in August 2022, and was also posthumously awarded the medal “for courage”.^[123]
- Telegram-channel Grey Zone, allegedly connected with the Wagner Group, reported a “heroic” death of Aleksandr Kolipov from IK-1 Syktyvkar on 28 July 2022, convicted of robberies and murder in 2019 and sentenced to 9 years’ imprisonment.^[3]
- A prisoner whose last name is Shpakovskiy, from IK-7 Veliky Novgorod, was reportedly killed in Ukraine and buried on 28 August 2022.

- Igor Kusk, a former leader of an organised criminal group, convicted in 2015 by the Supreme Court of Tatarstan and sentenced to 23 years' imprisonment.^[124] Apart from Igor Kusk, two other notable organised gangs' leaders reportedly recruited by Wagner and killed in Ukraine were Sergey Maksimenko and Andrey Bereznykh.^[125]

According to the investigative media The Insider, as of mid-October 2022, more than 500 recruited prisoners were killed in Ukraine. This number was based on the analysis of condolences letters signed by Andrey Troshev, one of the Wagner Group commanders,^[106] and published by relatives on social networks, along with photos of medals "for courage" posthumously awarded by the Wagner Group to recruited prisoners. The Insider verified this information and the identities of killed prisoners by reaching out to some of the relatives.^[126]

John Kirby, the strategic communications coordinator at the US National Security Council reported that only in November-December 2022 around 900 recruited prisoners were killed in the fighting near Bakhmut.^[31]

In January 2023 over two hundred fresh graves of Wagner Group members (most of whom were former prisoners) were found on a cemetery in the Krasnodar Region, not far from the Wagner Group's training camp and their chapel. Reuters established the identity of at least 39 buried recruited prisoners.^[127] BBC has verified the identity of 162 ex-prisoners.^[5]

In January 2023 BBC and Mediazona, with the aid from volunteers, identified the names of 471 killed prisoners. According to BBC this number is increasing rapidly. Since November 2022, 60-80 prisoners have been reported dead weekly (based only on the public reports). Most of the convicts recruited by Wagner are buried in towns where their relatives live. According to relatives, documents of the deceased are usually brought by men in plain clothes, who also give the relatives money and posthumous awards with little to no explanations.^[5] In the beginning of February 2023 Mediazona, based on open sources, confirmed the death of 567 recruited prisoners.^[21] Around 30 fresh graves of ex-prisoners recruited by Wagner and killed by Ukraine were identified in March 2023 in the Krasnodar Region and the Republic of Adygea.^[128]

In February 2023 the US Government estimated the Wagner Group's casualties to be around 30,000 people, including 9,000 killed. About half of them were killed since mid-December and 90% of those killed were recruited prisoners.^[129]

By April 2023 BBC identified seven mass burial sites of the Wagner Group members across Russia (including in Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, Samara, Rostov, Saratov and Moscow Region, as

well as the Luhansk Region of Ukraine) on which at least 995 people were buried, most of whom were convicted prisoners.^[130] In May 2023 a fresh cemetery was found in the village of Nikolayevka (Samara Region), with around 300 Wagner members buried in it, most of whom were convicted prisoners killed between October 2022 and April 2023.^[131]

On 23 May 2023 Yevgeny Prigozhin stated that around 10,000 recruited prisoners were killed in Ukraine.^[132]

I. Executions

On 15 September 2022, Ukrainian journalist Yuri Butusov published a video showing a captured Russian soldier who identified himself as Yevgeny Anatolievich Nuzhin, a convicted prisoner from IK-3 Ryazan, sentenced to 28 years' imprisonment in 1999 for murder (and later an attempted escape). He confirmed information about Prigozhin's visit to the colony in July-August 2022, after which 92 inmates agreed to join Wagner. On 25 August 2022, these prisoners, including Nuzhin, were transferred to the Rostov Region and from there to the Luhansk Region of Ukraine as part of Wagner's assault squad. Nuzhin claims that he was engaged in collecting corpses of Russian servicemen. He also reported the case of shooting of two prisoners.^[133] The identity of Nuzhin was corroborated by an ex-prisoner from IK-3 Ryazan and the public Russian courts' database.^[134]

On 13 November 2022 Telegram channel Grey Zone linked to the Wagner Group published a video of Nuzhin's execution. According to the video description, Nuzhin had "vanished while under investigation in Kyiv". In the video, Nuzhin explained that on 11 November 2022, while in Kyiv, he had been hit in the head and lost consciousness. He woke up in a basement, where he was told that he would be "put on trial". The "VCHK-OGPU" (ВЧК-ОГПУ) Telegram channel claimed that Nuzhin had been returned to Russia as part war prisoners exchange. This was confirmed on 16 November 2022 by Mikhail Podolyak, an adviser to President Zelenskyy, in his interview with Dozhd TV.^[135] After Nuzhin's explanations, the video showed his execution, which Grey Zone called "The Hammer of Vengeance". A concrete block was attached to Nuzhin's head, and an unknown man hit him on the head with a sledgehammer. The video ended with the caption "liquidated".^[136]

The execution of Nuzhin resembles another execution of a civilian, carried out by the Wagner Group in Syria in 2019. That case was brought to the UN Human Rights Council Working Group on Mercenaries and the European Court of Human Rights in 2022 jointly by Human Rights Centre Memorial, FIDH, and the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression.^[137]

Yevgeny Prigozhin commented on the video:

“I prefer to watch stories in theatre. As for the “sledgehammered”, this show demonstrates us that he had not found happiness in Ukraine, but met unkind, but fair people. I think this movie is called “A dog shall die by a dog’s death”. It’s a great director’s work, it’s easy to watch in one breath. I hope no animals suffered during the filming.”^[138]

In his subsequent letter allegedly sent to the Prosecutor General of Russia, Prigozhin in a sarcastic manner denied Wagner Group’s involvement in the execution.^[139] Kremlin spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, when asked about the video of the execution refused to give comments saying that: “We don't know what it is, how true it is. It's none of our business.”^[140] Nuzhin's family told BBC that they had been trying to find out about his fate for months after he was captured in Ukraine in September 2022. The correctional colony administration and the Russian Ministry of Defence refused to help the family.

After the publication of the video of Nuzhin’s extrajudicial execution, the colony’s staff blocked the phone number of Nuzhin’s wife. The law enforcement agencies did not respond to the video. Nuzhin’s relatives reported that by the end of January 2023 they had not been contacted by either the FSIN or other authorities. The location of the former prisoner’s body is unknown.^[5]

According to a prisoner from IK-2 Yaroslavl Region, the Wagner Group recruiters during subsequent visits to correctional colonies referred to the case of Nuzhin when speaking about the fate of those who surrender.^[21]

On 4 December 2022 Yuri Butusov published an interview with Aleksandr Bolchev, another captured prisoner who had taken part in the war as a member of Wagner Group. Bolchev said that the inmates were threatened to be shot if retreating. He further explained that he does not wish to be exchanged and to return to Russia, fearing for his life. Bolchev denied any knowledge of Nuzhin’s case. According to public data base of the Russian courts’ proceedings, Bolchev was convicted of theft in 2020 and sentenced to 3,5 years’ imprisonment. Bolchev stated that he had agreed to join Wagner to have his criminal record extinguished, which would allow him to find a job afterwards.^[141]

On 16 December 2022 the former commander of Nuzhin’s unit, Adrey Medvedev, who allegedly defected from Wagner, gave an interview to The Insider. He reported ten executions of Wagner Group members who refused to fight, several of which he had attended personally. Most of the executed soldiers were former prisoners. Two of them were executed near

Pervomaysk after attempted escape from a hospital where they were treated. Medvedev explained that the executions (“zeroing” in the Wagner Group slang) were performed by a specialised unit, called “Myod”:

“They’re in the business of making people disappear: they take guys and [kill them] either publicly or non-publicly, as was the case with Nuzhin,” he said.

According to Medvedev, recruited members of the Wagner Group are not paid salaries and neither their relatives receive compensations in cases of death. Mercenaries and recruited prisoners are not allowed to leave the service after the expiry of the agreed terms of their contracts. Most of the deceased are officially reported as missing. Medvedev also reported that Wagner Group is widely practicing confinement in a metal container for several days without food and water as a form of punishment. Medvedev claimed to have in his possession videos of execution of two former prisoners which were filmed near Alchevks (Luhansk Region). According to him, “the convicts started joining [Wagner Group] in August” and were “re-staffed every week” due to high losses.^{[142][143]} On 13 January 2023 Medvedev arrived to Norway. He was apprehended by the police and made an asylum request.^[144]

On 13 February 2023 “Grey Zone” Telegram Channel affiliated with the Wagner Group published another video of an execution similar to the execution of Yevgeny Nuzhin. The victim of the execution was a prisoner, identified as Dmitry Yakushenko who had been convicted of robbery and murder and sentenced to 19 years’ imprisonment. He was recruited by Wagner, and almost immediately surrendered to the Ukrainian army. In the video Yakushenko was hit on the head with a sledgehammer. Yakushenko allegedly was among the prisoners of war exchanged on 1 December 2022. Russian Ombudsperson said that she would apply to the Investigative Committee of Russia with regard to the video. Yevgeny Prigozhin hinted at the existence of other similar videos. Later his press-service published another video showing Yakushenko alive. In the video he said that he had been forgiven by the Wagner Group.^[145]

J. Prisoners’ recruitment by the Ministry of Defence.

Relatives of inmates who serve sentence in IK-3 Ryazan Region and IK-4 Stavropol Region (both colonies are for former law enforcement) reported that in the end of September 2022 the colonies had been visited by the officials of the Ministry of Defence (allegedly in the rank of generals) who offered prisoners to sign contracts and join a newly formed “Storm” / “Storm Z” («Шторм») battalion. Approximately 100 prisoners accepted the offer and 60 of them were selected by the recruiters.^[19]

In September 2022 Russia Behind Bars received reports from IK-7 Novgorod Region about the recruitment of inmates into the “official” Russian military forces (approximately 60 inmates were taken from the colony). Between December 2022 and February 2023 recruiters of the Ministry of Defence visited at least five correctional colonies in Astrakhan (IK-6, 20 prisoners were recruited into the army), Kemerovo (IK-44), Khanty-Mansiysk (IK-41, 56 prisoners), and Altay Regions. Prisoners from the correctional colonies in Volgograd were allowed to submit applications for enlistment.^[91]

According to the UK Ministry of Defence, only in April 2023 the Russian Ministry of Defence recruited up to 10,000 convicts.^[146] According to the reports collected by Russia Behind Bars directly from correctional colonies, between 1 February and mid-June 2023 the Ministry of Defence recruited around 15,000 prisoners from at least 25 Russian correctional colonies across Russia.^[147] According to updated Russia Behind Bars estimates based on an analysis of reports from convicts and their relatives, by the end of August 2023, the Ministry of Defence had recruited 25,000 prisoners. The geography of recruitment was extended to all regions of Russia (except for the Chechen Republic). Prisoner recruitment was also carried out in the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine.

Conditions offered to the prisoners were similar to those previously proposed by Wagner (amnesty or pardon after six months or one year of service, financial remuneration of 150-200 thousand roubles). Similarly to the convicts recruited by Wagner, prisoners taken by the Ministry of Defence were formally transferred to IK-12 in the Rostov Region (previously used by the Wagner Group), and from there to training camps in the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions of Ukraine. Prisoners first signed contracts with “Peoples’ Militia” of DPR / LPR and subsequently with the Ministry of Defence. Some of the prisoners were then formally attached to the Storm Z battalion and were deployed, in particular, at the front lines in the Zaporizhzhia Region of Ukraine, as a detachment of the Russian army’s 71st regiment.^{[147][148]} In late May 2023 Storm Z was deployed near Bakhmut, “succeeding” from the Wagner Group after its retreat^[149], and later, in July, near Kupyansk.^[150]

K. Legislative developments

On 4 November 2022 the Russian authorities amended the Mobilisation Act (Federal Law “On Mobilisation Preparations and Mobilisation in the Russian Federation of 26 February 1997 No. 31-FZ) having lifted the restriction on the mobilisation to the army of persons who had been convicted of serious crimes. The amendments prohibit only the mobilisation of persons convicted of sexual offences against minors, certain terrorist and extremist offences, organisation or membership of an illegal armed group; hijacking; illegal handling,

embezzlement, extortion of nuclear materials or radioactive substances; state treason; spying; attack against public official; seizure of state power; mutiny.^[151]

The amendments echoed the rhetoric of Yevgeny Prigozhin, who stated in a threatening manner during recruitment of prisoners in IK-9 Kursk Region in mid-October: “you [inmates] have a chance to go voluntarily and with money, but then ‘other people’ with ‘other competencies’ will come after you, and then everyone will go”,^[152] apparently hinting on the forced conscription into army.

In January 2023 Yevgeny Prigozhin wrote an open letter to the speaker of the lower house of Russia’s parliament, Vyacheslav Volodin, asking him to criminalise actions or publications that discredit Wagner fighters and to prohibit public disclosure of their criminal past, arguing that those “who are risking their lives every day and dying for the Motherland are being portrayed as second-class people, stripping them of the right to atone for their guilt.”^[127] On 25 January 2023 Volodin issued a press-release saying that he took into account the public letter from Prigozhin and ordered relevant sub-committees of the Duma to prepare amendments to the Criminal Code criminalising “discreditation of the war participants”. In his words, “everyone who defend the country, military servicemen, volunteers, mobilised, and Wagner members – are heroes. They shall be respected similarly to [other] participants of military action.”^[153]

The relevant amendments to the Criminal Code (Articles 207.3 and 280.3) and the Code of Administrative Offences (Article 20.3.3) were prepared on 8 February 2023,^{[154][155]} and adopted on 18 March 2023.^[156] They supplemented the existing criminal and administrative offences of “public discreditation of the Russian armed forces” with:

- a) administrative responsibility (Article 20.3.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences) for the “public discreditation of the assistance provided by volunteer formations, organisations, and individuals, to fulfilment of tasks assigned to the armed forces of the Russian Federation”, punishable by a fine of up to 50,000 roubles for individuals, up to 200,000 roubles for public officials, and up to 500,000 roubles for legal entities. Article 20.3.3 § 2 provides for twice as large punishment, if such actions were “accompanied with calls for unauthorised public events, or posed a threat to life and limb of citizens, property, public order, or disruption of vital objects, transport and social infrastructure, credit organisations, energy supply, industry and communication”;
- b) criminal responsibility for repeated commission (second during one year) of the administrative offence of “public discreditation”, punishable by up to five years’ imprisonment (Articles 207.3 of the Criminal Code), or by up to seven years’ imprisonment if they caused “negligent death or damaged citizens’ health,

property, entailed mass breaches of public order or disrupted the functioning of vital objects, transport and social infrastructure, credit organisations, energy supply, industry and communication (Articles 207.3 § 2);

- c) criminal responsibility (Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code), for “public dissemination of false information” about “the assistance provided by the volunteer formations, organisations, and individuals, to the fulfilment of tasks assigned to the armed forces of the Russian Federation”, punishable by up to five years’ imprisonment (and up to ten or fifteen years’ imprisonment if there was one of six “aggravating circumstances” under Article 207.3 §§ 2 and 3, including “grave consequences”).

Kremlin spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, confirmed that the “discreditation” of the Wagner Group falls under the criminal and administrative offences provided for by the amendments.^[157]

On 31 May 2023 amendments to the Military Service Act (Federal Law no. 53-FZ of 28 March 1998) were proposed, which, allowed during mobilisation period and the state of war, to make military service contracts with persons with criminal record (except for certain offences, including terrorism, hostage taking, illegal possession or theft of nuclear materials, state treason, espionage, mutiny, coup d’état, extremism). The amendments further proposed to relive convicts who signed military service contracts from sentence. The draft law was adopted on 26 June 2023.^[158]

L. Foreign recruitment and recruitment of foreigners

In September 2022 reports surfaced that the Wagner Group has extended the recruitment to the correctional facilities in the Donetsk Region of Ukraine.^[159] According to other sources, Wagner Group “gained permission” to recruit prisoners in Donetsk later, in the early December 2022.^[160] Reports of prisoners’ recruitment also came from the occupied Kherson Region.^[161] The Ukrainian NGO “Protection for Prisoners of Ukraine” obtained a list of 156 prisoners from correctional colonies Zapadnaya and Makiivskaya (both located in Makiivka), Nikitovskaya (Gorlivka), Yenakiieve, Kirovskoye, Torez, as well from Donetsk, who “expressed their wish to join the ranks” of the so-called “Donetsk People’s Militia”. It is suggested that Wagner Group or another pro-Russian military contractor was involved in their recruitment.

It was also reported that Wagner Group recruited foreign nationals serving sentence in Russia. In September 2022 over 40 foreign prisoners from IK-17 Mordovia, including citizens of Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Moldova, Serbia, and Egypt, were recruited and transferred to Ukraine. Recruited prisoners have been identified by Novaya Gazeta Europe.^[162] In October 2022, Sergey Sebrezov, a Ukrainian national who served his sentence in IK-10 Saratov Region was recruited, deployed in Ukraine, and allegedly killed in action. Information agency “FAN”,

linked to Prigozhin, subsequently published a video on which Sebrevov refuted the report on his death.^[163]

In November 2022 the Zambian authorities requested the Russian government to clarify the circumstances of death of Lemekhani Nathan Nyirenda, a Zambian national who had been serving his 9 years' sentence in Russia for drug offence, and was allegedly recruited by Wagner Group and killed in Ukraine.^[164] The body of Nyirenda was returned to the relatives in the early December 2022. According to the Zambian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Stanley Kakubo, "[the Zambian authorities] were informed that Russia allows for prisoners to be provided an opportunity for pardon in exchange for participation in the 'special military operation'." Minister said the information had come from his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov.^[165] Prigozhin commented the death of Nyirenda in the following way:^[166]

"Yes, I remember this guy well. I talked to him in the Tver Region and asked him a question: 'Why do you need this war? You can get out early in a couple of years, you'll soon be home and you'll see your relatives. Why are you going? After all, the chance of dying is high enough. Remember that.' And he answered what I expected. He said: 'You Russians have helped us Africans to gain our independence for many years. When it was difficult for us, you gave us a hand, and you continue to do so now. The Wagner PMC saves thousands of Africans and if I go with you to war, it is probably the least I can do to pay our debts. And if I stay alive, I will learn to fight for my homeland. And one more thing, I'm honoured, I only know about Wagner by hearsay, but I can become one of you.' Nyirenda Lemekani Nathan on 22 September was one of the first to break into the trenches of the enemy, showed courage and bravery. And died a hero."

On 17 September 2022 Murad Kurbanov, the head of the Turkmen opposition movement "Democratic Choice of Turkmenistan" reported with reference to the local human rights activists from Turkmenistan and Russia, as well as prisoners' relatives, that the Turkmen authorities transferred at least 500 Russian-speaking inmates from Turkmenistan prisons to Russia. They were served with newly issued Russian passports and deployed to Ukraine as part of a private military contractor known as "Redut".^[167] Before the transfer, prisoners allegedly had to register online on the contractor's website. Similarly to the recruitment in Russia, inmates in Turkmenistan were promised early release and financial remuneration in exchange for their service. According to Kurbanov, this information leaked after the first inmates recruited under this scheme were killed in Ukraine. Their relatives were allegedly visited by the state security service and told that prisoners died of covid-19 and their bodies would not be returned to them due to epidemiological restrictions.^[168]

On 29 November 2022, the Daily Beast media reported, with reference to the military officers from the Central African Republic, that Wagner Group had started recruitment of inmates in

CAR prisons for their subsequent participation in military operations of the Group in Mali and Ukraine. Reportedly, for this purpose, recruiters were allowed by the authorities to freely visit prisons and other places of detention. According to the reports, the Wagner Group had recruited dozens of prisoners, most of whom were convicted of terrorism, murder, and rape.^[169]

On 31 December 2022 the Russian Ministry of Interior put on a wanted list six prisoners recruited by the Wagner Group who had escaped from a training camp in Krasnodon District of the occupied Luhansk Region of Ukraine on 21-22 December 2022. The armed group, comprising three nationals of Uzbekistan, one citizen of Kyrgyzstan, one Belarus national, and one Russian national allegedly went to the Rostov Region of Russia.^[170]

In January 2023, Prigozhin's media "FAN" reported the death of a Tanzanian national, Tarimo Nemes Raymondo, who was recruited from IK-2 Yaroslavl Region and allegedly was killed near Bakhmut in October 2022.^[171] Later a prisoner from IK-2 Yaroslavl Region reported that Wagner Group's recruiter who "revisited" the colony in the end of 2022 explicitly told foreign nationals not to volunteer.^[21]

In January 2023 reports came about the attempts to recruit prisoners from the occupied Ukrainian region of Kherson who had been forcefully transferred to Russia in November-December 2022.^[172] Mass recruitment of foreign nationals also took place in IK-6, Vladimir Region. There have also been at least four reported cases of death among Kyrgyzstan,^[173] and ten Tajikistan nationals^[174] recruited by the Wagner Group from correctional colonies in Russia. According to the General Staff of the Ukraine armed forces, 1,200 prisoners were recruited by the Wagner Group from the facilities in the occupied Crimea in February 2023.^[175]

M. Praising the "heroes"

On 24 December 2022 Yevgeny Prigozhin organised and personally attended a solemn funeral of Dmitry Menshikov, a convict who had been sentenced to 7.5 years' imprisonment in February 2022 and was recruited by the Wagner Group. The funeral took place at a newly created Alley of Valour of the St Petersburg Beloostrovskoye cemetery which was established at the request of Prigozhin. The Military servicemen, as well as members of veterans organisation *Boyevoye Bratstvo* (Combat Brotherhood) and a youth branch of the LDPR political party, took part in the funeral.^[176]

Sergey Molodtsov, another convict who had been recruited by the Wagner Group from a correctional colony, was buried with military honours on 5 January 2023. The local administration of Serov (Sverdlovsk Region of Russia) organised the funeral and issued an official necrology. The ceremony was attended by the members of the local veterans'

organisation. The coffin was solemnly carried by the military servicemen. Molodtsov was a recidivist most recently sentenced in 2017 to 11,5 years' imprisonment for an aggravated murder of his mother.^[177] Similar funeral with military honours was organised on 19 January 2023 for Aleksandr Sitavichus, another prisoner recruited by Wagner, who had been convicted of triple murder.^[178] On 2 March 2023 Andrey Kholodov, a gang member, convicted of robberies, kidnapping, and multiple murders, and sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment in 2008 was buried at the Alley of Glory of the Tyumen Cemetery. He was recruited by the Wagner Group from a correctional colony in Irkutsk.^[179] On 2 March 2023 another recruited prisoner, Roman Aleksantsev, convicted of aggravated murder, theft, and destruction of property, and sentenced to 22 years' imprisonment, was buried in Sevastopol (occupied Crimea). The Russian "governor" of the occupied Sevastopol said that Aleksantsev "was convicted of a serious crime, but atoned for it with blood".^[180]

In December 2022 a commemorative plaque was installed on a building of a school in Sratov in tribute to Denis Kovyrzin. Kovyrzin, recruited by the Wagner Group from IK-11 Nizhniy Novgorod, was convicted of murder and illegal firearms possession in 2016.^[181] On 10 January 2023 another commemorative plaque was installed in Konakovo (Tver Region) in tribute to Nikolay Davidyan, who had been convicted in March 2022 of large-scale drug sell, sentenced to 9 years' imprisonment and recruited by Wagner in August 2022. The ceremony was attended by the head of the town administration.^[182]

On 31 December 2022 President Putin awarded medal "For Courage" to Aik Gasparayan, who had been sentenced to 7 years and 3 months' imprisonment for armed robbery in 2021. When accepting the medal from Putin, Gasparyan said "I serve Russia and the PMC Wagner".^[183]

Legal analysis

A. Lack of the domestic legal framework regulating the activities of private military contractors and backing up of the recruitment by the FSIN

Despite the Russian authorities' active reliance on private military contractors such as Wagner, the domestic legislation of the Russian Federation is completely silent on their status, activities, modes of incorporation, relations with the regular army and the Ministry of Defence, as well as their responsibility. The authorities persistently denied any links to the Wagner Group or similar paramilitary groups or formations. Several attempts to legalise them and enact legislation governing their activities have ended up in vain. The PMCs employed by Russia continue to operate across the globe (including Libya, Syria, Central African Republic, and Ukraine) in a complete legal vacuum, which paves the way for the variety of crimes and

violations of human rights and humanitarian law regularly committed by them and the impunity of their personnel and commanders.^[184]

Formally, organisation and membership of an illegal armed formation such as the Wagner Group may constitute several offences under the Criminal Code of Russia: Article 208 (“Organisation or membership of illegal armed formation”), 209 (“Banditry” – organisation of a stable armed group with the aim of assaulting individuals or organisations or membership of it), 210 (“Organisation of criminal community or membership of it”), 359 (“Mercenarism”). Despite substantive criminalisation and numerous criminal complaints, no proceedings were brought up in Russia in relation to the recruitment of prisoners by the Wagner Group.

The lack of the legal domestic framework regulating the activities of PMCs allows them to use untrained personnel, unfamiliar with basic principles of international humanitarian law, military regulations, and obligations stemming from them (see the relevant obligations summarised in the Montreux Document “On pertinent international legal obligations and good practices for States related to operations of private military and security companies during armed conflict”, I.A.2, 3, and 4, 17 September 2008).^[185] The authorities deliberately leave the activities of private military contractors, such as the Wagner Group, non-transparent and unscrutinised, in order to:

- (a) shield their personnel and superiors from responsibility for the acts and practices against combatants, civilians, as well as their own staff, both outside and during military conflicts;
- (b) absolve the state from obligations and responsibility under IHL and human rights law for the actions of contractors and the manner in which they operate.

The FSIN has not publicly commented on the recruitment campaign, its modalities, and grounds. Neither have they responded to the relevant inquiries addressed to them by the media.^[63] However, it is clear, that the visits to the penal institutions by the Wagner Group recruiters could not have taken place without formal authorisation by prison administrations. Article 24 of the Penitentiary Code of the Russian Federation provides for a closed list of public officials who are allowed to make unannounced visits to correctional institutions without prior approval by the prison authorities. All other persons, officials, and media may visit prisons and colonies only subject to prior authorisation of the administration of the penitentiary facilities or the Regional Departments of the FSIN. Accordingly, each visit by the recruiters has been formally permitted and coordinated with the prison authorities, who therefore approved the recruitment campaign and its goals.

B. Lack of the legal framework for transferring inmates to the zone of military conflict and their prolonged stay outside the detention facilities; arbitrariness of their detention

The Russian domestic law (Penitentiary Code of the Russian Federation) provides for the situations when a convicted prisoner may be authorised to temporarily leave a correctional institution (Articles 97 and 104):

- a) a short-term leave (up to seven days) can be granted in view of exceptional circumstances (death or a serious, life-threatening illness of a close relative), as well as for the preliminary employment and living arrangements of the convict;
- b) a long-term leave for the period of the annual leave for the employed prisoners and for a similar period in respect of unemployed prisoners (18 days for minor convicts and 12 days for other prisoners).

Leave is not allowed to the broad categories of prisoners, including aggravated recidivists, lifers, prisoners suffering from tuberculosis, addicted to alcohol, substances, and drugs, prisoners who had not undergone treatment for sexually-transmitted diseases, HIV-positive prisoners, prisoners who were declared “persistent offenders of the prison regime”, prisoners convicted of crimes against minors, terrorist activities, hijacking, drug-related offences, etc. Leave may also be suspended in view of the epidemiological situation. The decision to grant leave for the remaining categories of prisoners lies within the full discretion of the prison authorities.

Taking into account the limited term of the prison leave as well as other strict requirements for granting leave requests, it is clear that this mechanism can not be used as a formal ground for authorising the prisoners’ relocation to the military conflict zone.

An anonymous prison officer from one of the colonies in the Leningrad Region (IK-7, IK-3, or IK-4) explains that “according to documents, inmates are simply transferred to another colony. I don’t know which one exactly, but it turns out that convicts technically are still convicts, as they were. About one hundred inmates were transferred from our colony to an unknown location. We don’t know their fate yet.”^[71] Similar explanations were coming from prisoners’ relatives from the same Region.^[34]

However, even during a transfer to another penitentiary facility, prisoners can be detained only in other colonies, remand prisons, or transit centres existing on the territory of the penitentiary facilities (Article 76 § 7 of the Penitentiary Code).

Transfer of convicted prisoners to remand prisons or other correctional institutions is allowed:

- (1) for their participation in the pre-trial investigation or court hearings (Article 77.1 of the Penitentiary Code),
- (2) due to their medical condition or in view of the existing risks to their safety,
- (3) in cases of re-organisation or liquidation of a facility where they are held,
- (4) due to “other exceptional circumstances preventing further detention of a person in a specific facility”, including cases of relocation to a region, where prisoners’ relatives live (Article 81 of the Penitentiary Code)

None of these grounds explains the massive flow of prisoners from the colonies visited by the Wagner Group recruiters. The Penitentiary Code (Article 81.1) requires prison administrations to register the residence of inmates in a region and a correctional institution where they serve their sentence. This provision specifies that no migration record shall be made in respect of prisoners detained in transit centres or remand prisons for their transfer to another correctional facility or participation in the pre-trial investigation or court hearings. The lack of the migration record of prisoners in transit explains the ‘convenience’ of the transferring as a formal explanation for their prolonged absence from correctional institutions. Therefore, it is highly probable that the Penitentiary Service of Russia is abusing their wide powers in the matter of geographical distribution of prisoners to conceal their involvement in the military conflict and to create an impression that they have never left the penitentiary system but are merely transferred between the institutions.

Another formal ground for convicted prisoners to leave correctional colonies for a prolonged period of time would be their early release granted by a court under the provisions of the Criminal Code of Russia (Section 12 of the Code). However, according to the public databases of courts’ jurisprudence, no such orders were taken recently in large numbers. Neither the recruited prisoners were released under the State Duma’s decree on amnesty (this opportunity for obtaining early release was actually one of the options promised to the prisoners who joined the Wagner Group).

The amendments to the Mobilisation Act (see above) of 4 November 2022, allowing the mobilisation into army of persons who had been convicted of serious crimes, apparently constituted an attempt by the authorities to retroactively legalise the recruitment campaign (at least to some extent).

Another attempt to explain the mass release of prisoners was made informally, through the member of the Presidential Council for Human Rights, Eva Merkacheva, who claimed in January 2023, that the recruited inmates had been pardoned by a classified decree of the President before their transfer from the correctional colonies.^[186] At the time the Kremlin’s

spokesperson evaded a direct answer to the question about the pardon of recruited prisoners, merely citing the provisions of the Criminal Code.^{[187][188]} However, on 13 June 2023 Vladimir Putin, during a meeting with “military journalists” stated that he indeed had signed decrees on pardon of convicts who took part in the war. He did not specify the number of pardoned convicts and whether the decrees were signed before their deployment or after the completion of their contracts with the Wagner Group).^[116]

Accordingly, it is highly possible that the recruited prisoners leaving the correctional colonies to the military conflict area still retained their formal status of formally detainees deprived of liberty and therefore enjoying the guarantees stemming from Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted by the General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) on 16 December 1966). Their absence from the correctional institutions was therefore allegedly authorised by the prison administrations in breach of the domestic and international law.

Article 9 § 1 of the ICCPR provides for that no one shall be deprived of liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedures as are established by law. Procedures for carrying out legally authorised deprivation of liberty should also be established by law, and States parties should ensure compliance with their legally prescribed procedures. Detention may be arbitrary if the manner in which the detainees are treated does not relate to the purpose for which they are ostensibly being detained.^[189] Extreme forms of arbitrary detention that are themselves life-threatening violate the rights to personal liberty and personal security as well as the right to protection of life.^[190] Detainees should be held only in facilities officially acknowledged as places of detention.^[191]

The engagement of inmates in the operations of the Wagner Group while they are still serving their prison terms exposes their life to an immense risk and runs contrary to the purpose of their formal detention rendering it arbitrary and unlawful.

C. Absence of the effective control of the prison administration over the inmates in the zone of military conflict

It follows from Article 103 § 1 of the Penitentiary Code of Russia that convicted prisoners can be employed by organisations located on the territory of correctional facilities or outside, “if their security and isolation are duly ensured”. It is important that “the production activities of convicts must not interfere with the main task of correctional institutions - the correction of convicts” (Article 103 § 5 of the Code). When allowing the inmates to join private military contractors and to leave detention facilities for the purpose of participation in the military conflict in Ukraine, the prison administrations fail to supervise and secure the safety of inmates,

properly implement and upkeep the regime rules, as well as to ensure the execution of sentences appointed by courts, i.e. to fulfil their responsibility for the custody of prisoners and the protection of society, and the functions vested with them under the domestic law and stemming from the applicable international standards.

Under the *Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment* adopted by the UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988:

“Any form of detention or imprisonment and all measures affecting the human rights of a person under any form of detention or imprisonment shall be ordered by, or be subject to the effective control of, a judicial or other authority” (Principle 4).

United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) (General Assembly resolution 70/175, Annex, adopted on 17 December 2015) provides for that prison labour must not be of an afflictive nature (Rule 97) and that prisoners employed in work not controlled by the prison administration shall always be under the supervision of prison staff (Rule 100).

According to the CCPR jurisprudence,

“when private individuals or entities are authorized by a State party to exercise powers of arrest or detention, the State party remains responsible for adherence to Article 9 [of the CCPR]. It must rigorously limit those powers and must provide strict and effective control to ensure that those powers are not misused, and do not lead to arbitrary or unlawful arrest or detention. It must also provide adequate remedies for victims if arbitrary or unlawful arrest or detention does occur.”^[192]

By renting out convicted prisoners to the Wagner Group, the prison authorities *de facto* transfer the control over the inmates and the relevant responsibility. Such delegation of responsibilities does not have any legal basis in Russian law, either in the form of a specific agreement between the authorities and the group or a normative act establishing the framework for the employment of prisoners by PMCs, delegating them the function and the responsibility for the execution of sentences and obliging them to ensure safety and security of the prisoners.

D. Recruitment of prisoners by the Wagner Group and their involvement in the military conflict run contrary to the rehabilitative and reintegrative purposes of criminal punishment and constitute a forced labour

The Nelson Mandela Rules provide that:

“Rule 96

1. *Sentenced prisoners shall have the opportunity to work and/or to actively participate in their rehabilitation ...*
2. *Sufficient work of a useful nature shall be provided to keep prisoners actively employed for a normal working day.*

Rule 97

1. *Prison labour must not be of an afflictive nature.*
2. *Prisoners shall not be held in slavery or servitude.*

...

Rule 98

1. *So far as possible the work provided shall be such as will maintain or increase the prisoners' ability to earn an honest living after release.*

...

Rule 99

1. *The organisation and methods of work in prisons shall resemble as closely as possible those of similar work outside of prisons, so as to prepare prisoners for the conditions of normal occupational life.*
2. *The interests of the prisoners and of their vocational training, however, must not be subordinated to the purpose of making a financial profit from an industry in the prison.*

Rule 100

1. *Preferably, industrial industries and farms should be operated directly by the prison administration and not by private contractors.*
2. *Where prisoners are employed in work not controlled by the prison administration, they shall always be under the supervision of prison staff...^[193]*

Inmates joining the Wagner Group and participating in the military conflict still retain their status of convicted prisoners and shall benefit from the respective guarantees linked to that status, including the protection from forced or compulsory labour (Articles 1(1), 2(1) and (2)(c) of the Forced Labour Convention (no.29); Article 8 of the CCPR). The Human Rights Committee has stated that “for [detainees’] labour not to be forced or compulsory, it must, at a minimum, not be an exceptional measure... *and it must be provided for by law in order to serve a legitimate purpose under the Covenant.*”^[194]

The detainees’ conscription, their “work” for Wagner Group, as well as the modalities and conditions for their release for these purposes are not regulated by domestic law (for comparison, in March 2022 the Ukrainian authorities adopted a law providing for the release of certain categories of prisoners willing to join the army).^[195] Accordingly, there are no centralised public monitoring mechanism, unified register of convicts joining the PMCs, no regulations setting out basic social guarantees for conscripted prisoners. The lack of a legal framework paves the way for various serious violations of the prisoners’ rights and makes their

involvement in the military conflict totally non-transparent. For instance, the relatives of prisoners killed or injured during the military conflict are unable to become aware of their whereabouts and fate.

By allowing the prisoners to join Wagner Group and leave the places of detention to the military conflict areas, prison authorities additionally compromise public safety. The group is particularly interested in recruiting dangerous violent offenders. Their participation in the military conflict, training, and access to firearms, further aggravate their violent character and raise the risks that they pose to society without pursuing any legitimate socially important aims, such as territorial defence. Thus, neighbours of Aleksander Salmin, a prisoner-recidivist recruited by the Wagner Group from a colony in Leningrad Region who was allegedly released after six months' service for Wagner, told BBC:

“He was very good, kind, responsible. But then he changed dramatically when he started using drugs. He became insanely violent.”

“[The crimes of which Salmin was convicted] is a small fraction of the crimes he has committed, ... These are just the people who dared to write a [criminal complaint] against him. But there are also those who kept quiet. There are people who are still very much afraid that he will come back to our city. And I am very much afraid that he will do something to these people. Salmin is a scary man.”

Another Salmin's acquaintance told BBC that he could have also been involved in a brutal crime against her loved one. According to her, Salmin allegedly threatened to kill her if the victim reported to the police.

“I knew [Salmin] had gone to war ... in August I heard rumours that he had been killed there. And today I saw this video of them being awarded... And I don't understand: why? It's wild to me when someone like Anatoly is called a hero.”^[99]

Ivan Rossomakhin, who was found guilty of murder in 2020 and sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment, was later recruited by the Wagner Group. He returned to his home village of Noviy Burets in the Kirov Region in March 2023. Since his return, he has been regularly seen on the streets in a state of drunkenness, wielding an axe, threatening to kill passersby, and damaging cars. As a result, he has been arrested multiple times for hooliganism. Finally, on 29 March 2023, he was arrested again, this time on charges of murder.^[196]

The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the prisoners are invited to join the Wagner Group rather than the regular Russian armed forces, which formally makes the Russian domestic military regulations inapplicable to them. The Military Service Act (Federal Law no. 53-FZ of

28 March 1998) provides that military service contracts cannot be signed by convicted, sentenced, and prosecuted persons, as well as the persons who had a criminal record or had ever served a prison sentence (Section 34 § 5 (5)). This prohibition is clearly aimed at excluding former prisoners (let alone those who still serve sentences) from any involvement in military service. The recruitment campaign conducted by Wagner and backed up by the authorities is clearly used to bypass this prohibition by dragging the convicts into military activities in a non-official capacity. The use of untrained personnel lacking the knowledge of the basic principles of humanitarian law some of whom have been involved in serious violent crimes exacerbates the risk of grave breaches of Geneva Conventions against civilians and combatants.

Despite the absence of a widespread practice of forceful recruitment of prisoners using physical violence or threats thereof, the recruitment still cannot be considered voluntary, as the recruiters widely use deceit and false promises as a method for persuading the inmates to join Wagner or similar armed groups. Thus, it is widely reported that the prisoners are promised amnesty or a presidential pardon after six months of service. This is clearly misleading, as there have been no amnesties in Russia since 2015, and previously all amnesties were limited to specific, narrow groups of prisoners mostly convicted of lower severity and non-violent offences. However, the “target audience” of the Wagner recruiters includes, among others, long-term prisoners sentenced for serious violent crimes and recidivists. As to the presidential pardon, for the last 20 years, the President granted only 13 such requests (out of 2,301 lodged)^[197] and, taking into account the enhancement of punitive measures in Russia, this rate would hardly increase.

As regards correctional colonies in the occupied territories of Ukraine, where the recruitment has been also reportedly taking place, it should be emphasized that such recruitment runs contrary to Article 51 of the Fourth Geneva Convention (Enlistment. Labour) which prohibits the occupying power from compelling protected persons (including prisoners in the occupied territories, by virtue of Article 4 of the Convention) to serve in its armed or auxiliary forces, as well as from exerting pressure or disseminating propaganda aimed at securing voluntary enlistment.

Wagner uses the legal illiteracy and vulnerability of the prison population to their advantage. The prison authorities (with a few exceptions) tolerate the recruitment campaign based on the misinformation of prisoners or, which is even more disturbing, actively support it, in breach of their responsibility to ensure the safety, security, and rehabilitation of the inmates. Most of the prisoners have lived for a long time under constant psychological and often physical pressure, without realistic prospects of early release, in the absence of any rehabilitation programmes.^[198]

Their social ties and values become completely severed or seriously damaged and they are willing to take extreme choices which put their lives and those of others at risk.

Immersing prisoners in a military environment, involving and exposing them to violence, lead to their loss of touch with reality and commission of further crimes, as vividly demonstrated by the case of Pavel Nikolin, a 38-year old recidivist from IK-4 Republic of Bashkiria, convicted of multiple armed robberies, hijacking, and prison escape. On 7 December 2022 he opened fire at several police officers from a machinegun, injuring one of them. The incident took place in Novoshakhtinsk (Rostov Region of Russia). Nikolin was arrested and charged with illegal firearms possession and attack against the law-enforcement officer. It was reported that Nikolin deserted from the Wagner Group. Yevgeny Prigozhin suggested that Nikolin could have been injured or shocked and disoriented and had mistaken police officers for enemy soldiers.^[199] On 9 November 2022 Leninsky district court of the Rostov Region authorised Nikolin's pre-trial detention for two months. During remand hearings Nikolin confirmed that he served in Wagner Group and had been deployed with his unit near Bakhmut, but had gotten lost and that he had indeed taken mistaken the police for Ukrainian soldiers.^[200]

Instead of protecting inmates, the prison administrations expose them to the Wagner Group as an easily-accessible and obedient labour force, which diminishes their human dignity and subjects them to forced labour, in breach of Articles 7 and 8 of the CCPR.

E. Legal status of the recruited prisoners

On 4 November 2022 EPLN asked the Security Service, Prosecutor General Office, and the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine about the status of captured prisoners. On 8 November 2022 the Ministry of Justice replied that the information about the status of prisoners of war cannot be disclosed with a view to restrictions implemented in the war time. This, and similar responses can be understood as indirectly hinting at that the captured "Wagner's prisoners" are considered as prisoners of war by the Ministry of Justice.

Despite being recruited by unincorporated military contractor Wagner Group and taking part in the military conflict as its members, most of the prisoners do not qualify as "mercenaries" within the meaning of Article 47 of Additional Protocol I to Geneva Conventions or the 1989 Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries.

The cumulative criteria set forth in these instruments, as well as other treaties and numerous national laws, provide for that to qualify as a mercenary, an individual must neither be a national of a party to the conflict, nor resident of territory controlled by a party to the conflict. As most of the recruited prisoners are Russian nationals or permanently reside in Russia, they

do not fulfil the condition of nationality and therefore do not qualify as mercenaries. The opposite approach would contradict the well-established (albeit quite restrictive) criteria of “mercenaries” and would have led to them being stripped of their right to combatant or prisoner-of-war status (Article 47(1) of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions).

Conclusion

The Submitting Organisations respectfully ask the Mandate of the Special Rapporteur to take this submission into account for the purposes of the forthcoming Mandate’s comprehensive reports to the Human Rights Council at its fifty-fourth session and to the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session.

Respectfully submitted.

¹ Human Rights Council: Concerns about Continued Reports of Localised Violence Involving Community-Based Militias in South Sudan, and in Mali the Deterioration of the Overall Security Situation Has Passed the Critical Threshold. OHCHR Press release. 29 March 2022 // <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/03/hrc-continued-localised-violence>

Human Rights Council Holds Interactive Dialogue with the Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in the Central African Republic and Begins Interactive Dialogue with the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya. OHCHR Press release. 6 July 2022 // <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/07/human-rights-council-holds-interactive-dialogue-independent-expert-situation>

CAR: Russian Wagner Group harassing and intimidating civilians – UN experts. OHCHR Press release. 27 October 2021 // <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/11/car-russian-wagner-group-harassing-and-intimidating-civilians-un-experts>

CAR: Experts alarmed by government’s use of “Russian trainers”, close contacts with UN peacekeepers. OHCHR Press release. 31 March 2021 // <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/03/car-experts-alarmed-governments-use-russian-trainers-close-contacts-un>

Libya: Violations related to mercenary activities must be investigated – UN experts. OHCHR Press release. 17 June 2020 // <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2020/06/libya-violations-related-mercenary-activities-must-be-investigated-un-experts>

Wagner in Syria: Appeal to European Court of Human Rights after case dismissed in Russia. FIDH Press release. 9 June 2022 // <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/north-africa-middle-east/syria/syria-russia-wagner-appeal-european-court-human-rights>

Shrouded in secrecy for years, Russia’s Wagner Group opens up. Aljazeera. 10 August 2022 // <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/10/wagner-private-group-now-an-extension-of-russias-military>

² Новые солдаты российской армии: ЧВК Вагнера завербовала больше тысячи заключённых в 17 колониях страны (New Soldiers of the Russian Army: Wagner PMC recruited more than one thousand prisoners in 17 colonies across the country). Verstka, 5 August 2022 // <https://verstka.media/vagner-verbovka-zaklyuchennyh-iz-17-koloniy/>

³ «А потом пришли новости, что Славу снарядом разорвало» ("And then the news came that Slava had been torn apart by a shell"). Important Stories, 19 September 2022 // <https://importantstories.com/2022/09/19/a-potom-prishli-novosti-cto-slavu-snyadom-razorvalo/>

⁴ Avtozak Live Telegram Channel, 13 October 2022 // <https://t.me/avtozaklive/16251?single>

⁵ Служу России и ЧВК "Вагнер". Как в России поставили на поток вербовку заключённых на войну с Украиной ("Serving Russia and the Wagner PMC. How Russia has streamlined prisoner recruitment for war with Ukraine). BBC, 27 January 2023 // <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-64427178>

⁶ Ivan Astashin Telegram Channel, 30 November 2022 // https://t.me/bolshaya_zona/1670

⁷ «Пригожин сразу говорит, что 80% не вернутся с фронта». Как заключённых вербуют в ЧВК Вагнера для войны в Украине (Prigozhin immediately says that 80% will not come back from the front. How prisoners are recruited into the Wagner PMC for the war in Ukraine). The Insider, 18 August 2022 // <https://theinsider.ru/confession/254148>

⁸ This information came from Aleksandr Shestun, a former head of the Serpukhov District, serving his sentence in the Kaluga Region (Sota Telegram Channel, 22 September 2022 // <https://t.me/sotaproject/46613>).

- ⁹ В Кемеровской области более 100 заключённых завербовали для отправки на войну (More than 100 prisoners recruited to be sent to war in Kemerovo region). Verstka, 1 November 2022 // <https://verstka.media/v-kemerovskoi-oblasti-zaverbovali-bolee-100-zakluchennyh/>
- ¹⁰ Родственники кузбасских заключенных заявили о принуждении вступать в ЧВК и ехать на «спецоперацию» (Relatives of Kuzbass prisoners said that they were forced to join the PMC and go to the "special operation"). Tayga Info, 15 November 2022 // <https://tayga.info/179795>
- ¹¹ «Те, кто отказался, сильно избиты, ходить не могут». Родные заключенных из Сибири подтвердили, что тех массово отправляют на войну («Those who refused are badly beaten, they can't walk.» Relatives of prisoners from Siberia confirmed that they were being sent to war en masse). Currenttime, 23 November 2022 // <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/te-kto-otkazalsya-silno-izbity-hodit-ne-mogut-rodnnye-zaklyuchennyh-iz-sibiri-rasskazali-chto-ih-massovo-otpravlyayut-na-voynu-v-ukraine/32142742.html>
- ¹² Sota Telegram Channel, 7 December 2022 // <https://t.me/sotaproject/50522>
- ¹³ «Не меньше ста»: священник благословил красноярских заключенных на участие в СВО в составе «Вагнера» ("No less than a hundred": priest blesses Krasnoyarsk prisoners to participate in [special military operation] as part of Wagner). NGS24.ru, 4 November 2022 // <https://ngs24.ru/text/politics/2022/11/04/71791916/>
- ¹⁴ «Русь Сидящая»: в Новосибирской области на войну завербовали около 1,4 тысячи заключенных (Russia Behind Bars: about 1,400 prisoners recruited for war in Novosibirsk Oblast). Important Stories, 3 November 2022 // <https://istories.media/news/2022/11/03/rus-sidyashchaya-v-novosibirskoi-oblasti-na-voynu-zaverbovali-okolo-14-tisyachi-zaklyuchennikh/>
- ¹⁵ «Русь Сидящая»: вербовщики добрались до оренбургских колоний (Russia Behind Bars: recruiters have reached the Orenburg colonies). The Insider, 30 September 2022 // <https://theins.ru/news/255599>
- ¹⁶ Заключенные в Ростовской области массово записываются на спецоперацию. ФСИН отрицает вербовку (Prisoners in the Rostov region are enlisting en masse for special operations. Federal Penitentiary Service denies recruitment). 161.ru, 3 September 2022 // https://161.ru/text/world/2022/09/03/71626298/?fbclid=IwAR1ZHVfqordesmedtUCO2Pph8sne1FHWFUwn1_i-Y3hpgu4vTD6PrY6GbE
- ¹⁷ Important Stories Telegram Channel, 24 August 2022 // https://t.me/istories_media/1412
- ¹⁸ ЧВК «Вагнера» завербовала еще полсотни заключенных из колонии, где сидел Евгений Нужин (Wagner PMC recruits half a hundred more inmates from the colony where Evgeny Nuzhin was imprisoned). Important Stories, 30 November 2022 // <https://istories.media/news/2022/11/30/chvk-vagnera-zaverbovala-veshche-polsotni-zaklyuchennikh-iz-kolonii-gde-sidel-yevgenii-nuzhin/>
- ¹⁹ Минобороны России теперь тоже вербует эзков на фронт (Russia's defence ministry now also recruits convicts for the frontline). Important Stories, 11 October 2022 // <https://istories.media/news/2022/10/11/minoboroni-rossii-teper-tozhe-verbuet-zekov-na-front/>
- ²⁰ Relative of convict reports recruitment of prisoners for Ukraine War in Russian penal colony. Novaya Gazeta Europe, 19 October 2022 // <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/10/19/relative-of-convict-reports-recruitment-of-prisoners-for-ukraine-war-in-russian-penal-colony-en-news>
- ²¹ По второму кругу. Вербовщики «ЧВК Вагнера» снова объезжают колонии, откуда уже забирали эзков — но теперь им почти не верят (A second round. Wagner PMC recruiters are once again touring the colonies from which they have taken prisoners - but now they are hardly trusted). Mediazona, 6 February 2023 // <https://zona.media/article/2023/02/06/verbovka>
- ²² От тюменской ИК-1 в аэропорт едут колонны спецмашин. Источники сообщают, что осужденных отправят на СВО (Columns of special vehicles are on their way to the airport from Prison No. 1 in Tyumen. Sources say that the convicts will be sent to [special military operation]). 72.ru, 17 November 2022 // <https://72.ru/text/gorod/2022/11/17/71822651/>
- ²³ «Наших мужей забирают на войну в Украину». Свидетельства вербовки заключенных в российских тюрьмах ("Our husbands are being taken to war in Ukraine. Evidence of prisoner recruitment in Russian prisons). Популярная политика, 13 September 2022 // <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfPxSFaXqbg&t=27s>
- ²⁴ An extended interview with Svetlana Akimova, mother of Vladimir Akimov, a convict recruited from IK-6 Vladimir is available at: <https://myrussianrights.ru/vse-video/priehali-zagruzili-uvezli-chvk-vagner-v-ik-6/>. This is the correctional colony where Alexey Navalny, prominent Russian opposition leader, is currently detained.
- ²⁵ Заключенный ярославской ИК-2 сообщил, что из трех местных колоний на войну отправили 373 человека (A convict from IK-2 Yaroslavl reported that 373 inmates from three local colonies were sent to war). Mediazona, 24 August 2022 // <https://zona.media/news/2022/08/24/vagner>
- ²⁶ Родственники заявили об исчезновении заключенных в забайкальских колониях (Relatives report disappearance of prisoners in Trans-Baikal colonies). Tayga Info, 29 November 2022 // <https://tayga.info/179940>
- ²⁷ «Мам, я пойду». Семьи заключенных из Забайкалья рассказали об уходе мужчин в ЧВК «Вагнер» ("Mum, I'll go". Families of prisoners from Transbaikalia told of men leaving for the Wagner PMC). Chita.ru, 5 December 2022 // <https://www.chita.ru/text/society/2022/12/05/71863193/>
- ²⁸ За два месяца число заключенных в мужских колониях сократилось на рекордные 23 тысячи человек. Это происходит на фоне вербовки в «ЧВК Вагнера» (In two months, the number of prisoners in the male colonies decreased by a record 23 thousand people. This happens against the background of recruitment by the Wagner PMC). Mediazona, 18 November 2022 // <https://zona.media/article/2022/11/18/navoynu>

- ²⁹ На фоне СВО в России резко сократилось тюремное население (Russia's prison population has fallen sharply in the face of [special military operation]). Yardelo.org // https://yardelo.org/2022/11/19/на-фоне-сво-резко-сократилось-т/?fbclid=IwAR3XED0lJrHLXBg1Qp5Q5FLkQ-jrYvKnB72d_WTF7YK_gxtVHRibHJoLjRnQ
- ³⁰ “Lies, damn lies and statistics - how many prisoners has Wagner really recruited?”. Iddle, 7 March 2023 // <https://ridl.io/lies-damn-lies-and-statistics-how-many-prisoners-has-wagner-really-recruited/>
- ³¹ US believes Wagner mercenary group is expanding influence and took delivery of North Korean arms. CNN, 22 December 2022 // <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/22/politics/russia-wagner-group/index.html>.
- ³² ‘A Quick Death or a Slow Death’: Prisoners Choose War to Get Lifesaving Drugs. NYTimes, 21 April 2023 // <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/21/world/europe/russia-wagner-group-hiv-prisoners-ukraine.html>
- ³³ “Activists” are convicts who are used by the prison administration to enforce the internal regime and discipline of other prisoners. Activists often torture other inmates and extort money from them, at the direct order of the or with tacit consent of the administration (see, e.g. «Активисты» на службе ФСИН (“Activists” at the FSIN service). Novaya Gazeta, 29 October 2017 // <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/10/29/74384-aktivisty-na-sluzhbe-fsin>).
- ³⁴ ЧВК «Вагнера» вербует заключенных колоний Петербурга для поездки на Донбасс «идти в авангарде, помогать обнаруживать нацистов» (PMC Wagner is enlisting inmates from the St Petersburg’s colonies to travel to Donbas “to lead the way helping to detect Nazis”). Important Stories, 4 July 2022 // <https://importantstories.media/reportages/2022/07/04/chvk-vagner-verbuet-zaklyuchennykh-kolonii-peterburga-dlya-poezdki-na-donbass-idi-v-avangarde-pomogat-obnaruzhivat-natsistov/>
- ³⁵ Important Stories Telegram Channel, 6 July 2022 // https://t.me/important_stories_media/1293
- ³⁶ Rotonda Telegram Channel, 7 July 2022 // <https://t.me/rotondamedia/3685>
- ³⁷ «Нужны добровольцы на грязную работу: убивать по приказу, не задавая вопросов» (“We need volunteers for the dirty work: to kill on command, without asking questions”). Important Stories, 20 July 2022 // <https://importantstories.media/investigations/2022/07/20/zk-i-vagner/>
- ³⁸ Russia dangles freedom to prisoners if they fight in Ukraine. Many are taking the deadly gamble. CNN. 9 August, 2022 // <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/08/09/europe/russia-recruits-prisoners-ukraine-war-cmd-intl/index.html>
- ³⁹ Родственники наёмников ЧВК Вагнера начали жаловаться на отказы в выплатах за смерть на войне. В ЧВК ссылаются на «тайну завещания» и «имидж компании» (Relatives of Wagner PMC mercenaries have begun to complain about refusals of payments for deaths in war. PMCs cite "secrecy of will" and "company image"). Verstka Telegram channel, 6 April 2023 // <https://t.me/svobodnieszlova/1729>
- ⁴⁰ Секс с малолетней и групповое изнасилование. За какие преступления сидели заключённые, которых ЧВК Вагнера завербовала для войны в Украине (Sex with a minor and gang rape. What crimes were the prisoners that the Wagner PMC recruited for the war in Ukraine imprisoned for?). Verstka, 16 September 2022 // <https://verstka.media/za-cto-sideli-zeki-kotorve-seychas-na-voynе/>
- ⁴¹ “Из них такое поперло, что никто не ожидал”. Как заключенные реагируют на призывы вступить в ЧВК “Вагнера” (“There is something that came out of them that no one expected.” How prisoners react to calls to join the Wagner PMC). BBC, 17 September 2022 // <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-62934135>
- ⁴² An extended interview with Stanislav Bogdanov: «Я сказал: меня там убьют? Вы меня в колонии быстрее убьете – морально» (I said: will they kill me there? You will kill me faster in prison - morally). Holod, 20 January 2023 // <https://holod.media/2023/01/20/prison-wagner-freedom/>
- ⁴³ Медиа Пригожина рассказали о помиловании за участие в войне заключенного, который убил судью и должен был сидеть еще 13 лет (Prigozhin Media tells of pardon for participation in war of a prisoner who killed a judge and should have been jailed for another 13 years). The Insider, 12 October 2022 // <https://theins.ru/news/255945>
- ⁴⁴ Sota Telegram Channel, 17 September 2022 // <https://t.me/sotaproject/46266>
- ⁴⁵ Sota Twitter, 11 October 2022 // https://twitter.com/sota_vision/status/1579775054673776641?s=61&t=IaTVq5SweIFhMhf0wvh8kw
- ⁴⁶ В Иркутской области пострадавшего от пыток заключенного завербовали в “ЧВК Вагнера” (Torture survivor recruited by Wagner PMC in Irkutsk region). Sibir Realii, 7 February 2023 // <https://www.sibreal.org/a/v-irkutskoy-oblasti-zaklyuchennogo-postradavshego-v-dele-o-pytkah-zaverbovali-v-chvk-vagnera-32259957.html>
- ⁴⁷ Я тебя отвоюю. Как жены и матери заключенных мешают отправлять их из Ростовской области на Украину (I'll win you back. How wives and mothers of prisoners prevent them from being sent from the Rostov region to Ukraine). 161.ru, 29 September 2022 // <https://161.ru/text/world/2022/09/29/71694857/>
- ⁴⁸ Спасение осуждённого: как россиянка помешала ЧВК Вагнера завербовать своего мужа в колонии (Saving a convict: how a Russian woman stopped the Wagner PMC from recruiting her husband in prison). Verstka, 17 August 2022 // <https://verstka.media/kak-pomeshat-zaverbovat-muzha/>
- ⁴⁹ Родственники заключенных новосибирской ИК-14 потребовали остановить вербовку осужденных в ЧВК «Вагнер» (Relatives of inmates in Novosibirsk's Penal Colony 14 demanded a halt to recruitment of convicts to the Wagner PMC). Mediazona, 3 November 2022 // <https://zona.media/news/2022/11/03/verbovka>
- ⁵⁰ «Сыночка, если подпишешь заявление на войну, завтра можешь меня хоронить» (Son, if you sign the war petition, you can bury me tomorrow). Verstka, 3 November 2022 // <https://verstka.media/novosibirsk-ik14-rodstvenniki-protestuyut-protiv-verbovki-zaklyuchennykh/>

- ⁵¹ «Вместо походов на могилу» (Instead of going to the grave). Nemoskva.net, 20 June 2023 // <https://nemoskva.net/vmesto-pohodov-na-mogilu/>
- ⁵² «Что толку, если они будут сидеть в тюрьме». Свердловский депутат потребовал отправить женщин на спецоперацию ("What good will it do if they sit in jail". Sverdlovsk MP demands women be sent to special operation). E1.ru, 21 December 2022 // <https://www.e1.ru/text/politics/2022/12/21/71917928/>
- ⁵³ A copy of the statement was published by Important Stories: Родственник не может найти завербованного в ЧВК «Вагнера» заключенного. Он подписал отказ сообщать, где находится (A relative cannot find a prisoner recruited by the Wagner PMC. He has signed a refusal to disclose his whereabouts). Important Stories, 25 November 2022 // <https://importantstories.media/news/2022/11/25/rodstvnik-ne-mozhet-naiti-zaverbovannogo-v-chvk-vagnera-zaklyuchennogo-on-podpisal-otkaz-soobshchat-gde-nakhoditsya/>
- ⁵⁴ <https://hrcspb.org/2022/09/18/obrashhenie-k-general-nomu-prokuroru-uf-s-pros-boj-raz-vasnit-situatsiyu-s-zaklyuchennyimi-prinimayushhimi-uchastie-v-svo/>
- ⁵⁵ «Не расстраивать президента»: какие темы запретили обсуждать на встрече СПЧ с Путиным ("Not to upset the president": what topics were banned from the HRC meeting with Putin). Verstka, 6 December 2022 // https://verstka.media/kakie-temy-zapretili-obsuzhdatspchs-prezidentom/?tg_rhash=86cf5f61f61288.
- ⁵⁶ Генпрокуратура и ФСИН отказались назвать основания для отправки заключенных на войну. Из их ответов следует, что практика Пригожина незаконна (The Prosecutor General's Office and the Federal Penitentiary Service refused to give reasons for sending prisoners to war. Their responses suggest that Prigozhin's practice is illegal). "Можем объяснить" (Can explain) Telegram Channel, 9 January 2023 // <https://t.me/mozhemobyasnit/14378>
- ⁵⁷ Уполномоченный по правам человека в Прикамье прокомментировал вербовку заключенных в колониях края (The Ombudsperson in the Kama [Perm] Region commented on the recruitment of prisoners in the regional colonies). 59.ru, 7 October 2022 // <https://59.ru/text/incidents/2022/10/07/71717429/>
- ⁵⁸ Свердловский омбудсмен поддержала отправку заключенных на СВО (Sverdlovsk ombudsman supported sending prisoners to the [special military operation]). Kommersant, 1 March 2023 // <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5844269>
- ⁵⁹ Семьи отправленных на войну заключенных потребовали от Следственного комитета возбудить уголовные дела (Families of prisoners sent to war demand that the Investigative Committee initiate criminal proceedings). Agentstvo Telegram Channel, 18 November 2022 // <https://t.me/agentstvovnews/1895>
- ⁶⁰ Минобороны РФ сообщило, что штурм кварталов в Соledаре вели отряды "ЧВК "Вагнер" (Russian defence ministry says Wagner PMC units stormed neighbourhoods in Soledar). Interfax, 13 January 2023 // <https://www.interfax.ru/world/880702>
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- ⁶² Военный-отказник рассказал, что его с сослуживцами заставляют воевать в Украине вместе с бойцами ЧВК и осуждёнными (A military objector said that he and his comrades were forced to fight in Ukraine together with PMC fighters and convicts). Verstka, 7 September 2022 // <https://verstka.media/otkaznikov-uderzhivayut-na-fronte-s-vagnerovcami-i-zaklyuchennymi/>
- ⁶³ Deadly and disposable: Wagner's brutal tactics in Ukraine revealed by intelligence report. CNN, 24 January 2023 // <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/01/23/europe/russia-wagner-tactics-report-ukraine-intl/index.html>
- ⁶⁴ "Our Losses Were Gigantic": Life in a Sacrificial Russian Assault Wave. The New York Times, 13 February 2023 // <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/13/world/europe/ukraine-russia-prisoners.html>
- ⁶⁵ Роман с «Вагнером» (An affair with "Wagner"). 47news.ru, 16 February 2023 // <https://47news.ru/articles/226551/>
- ⁶⁶ «Один подстрелил командира, с него кожу сняли». Заключенным из ЧВК Вагнера отрезают пальцы, командиры скрывают пытки с помощью крематория ("One shot the commander, they skinned him". Wagner PMC prisoners have their fingers cut off, commanders cover up torture with crematorium). The Insider, 1 November 2022 // <https://theins.ru/news/256593>
- ⁶⁷ Вооруженные заключенные сбежали из учебного центра ЧВК «Вагнер», среди них — граждане Узбекистана и Кыргызстана (Armed prisoners escape from Wagner PMC training centre, among them Uzbek and Kyrgyz nationals). Mediazona Central Asia, 2 January 2022 // <https://mediazona.ca/news/2023/01/02/wagner>
- ⁶⁸ Russia Freed Prisoners to Fight Its War. Here's How Some Fared. New York Times, 30 January 2023 // <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/30/world/europe/wagner-convict-ukraine-russia.html>
- ⁶⁹ Thousands of Russian private contractors fighting in Syria. AP News, 12 December 2017 // <https://apnews.com/article/7f9e63cb14a54dfa9148b6430d89e873>
- ⁷⁰ Пригожин появился в Петергофе у могилы бывшего заключенного, погибшего в ходе боевых действий (Prigozhin appeared in Peterhof at the grave of a former prisoner killed in action). Fontanka.ru, 21 August 2022 // <https://www.fontanka.ru/2022/08/21/71589041/>
- ⁷¹ «Освободиться из тюрьмы, пойдя на войну в Украине, можно лишь через могилу» ("To get a release by going to the war in Ukraine is possible only over a grave") Novaya Gazeta Europe, 30 August 2022 // <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/08/30/osvoboditsya-iz-tiurny-poidia-na-voinu-v-ukraine-mozhno-lish-cherez-mogilu>

- ⁷² “We are most interested in murderers and bandits. You’ll like it in our squad.” Evgeny Prigozhin of the Wagner Group seems to be personally enlisting inmates to fight in Ukraine. Mediazona, 10 August 2022 // <https://en.zona.media/article/2022/08/10/prigozhin>
- ⁷³ Соратники Навального опубликовали видео вербовки заключенных Пригожиным в ИК-6 Йошкар-Олы (Navalny's associates published a video of Prigozhin recruiting inmates in Yoshkar-Ola IK-6). Mediazona, 14 September 2022 // <https://zona.media/news/2022/09/14/ik6prgzhn>; full video of the speech is available at: <https://tiraspol-news.ru/society/2022/09/14/11131.html>
- ⁷⁴ Goryachy Klyuch is a town in the Krasnodar Region of Russia. The chapel mentioned by Prigozhin can be found here: <https://goo.gl/maps/fNkbhD9SSpoLsinf9>
- ⁷⁵ Concord Company Press-Service Vkontakte Official Page, 15 September 2022 // https://vk.com/wall-177427428_1156
- ⁷⁶ Concord Company Press-Service Vkontakte Official Page, 15 September 2022 // https://vk.com/concordgroup_official?w=wall-177427428_1159
- ⁷⁷ VCHKOGPU Telegram Channel, 22 September 2022 // <https://t.me/vchkogpu/33130>
- ⁷⁸ Кепка Prigozhina Telegram Channel, 10 September 2022 // https://t.me/Prigozhin_hat/1670
- ⁷⁹ <https://gulagu-da.ru>
- ⁸⁰ Concord Company Press-Service Vkontakte Official Page, 26 September 2022 // https://vk.com/wall-177427428_1194
- ⁸¹ Пригожин признал создание группы "Вагнер" в 2014 году (Prigozhin acknowledged the creation of Wagner Group in 2014). Ria Novosti, 26 September 2022 // <https://web.archive.org/web/20220926080736/https://ria.ru/20220926/vagner-1819431778.html>
- ⁸² Евгений Пригожин признал, что в 2014 году создал ЧВК Вагнера. Раньше он судился с теми, кто связывал его с наемниками (Evgeny Prigozhin has admitted that he set up the Wagner PMC in 2014. He used to sue those who linked him to the mercenaries). Meduza, 26 September 2022 // <https://meduza.io/news/2022/09/26/evgeniy-prigozhin-priznal-chno-v-2014-godu-sozdal-chvk-vagnera-ranshe-on-sudilsya-s-temi-kto-svyazyval-ego-s-naemnikami>
- ⁸³ Concord Company Press-Service Vkontakte Official Page // https://vk.com/concordgroup_official
- ⁸⁴ Organisation profile, Russian registration numbers, postal address, and other public information can be found, e.g., at: <https://companies.rbc.ru/id/1037843002515-ooo-konkord-menedzhment-i-konsalting/>
- ⁸⁵ Империя Пригожина взяла военные городки (Prigozhin's empire has taken over military camps). Fontanka.ru, 12 January 2016 // <https://www.fontanka.ru/2016/01/11/120/>
- ⁸⁶ Media: Wagner Group commander becomes CEO of Putin’s friend’s catering business. Uawire.org, 16 November 2017 // <https://web.archive.org/web/20221102200416/https://uawire.org/wagner-group-commander-becomes-ceo-of-putin-s-friend-s-catering-business>
- ⁸⁷ ‘PMC Wagner Centre’ opens in Saint Petersburg. Novaya Gazeta Europe, 29 October 2022 // <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/10/29/pmc-wagner-centre-opens-in-saint-petersburg-en-news>
- ⁸⁸ Пригожин “легализовал” название ЧВК “Вагнер” (Prigozhin “legalized” the name of the Wagner PMC) BBC, 17 January 2023 // <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-64304032>
- ⁸⁹ Concord Company Press-Service Vkontakte Official Page, 9 February 2023 // https://vk.com/concordgroup_official?w=wall-177427428_2005
- ⁹⁰ Russia's Wagner mercenary group says it's no longer recruiting convicts. This may signal a shift in strategy. CNN, 11 February 2023 // <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/02/09/europe/wagner-russia-convicts-ukraine-intl-cmd/index.html>
- ⁹¹ Не только Пригожин (Not only Prigozhin). Verstka, 13 February 2023 // <https://verstka.media/minoborony-tozhe-davno-verbuet-v-koloniyvah/>
- ⁹² Putin says Wagner group fully financed by Russian government. Tass, 27 June 2023 // <https://tass.com/defense/1639345>
- ⁹³ «Общество должно относиться к ним с глубочайшим уважением». Пригожин заявил, что первых заключенных, воевавших в Украине, помиловали (“Society should treat them with the utmost respect.” Prigozhin says first prisoners who fought in Ukraine pardoned). The Insider, 5 January 2023 // <https://theins.ru/news/258326>
- ⁹⁴ Unblurred and extended version of the video is available at: https://vk.com/video-31371206_456265774
- ⁹⁵ Первая группа бывших заключенных из ЧВК «Вагнер» вернулась домой в сопровождении Евгения Пригожина (The first group of ex-prisoners from the Wagner PMC returned home accompanied by Evgeny Prigozhin). RIA FAN, 5 January 2022 // <https://riafan.ru/23831573-pervaya-gruppa-bivshih-zaklyuchennih-iz-chvk-vagner-vernulas-domoi-v-soprovozhdenii-evgeniya-prigozhina>
- ⁹⁶ Евгений Пригожин передал награды экс-заключенным, отработавшим контракт с ЧВК «Вагнер». (Evgeny Prigozhin presents awards to ex-prisoners who have served their contract with the Wagner PMC) RIA FAN, 4 January 2022 // <https://riafan.ru/23831348-evgenii-prigozhin-peredal-nagradi-eks-zaklyuchennim-otrabotavshim-kontrakt-s-chvk-vagner>

- ⁹⁷ Среди первых «вернувшихся с войны заключенных» оказался «русский Уолтер Уайт» (Among the first "prisoners returning from the war" was "Russian Walter White"). Agentstvo Telegram Channel, 5 January 2022 // <https://t.me/agentstvonews/2246>
- ⁹⁸ Пригожин пообещал свободу заключенному, который в 2014 году убил свою бабушку — ветерана Великой Отечественной войны (Prigozhin promised freedom to the prisoner who killed his grandmother, a World War II veteran, in 2014). Agentstvo Telegram Channel, 6 January 2022 // <https://t.me/agentstvonews/2248>
- ⁹⁹ «Страшный человек». Что известно о помилованном заключенном, воевавшем в Украине в составе «ЧВК Вагнера» ("Scary man". What is known about the pardoned prisoner who fought in Ukraine as part of the Wagner PMC). BBC, 5 January 2022 // <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-64178320>
- ¹⁰⁰ Осужденные за убийства, грабежи и разбои возвращаются домой после службы в ЧВК Вагнера (Convicted murderers, robbers and burglars return home after serving with the Wagner PMC). Important Stories, 5 January 2023 // <https://stories.media/news/2023/01/05/wagner-go-home/>
- ¹⁰¹ На свободу вышли уже три группы заключённых, завербованных в ЧВК «Вагнер». Среди них — рецидивисты из Петербурга, судимые за разбой и кражи (Three groups of prisoners recruited by the Wagner PMC have already been released. Among them are repeat offenders from St Petersburg, convicted of robbery and theft). Rotonda Telegram Channel, 16 January 2023 // <https://t.me/rotondamedia/4252>
- ¹⁰² Бывший заключённый, которого, по словам Пригожина, помиловали за участие в ЧВК «Вагнер», — это мужчина, который зарезал свою тещу (The ex-convict who Prigozhin says was pardoned for his involvement with the Wagner PMC is the man who stabbed his mother-in-law to death). Rotonda Telegram Channel, 9 January 2023 // <https://t.me/rotondamedia/4234>
- ¹⁰³ На свободу вышел отслуживший в ЧВК «Вагнер» бывший заключенный, пытавший своих жертв кипятком (Ex-convict who tortured his victims with boiling water released). Rotonda Telegram Channel, 23 January 2023 // <https://t.me/rotondamedia/4265>
- ¹⁰⁴ Искупил без крови. Петербургский риелтор, осужденный на 23 года за убийство 4 человек, вернулся из ЧВК (Redeemed without blood. Petersburg realtor sentenced to 23 years for killing 4 people returned from PMC). Fontanka.ru, 24 January 2023 // <https://www.fontanka.ru/2023/01/24/71999960/>
- ¹⁰⁵ NGO, incorporated in Russia, tax payer number 7805676860, see: <https://www.list-org.com/company/9202673>
- ¹⁰⁶ EU hits Russian mercenary group Wagner with sanctions. Reuters, 13 December 2021 // <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-hits-russian-mercenary-group-wagner-with-sanctions-2021-12-13/>
- ¹⁰⁷ «Отпущенный на свободу» бывший заключённый-боец ЧВК «Вагнер» опубликовал документ, согласно которому он находится «в отпуске» ("Released" former prisoner-fighter of Wagner PMC has published a document saying he is "on leave"). Rotonda Telegram Channel, 17 January 2023 // <https://t.me/rotondamedia/4254>
- ¹⁰⁸ «Мы теперь другие люди»: бывшие заключенные из ЧВК «Вагнер» начинают новую жизнь ("We are different people now": ex-prisoners from the Wagner PMC start a new life). RIA "FAN", 5 January 2022 // <https://riafan.ru/23832062-mi-teper-drugie-lyudi-bivshie-zaklyuchennie-iz-chvk-wagner-nachinayut-novuyu-zhizn>
- ¹⁰⁹ Вы сделали большую работу: ЧВК «Вагнер» вернула домой очередную группу экс-заключенных (You've done a great job: Wagner PMC brings home another group of ex-prisoners). RIA "FAN", 8 January 2022 // <https://riafan.ru/23835233-vi-sdelali-bol-shuyu-rabotu-chvk-wagner-vernula-domoi-ocherednyuyu-gruppu-eks-zaklyuchennih>
- ¹¹⁰ Новая группа бывших заключенных из ЧВК «Вагнер» вернулась домой с фронта (New group of former prisoners from Wagner PMC returns home from the front). RIA "FAN", 13 January 2022 // <https://riafan.ru/23843807-novaya-gruppa-bivshih-zaklyuchennih-iz-chvk-wagner-vernulas-domoi-s-fronta>
- ¹¹¹ Кепка Prigozhina Telegram Channel, 17 January 2022 // https://t.me/Prigozhin_hat/2418
- ¹¹² Воевавшего в Украине россиянина в 2019 году осудили за оставление военной части. Потом он снова сел и завербовался в ЧВК Вагнера (A Russian who fought in Ukraine was convicted in 2019 for deserting a military unit. Then he went back to prison and enlisted in Wagner PMC). Important Stories, 24 January 2023 // <https://stories.media/news/2023/01/24/voevavshego-v-ukraine-rossiyanina-v-2019-godu-osudili-za-ostavlenie-voennoi-chasti-potom-on-snova-sel-i-zaverbovalsya-v-chvk-vagnera/>
- ¹¹³ СПЧ объяснил процедуру освобождения заключенных до участия в спецоперации (The HRC explained the procedure for releasing prisoners before participating in a special operation). RIA Novosti, 9 January 2023 // <https://ria.ru/20230109/zaklyuchennye-1843702450.html>
- ¹¹⁴ Путинское помилование: как ЧВК «Вагнер» вывозит заключенных на войну с Украиной (Putin's pardon: How the Wagner PMC takes prisoners to war with Ukraine). BBC, 17 February 2023 // <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-64675085>
- ¹¹⁵ Пригожин: пять тысяч заключенных закончили контракт с ЧВК «Вагнер» и были помилованы (Prigozhin: Five thousand prisoners have finished their contract with the Wagner PMC and have been pardoned). Kommersant, 25 March 2023 // <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5899568>
- ¹¹⁶ Zvezda News Telegram Channel, 13 June 2023 // <https://t.me/zvezdanews/121337>
- ¹¹⁷ Telegram Channel of the Press-service of Yevgeny Prigozhin, 18 June 2023 // https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1259
- ¹¹⁸ Взялись за старое (Going back to their old ways), Verstka, 5 July 2023 // https://verstka.media/pomilovannye-zeki-iz-chvk-vagner-vozvrashchayutsia-k-prestupnoy-devatelnosti-vlasti-stremiatsia-skryt-fakty-novyh-prestupleniy?tg_rhash=86cf5f61f61288

¹¹⁹ Источники: на Донбассе погибли минимум трое заключенных, завербованных ЧВК «Вагнера» в ИК-7 «Яблоневка». Еще двое ранены и находятся в больнице Луганска (Sources: at least three detainees recruited by the Wagner PMC in Yablonivka penal colony No 7 have been killed in Donbas. Two more were wounded and are in hospital in Luhansk). Important Stories Telegram Channel, 25 July 2022 // https://t.me/istories_media/1339

¹²⁰ Три разбойника из Петербурга: как не имевшие шанса на УДО рецидивисты оказались на войне (Three robbers from St. Petersburg: how recidivists who had no chance for parole found themselves at war). Verstka, 20 September 2022 // <https://verstka.media/recidivisty-iz-peterburga-na-voynne/>

¹²¹ Никита Михалков восхитился погибшим в Украине российским заключенным, причастным к пыткам в колонии (Nikita Mikhakov praised a Russian convict killed in Ukraine, who was involved in tortures in a colony). Novaya Gazeta Europe, 8 August 2022 // <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/08/08/nikita-mikhalkov-voskhitsia-pogibshim-v-ukraine-rossiiskim-zakliuchennym-prichastnym-k-pytkam-v-kolonii-news>

¹²² Сел на 10 лет, завербовался в «ЧВК Вагнера», погиб в Украине. Пример одного заключенного из Карелии (He was imprisoned for 10 years, enlisted in the Wagner PMC, and died in Ukraine. Story of one prisoner from Karelia). Mediazona, 26 August 2022 // <https://zona.media/article/2022/08/25/eremenko>

¹²³ La Russie peine à regarnir les rangs de son armée décimée en Ukraine. Le Monde, 7 September 2022 // https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2022/09/07/moscou-peine-a-regarnir-les-rangs-de-son-armee-decimee-en-ukraine_6140549_3210.html

¹²⁴ «Куска похоронили как героя». Криминальный авторитет из Татарстана, завербованный ЧВК «Вагнера», погиб на войне в Украине ("Kuska was buried as a hero." Criminal mastermind from Tatarstan, recruited by the Wagner PMC, died in the war in Ukraine). Holod, 23 September 2022 // <https://holod.media/2022/09/23/kuska-pohoronili-kak-gerova-kriminalnyj-avtoritet-iz-tatarstana-zaverbovannyj-chvk-vagnera-pogib-na-vojne-v-ukraine/>

¹²⁵ How Wagner Gave Three Russian Crime Bosses from the 90s a New Lease of Death. Bellingcat, 13 February 2023 // <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2023/02/13/how-wagner-gave-three-90s-russian-crime-bosses-a-new-lease-of-death/>

¹²⁶ За два месяца в Украине погибли более 500 зеков, завербованных Пригожиным. The Insider публикует имена и фото (In two months, more than 500 convicts recruited by Prigozhin died in Ukraine. The Insider publishes names and photos). The Insider, 4 November 2022 // <https://theins.ru/news/256690>

¹²⁷ A Russian graveyard reveals Wagner's prisoner army. Reuters, 22 January 2023 // <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ukraine-crisis-russia-graves-wagner/>

¹²⁸ Похороненные на Кубани наемники "ЧВК Вагнера" были судимы по тяжким статьям (Buried in the Kuban mercenaries of the "Wagner PMC" were tried on felony charges). Kavkaz Reali, 9 March 2023 // <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/pohoronennye-na-kubani-naemniki-chvk-vagnera-byli-sudimy-po-tyazhkim-statjvam/32310207.html>

На Кубани и в Адыгее обнаружили новые захоронения убитых в Украине наемников "ЧВК Вагнера" (In the Kuban and Adygea found new graves of mercenaries of the Wagner PMC killed in Ukraine). Kavkaz Reali, 8 March 2023 // <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/na-kubani-i-v-adygee-obnaruzhili-novye-zahoroneniya-ubityh-v-ukraine-naemnikov-chvk-vagnera-/32308443.html>

¹²⁹ More than 30,000 Wagner fighters have been wounded or killed in Ukraine, US estimates. CNN, 17 February 2023 // https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-2-17-23/h_a21a4198e8d6ba18d87d128cf0605524

¹³⁰ Новые кладбища: в России найдено уже семь массовых захоронений бойцов ЧВК "Вагнер" (New cemeteries: seven mass graves of Wagner PMC fighters already found in Russia). BBC, 11 April 2023 // <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-65240312>

¹³¹ «Хотелось бы знать, как он умер». «Вот Так» поговорил с родственниками осужденных, которые не знали, что их близкие погибли на войне в составе ЧВК «Вагнер» ("I would like to know how he died." "Vot Tak" talked to relatives of convicts who did not know that their loved ones died in the war as part of the Wagner PMC). Vot-tak.tv, 17 May 2023 // <https://vot-tak.tv/novosti/17-05-2023-pogibli-na-vojne>

¹³² Ukraine updates: Wagner Group reports 10,000 prisoner deaths. DW, 24 May 2023, available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/ukraine-updates-wagner-group-reports-10000-prisoner-deaths/a-65714776>

¹³³ «Что-то не то скажешь и тебя обнулят, так двоих расстреляли» – полонений российский зек "вагнеровец" ("Say the wrong thing and you'll be zeroed out, so two people were shot" - the Wagner-member prisoner from Russia). Butusov Plus YouTube Channel, 15 September 2022 // <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4dJRPuHzFg>

¹³⁴ «Что-то не так делаешь, тебя обнуляют. Расстреливают» ("You do something wrong, you get zeroed out. Shot"). Important Stories, 16 September 2022 // <https://istories.media/reportages/2022/09/16/ik-5-dopros/>
Extended interview with Nuzhin is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1aZpSbg80M>

¹³⁵ Казненный кувалдой экс-боец ЧВК Вагнера участвовал в обмене пленными добровольно — Подоляк (Ex-Wagner PMC soldier executed with sledgehammer participated in prisoner exchange voluntarily – Podolyak). The Insider, 16 November 2022 // <https://theins.ru/news/257017>

¹³⁶ Связанный с ЧВК Вагнера канал опубликовал видео казни заключенного, который попал в плен и планировал перейти на сторону Украины (Wagner PMC-affiliated channel publishes video of execution of prisoner who was captured and planned to defect to Ukraine). The Insider, 13 November 2022 // <https://theins.ru/news/256941>

- ¹³⁷ Wagner in Syria: Appeal to European Court of Human Rights after case dismissed in Russia. FIDH, 9 June 2022 // <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/north-africa-middle-east/syria/syria-russia-wagner-appeal-european-court-human-rights>
- ¹³⁸ Concord Company Press-Service Vkontakte Official Page, 13 November 2022 // https://vk.com/wall-177427428_1435
- ¹³⁹ Military Ombudsman Telegram Channel, 15 November 2022 // https://t.me/military_ombudsmen/651
- ¹⁴⁰ Песков отказался комментировать видео с бывшим бойцом ЧВК "Вагнер" (Peskov declines to comment on video of former Wagner PMC fighter). Interfax, 14 November 2022 // <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/872316>
- ¹⁴¹ Russian media "Verstka" confirmed Bolchev's identity with his sister, Yekaterina Bolcheva: Verstka Telegram Channel, 4 December 2022 // <https://t.me/svobodnieslova/1020>
- ¹⁴² Ex-commander of murdered Yevgeny Nuzhin confirms 10 executions of Wagner Group mercenaries. The Insider, 16 December 2022 // <https://theins.ru/en/news/257929>
- ¹⁴³ Показания командира ЧВК Вагнера. Наемники и ээки у Бахмута. Пытки в Херсоне. Запрещенный Меладзе (Testimony of Wagner's PMC commander. Mercenaries and cons near Bakhmut. Torture in Kherson. Banned Meladze), The Insider's YouTube channel, 18 December 2022 // <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2MMervIUgE&t=615s>
- ¹⁴⁴ Экс-командир убитого кувалдой «вагнеровца» Андрей Медведев подтвердил, что находится в Норвегии, где запросил убежище (Andrey Medvedev, ex-commander of the sledgehammered Wagnerian, confirms he is in Norway, where he has applied for asylum). The Insider, 15 January 2022 // <https://theins.ru/news/258565>
- ¹⁴⁵ Москалькова пообещала, что СК проверит видео казни бойца ЧВК Вагнера. Пригожин заявил, что это «дети развлекаются» (Moskalkova has promised that the Investigative Committee will check the video of the execution of the Wagner Cheka fighter. Prigozhin said it was "children having fun"). The Insider, 13 February 2023 // <https://theins.ru/news/259348>
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- ¹⁴⁷ «Новые гвардейцы Шойгу: убийца, насильник, вор-рецидивист» (Shoigu's new guardsmen: murderer, rapist, recidivist thief). Verstka, 16 June 2023 // <https://verstka.media/novye-gvardejcy-shoigu>
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- ¹⁴⁹ Ukraine's counteroffensive is facing off against Wagner's successor group, Storm Z, on the outskirts of Bakhmut Business Insider, 10 July 2023 // <https://www.businessinsider.com/ukraines-counteroffensive-facing-wagner-successor-storm-z-in-bakhmut-2023-7?r=US&IR=T>
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¹⁶⁰ ЧВК "Вагнер" получила разрешение на вербовку заключенных в Донецкой области (Wagner PMC given permission to recruit prisoners in Donetsk region). Ukranews.com, 6 December 2022 // https://ukranews.com/news/899905-chvk-vagner-poluchila-razreshenie-na-verbovku-zaklyuchennyh-v-donetskoj-oblasti#google_vignette

¹⁶¹ Россияне освободили заключенных из херсонской колонии, чтобы те воевали за РФ – Генштаб (Russians release prisoners from Kherson colony to fight for Russia - General Staff). News.liga.net, 24 October 2022 // <https://news.liga.net/amp/politics/news/rossiyane-osvobodili-zaklyuchennyh-iz-hersonskoy-kolonii-chtoby-te-voevali-za-rf-genshtab>

¹⁶² Более 40 иностранцев, отбывающих в мордовской ИК-17 сроки за торговлю наркотиками, убийства и изнасилования, отправили на войну в составе ЧВК «Вагнера» (More than 40 foreigners serving time in Mordovia's Prison 17 for drug trafficking, murder and rape sent to war as part of the Wagner PMC), Novaya Gazeta Europe, 25 October 2022 // <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/10/25/bolee-40-inostrantsev-otbyvaiushchikh-v-mordovskoi-ik-17-sroki-za-torgovliu-narkotikami-ubiistva-i-iznasilovaniia-otpravili-na-voinu-v-sostave-chvk-vagnera-news>

¹⁶³ В Саратове на войну забрали заключенного гражданина Украины. От его жены требуют заплатить за фото и адрес его трупа (A Ukrainian citizen imprisoned in Saratov was taken to war. His wife is demanded to pay for photos and address of his corpse). The Insider, 29 October 2022 // <https://theins.ru/news/256520>

¹⁶⁴ Ukraine war: Zambia demands answers for death of student Lemekhani Nyirenda. BBC, 15 November 2022 // <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-63627759>

¹⁶⁵ Ukraine war: Body of Zambian student Lemekhani Nyirenda returned by Russia. BBC, 12 December 2022 // <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-63935260>

¹⁶⁶ Telegram Channel of the Press-service of Yevgeny Prigozhin, 29 November 2022 // https://t.me/concordgroup_official/74

¹⁶⁷ PMC Redut is reportedly linked to the Russian Ministry of Defence. Пехота пуше неволи (Infantry is more than captivity). Novaya Gazeta Europe. 10 August 2022 // <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/08/10/pekhota-pushche-nevoli>

¹⁶⁸ ЧВК Вагнер проводит мобилизацию среди заключенных туркменистана! (Wagner PMC mobilises prisoners in Turkmenistan!) Graph.org, 17 September 2022 // <https://web.archive.org/web/20221102133037/https://graph.org/CHVK-VAGNER-PROVODIT-MOBILIZACIYU-SREDI-ZAKLYUCHENNYH-TURKMENISTANA-09-17>

¹⁶⁹ Putin’s Prison Recruiting Scheme Takes a Big, Desperate Turn. Daily Beast, 29 November 2022 // <https://www.thedailybeast.com/wagner-group-accused-of-recruiting-prisoners-from-the-central-african-republic-for-russias-war-in-ukraine?ref=scroll>

¹⁷⁰ Вооруженные заключенные сбежали из учебного центра ЧВК «Вагнер», среди них — граждане Узбекистана и Кыргызстана (Armed prisoners escape from Wagner PMC training centre, among them Uzbek and Kyrgyz nationals). Mediazona Central Asia, 2 January 2022 // <https://mediazona.ca/news/2023/01/02/wagner>

¹⁷¹ Похороны погибшего под Бахмутом бойца ЧВК «Вагнер» танзанийского происхождения прошли в Горячем Ключе (Funeral for Tanzanian-born Wagner PMC fighter killed near Bakhmut held in Goryachi Klyuch). RIA FAN, 16 January 2023 // <https://riafan.ru/23849403-pohoroni-pogibshogo-pod-bahmutom-boitsa-chvk-vagner-tanzaniiskogo-proishozhdeniya-proshli-v-goryachem-klyuche>

¹⁷² Россия вывозит заключенных из колоний на оккупированных территориях: Ольга Романова предполагает, что их заставят воевать за Москву (Russia removes prisoners from colonies in occupied territories: Olga Romanova suggests they will be forced to fight for Moscow). Current Time, 1 December 2022 // <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/rossiya-vyvozt-zaklyuchennyh-iz-koloniy-na-okkupirovannyh-territoriyah/32156992.html>

¹⁷³ Из тюрьмы на войну. Как осужденные в России кыргызстанцы попадают в Украину и погибают (From prison to war. How Kyrgyzstanis convicted in Russia end up in Ukraine and die). Radio Azattyk, 2 February 2023 // <https://rus.azattyk.org/amp/32252047.html>

На войне в Украине погиб еще один кыргызстанец, он был завербован ЧВК «Вагнер» в российской тюрьме (Another Kyrgyz died in the war in Ukraine; he was recruited by the Wagner PMC in a Russian prison). Radio Azattyk, 22 February 2023 // <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/32283189.html>

Осужденный в России кыргызстанец рассказал о вербовщиках в колонии (A Kyrgyzstani national convicted in Russia spoke of recruiters in the colony). Currenttime, 18 February 2023 // <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/32274341.html>

¹⁷⁴ Минтруда: Таджикские заключенные российских тюрем отправились на войну в Украине добровольно (Labour Ministry: Tajik prisoners in Russian prisons went to war in Ukraine voluntarily). Radio Ozodi, 13 February 2023 // <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/32269034.html>

¹⁷⁵ ЧВК «Вагнер» с начала месяца «использовала» около 1200 человек из тюрем Крыма – Генштаб ВСУ (Wagner PMC “used” around 1,200 people from Crimean jails since start of month - UAF General Staff). Крым.Realii, 12 February 2023 // <https://ru.krymr.com/a/news--vagner-s-nachala-mesyatsa-ispol-zovala-okolo-1200-chelovek-iz-tyurem-kryma/32267437.html>

¹⁷⁶ Пригожин добился, чтобы наемника ЧВК Вагнера похоронили в Петербурге на Аллее Доблести. «Повар» Путина лично приехал на церемонию (Prigozhin got the Wagner PMC mercenary buried in St Petersburg on the Walk of Valour. Putin's "cook" personally came to the ceremony). The Insider, 24 December 2022 // <https://theins.ru/news/258138>

¹⁷⁷ На Урале торжественно простились с бойцом ЧВК «Вагнер», который забил насмерть свою мать (A fighter from the Wagner PMC who beat his mother to death was given a solemn farewell in the Urals). E1.ru, 12 January 2023 // <https://www.e1.ru/text/gorod/2023/01/12/71966585/>

¹⁷⁸ Расстрелявшего трех человек вагнеровца похоронили с героическими почестями (Wagner member who shot three men is buried with heroic honours). The Insider, 26 January 2023 // <https://theins.ru/news/258870>

¹⁷⁹ Участник кровавой «банды лжемилиционеров» погиб на Украине. Его похоронили в Тюмени на Аллее Славы (A member of a bloody "gang of pseudo-militiamen" died in Ukraine. He was buried in Tyumen on the Alley of Glory). 72.ru, 2 March 2023 // <https://72.ru/text/gorod/2023/03/02/72075347/>

¹⁸⁰ Умер вагнеровец, осужденный за зверское убийство и сожжение человека. Губернатор Севастополя назвал его героем, «искупившим все кровью» (A Wagnerian man convicted of brutally murdering and burning a man has died. The Governor of Sevastopol called him a hero who "redeemed everything with blood"). The Insider, 3 March 2023 // <https://theins.ru/news/259880>

¹⁸¹ «Знать героев в лицо». В России официально открыли мемориальную доску заключенному, завербованному воевать в Украине ("Know your heroes by sight". Russia officially opens a plaque to a prisoner recruited to fight in Ukraine). BBC, 13 January 2022 // <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-64267396>

¹⁸² Герои на века: убийцам и наркоторговцам в России устанавливают мемориальные доски (Heroes for the ages: plaques are being erected for murderers and drug dealers in Russia). Verstka, 18 January 2023 // <https://verstka.media/memorialnye-doski-prestupnikam/>

¹⁸³ Награжденный Путиным наемник ЧВК Вагнера Аик Гаспарян был осужден на 7 лет за вооруженное ограбление (Wagner PMC mercenary Aik Gasparyan awarded by Putin had been sentenced to 7 years for armed robbery). The Insider, 7 January 2022 // <https://theins.ru/news/258362>

¹⁸⁴ Implausible Deniability: Russia's Private Military Companies. Commentary by Paul Stronski. 2 June 2020. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace // <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/06/02/implausible-deniability-russia-s-private-military-companies-pub-81954>

¹⁸⁵ <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/0996-montreux-document-private-military-and-security-companies>

¹⁸⁶ Putin secretly pardoned convicts recruited by Wagner to fight in Ukraine. Washington Post, 10 January 2023 // <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/10/putin-wagner-convicts-secret-pardon/>

¹⁸⁷ Песков прокомментировал сообщения СМИ об амнистии бойцов «Вагнера» (Peskov comments on media reports of amnesty for Wagner fighters). TASS, 9 January 2023 // <https://tass.ru/politika/16758957>

¹⁸⁸ Что известно о «помиловании» заключенных в ЧВК «Вагнер» (What is known about the "pardon" of prisoners at the Wagner PMC). DW, 4 February 2023 // <https://www.dw.com/ru/cto-izvestno-o-pomilovanii-zaklucennyh-v-cvk-vagner-razbor-dw/a-64605292>

¹⁸⁹ Human Rights Committee. General Comment No. 35. Right to Liberty and Security of Persons – Article 9 of the CCPR. 2014. CCPR/C/GC/35.

¹⁹⁰ 449/1991, Mojica v. Dominican Republic, para. 5.4; 1753/2008, Guezout v. Algeria, paras. 8.4, 8.7.

¹⁹¹ See Concluding observations Algeria 2007, para. 11; Sudan 2007, para. 22; United States of America 2006, para. 12; Democratic Republic of the Congo 2006, para. 19.

¹⁹² Human Rights Committee. General Comment No. 35. Right to Liberty and Security of Persons – Article 9 of the CCPR. 2014. CCPR/C/GC/35.

¹⁹³ See also Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners adopted by General Assembly resolution 45/111 on 14 December 1990 (paragraph 8): "conditions shall be created enabling prisoners to undertake meaningful remunerated employment which will facilitate their reintegration into the country's labour market and permit them to contribute to their own financial support and to that of their families".

¹⁹⁴ Views adopted by the Committee under article 5 (4) of the Optional Protocol, concerning communication No. 2556/2015 * , ** , ***. CCPR/C/125/D/2556/2015. 11 June 2019. Paragraph 7.5

¹⁹⁵ Верховная рада приняла закон об освобождении заключенных для участия в боевых действиях (Verkhovna Rada passes law releasing prisoners for participation in hostilities). Gazeta.ru, 15 March 2022 // <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2022/03/15/17430121.shtm>

¹⁹⁶ Осужденный за убийство житель Кировской области завербовался в «ЧВК Вагнера», вернулся в родное село и через неделю снова убил человека (A Kirov region resident convicted of murder enlisted in the Wagner PMC, returned to his home village and killed again a week later). Mediazona, 30 March 2023 // <https://zona.media/news/2023/03/30/wolverine>

¹⁹⁷ С Дона выдачи почти нет: почему за 11 лет помилован лишь один осужденный из 1364 (Almost no extradition from the Don: Why only one convict out of 1,364 has been pardoned in 11 years). 161.ru, 27 July 2022 // <https://161.ru/text/politics/2022/07/27/71520593/>

¹⁹⁸ See, e.g., EPLN Report to the CCPR concerning prison violence in Russia // https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/RUS/INT_CCPR_CSS_RUS_50031_E.pdf

¹⁹⁹ Рецидивист распространил СВО на Россию (Recidivist extends [Special Military Operation] to Russia). Kommersant, 7 December 2022 // <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5707820>

²⁰⁰ «Музыкант» принял полицейских за врагов ('Musician' mistook policemen for enemies). Kommersant, 9 December 2022 // <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5718312>