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Freed Ukrainian Captives Stranded at Russia-Georgia Border – Reports

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A law enforcement officer at the Verkhny Lars checkpoint. **Yelena Afonina / TASS**

Seven Ukrainian men released from Russian captivity have been stranded at the Russia-Georgia border for two weeks after Georgia denied them entry, a Georgian volunteer organization told the independent Meduza news website Wednesday.

The group tried to enter Georgia via the Verkhny Lars border crossing in the Caucasus mountains on Oct. 11. Georgian authorities said they needed to hear from the Ukrainian foreign ministry before they would be allowed in, Volunteers Tbilisi, which helps Ukrainian refugees, told Meduza.

While Ukrainians do not need a visa to enter Georgia, three of the men are not in possession of their Ukrainian passports, only carrying their certificates of release from Russian penal colonies.

The men have since been sleeping on the checkpoint's floor, with volunteers bringing them food and water. One of the ex-prisoners reportedly cut his wrists in protest of his treatment;

he is in stable condition after receiving medical treatment.

“We are all citizens of Ukraine and we just want to go home,” one of the stranded men was quoted by Meduza as saying.

The men had been held in Russian custody in Kherson but were moved to Russia when Moscow’s forces withdrew from the southern Ukrainian city last fall.

The men reportedly said they were taken to a deportation center in Volgograd following their release and handed an eight-year ban on entering Russia.

In August, another group of Ukrainian men, also mostly former prisoners from Kherson, was held up at the Verkhny Lars border crossing for 11 days before eventually being let into Georgia.

At the time, the Georgian foreign ministry reportedly claimed delays came from the Ukrainian side, but they let the men in without waiting for Ukrainian approval because of one man’s medical condition.

According to The New York Times, occupying Russian forces transported 2,500 Ukrainian prisoners to Russian territory when they withdrew from Kherson in October 2022.

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