190 Criminal Cases Opened Against Pardoned Wagner Fighters Returning from Ukraine – Reports

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Members of the Wagner group. **BelTA News Agency (CC BY 3.0)**

Russian authorities have opened at least 190 criminal cases against Wagner mercenaries who were pardoned in exchange for fighting in Ukraine, the independent media outlet Vyorstka reported Monday.

Russia's Defense Ministry and the Wagner mercenary group have recruited heavily from Russian prisons to bolster their manpower in Ukraine, promising convicts a pardon in exchange for military service. In July, Wagner said that some 32,000 former prisoners recruited by the mercenary group had returned to Russia.

According to Vyorstka's tally, ex-prisoners were most likely to be tried were theft (83 cases), traffic violations (27 cases), drug-related crimes (23 cases), and murder or attempted murder (20 cases) after returning to Russia.

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Some former Wagner fighters were charged with up to eight crimes, Vyorstka said.

The outlet added that former convicts appear to be released again after receiving a fine, mandatory or forced labor, or a suspended sentence.

Russian media have also recently reported several cases of convicted killers being freed after fighting in Ukraine.

Last month, Nikolai Ogolobyak, 33, who was sentenced to 20 years for the ritualistic murder of a group of teenagers in 2008, was [freed](#) seven years early after serving with the military in Ukraine.

In September, pardoned convict Sergei Rudenko, who was freed after fighting with Wagner, was [sentenced](#) to 11.5 years in prison for murder and theft.

In another case, pardoned prisoner Alexei Khlebnikov, who also served with the Wagner Group, was [arrested](#) in August for allegedly raping a 13-year-old girl.

The Kremlin [said](#) last month its policy of pardoning prisoners in return for their involvement in the conflict in Ukraine remained unchanged.

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