

Behind the partial opening of borders in Ukraine and the murder of far-right MP Andriy Parubiy

Ukrainian journalists
14 September 2025

This article was submitted to the World Socialist Web Site by journalists from the assembly.org.ua website. You can support their work on their fundraising page.

On August 28, the government decree of August 26, 2025, No. 1031 came into force in Ukraine on permission to travel abroad for men between the ages of 18 and 22. Previously, since the beginning of the war on February 24, 2022, only men under 18 and over 60 were allowed to leave the country. At the border they need to present a passport and a document with their latest military registration data in paper or digital form. The majority of the remaining male population aged 23–60 remains hostage to the state.

There are different versions of reasons for releasing some of the hostages now: from the possibly approaching elections to, on the contrary, the desire to get rid of pro-western students, who were a central social base for mass anti-corruption protests a month ago, and to prevent the holding of elections. A certain role was also played by the fact that men under 25 are not subject to mobilization, so it is much easier for them to approach the border with a backpack through checkpoints and raids of territorial recruitment centers. Moreover, the political situation in the country, which appeared stagnant for some time, has now entered a new, tumultuous period. Perhaps for the first time since 2019, there is a whiff of a thaw in the air, against the backdrop of such a regular tightening of the “tie of freedom” on the people’s neck. [The “tie of freedom” is an ironic phrase from the 1905-1907 revolution, meaning a noose for hanging.]

The mass flow of people now fleeing the country bypassing border checkpoints in the Romanian direction alone can be imagined from a message about this summer in the Telegram group of the Ukrainian Freedom Movement:

There is a lot of food there, we found something 3-4 times in 7 days. We had supplies for 3 days, then we ate what we found. And we got out. The first time we found 12 [packages of] freeze-dried foods. The second time 3 [more packages]. Then we found energy bars, 3 for two [people], and coffee. Then we found more canisters and tiles, they leave them everywhere. All kinds of medicines, vitamin C, painkillers, etc. Even a power bank. Tents are pitched there in many places. The last time we found food, I remember, a certain amount of puree. Plus a few [packages of] freeze-dried foods and a bag of tea. Food is dropped both 20 km before the border and right next to it.

Men who are older than 22 remain hostages of the state. Already on the evening of September 1, in the Odessa region, border guards shot dead a

23-year-old refugee from Kharkov as he was trying to climb over the fence into Moldova. The State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) claimed in its press release:

They [the refugees] did not respond to the lawful demands of law enforcement to stop. During the pursuit, border guards fired several warning shots at the violators. Later, the body of one of the fugitives was discovered with a gunshot wound incompatible with life. The border guards detained another man on the spot.

The agency does not explain how “warning” shots could have been fired at people. At present, if we are to believe the SBI, the suspected border guard has been taken into custody and faces up to 10 years in prison.

But this death received far less press coverage than the August 30 murder in broad daylight of Andriy Parubiy in Lviv. Parubiy was a co-organizer of both US-backed Maidan protest movements, in 2004 and 2014, the speaker of the Ukrainian parliament in 2016–2019 and a quasi-oppositional MP since 2019. His political views can be fully illustrated by the words from his father’s funeral speech: “He was intolerant of the Russian language from childhood. Different people lived in our house. And Andriy, being a child, went out into the yard, heard these people speak Russian, and didn’t even start talking to them.”

Less than two days after the murder, Mykhailo Stselnikov, an unemployed man born in 1973, was detained in the Khmelnytsky region. His son, an IT specialist, volunteered to fight and died in 2023 in the battle for Bakhmut. From the words of his ex-wife, Stselnikov was against his son joining the army—“one was a patriot and the other was not.” The detainee stated that the murder was his personal revenge against the Ukrainian authorities and that he chose Parubiy as a target because he lived nearby. “All I want is for you to pass sentence now. Yes, I knew him, I killed him. And I want to ask to be exchanged for a prisoner of war, so that I can go and find my son’s body. That’s all. I will not give any more comments.”

It is unclear why the suspect hid after the murder if he wanted to be detained. Moreover, in the video of the shooting, the killer looks rather like an athletic young man, which is why there is the version told that Stselnikov is incriminating himself and the murder was a signal from above so that the far-right public would not even think about ceasing to serve as the regime’s power base and defecting to the former commander-in-chief Valery Zaluzhnyi, who has recently begun to make more and more political statements.

However, the main issue here is not whether the death of “one of the founders of the modern Ukrainian state” (in the words of his fellow party

member Irina Gerashchenko) is connected with someone's decision to erase the "browser history," and whether the suspect really murdered Parubiy. The very fact that various political figures are now assassinated with such regularity speaks of a crisis in the entire governance and security system. Simply put, the ruling class cannot rule in the old way.

This fact also emerges from the growing signs of social unrest from below, especially the increasingly angry and violent resistance to the forced mobilization drive. In Vinnytsya, an unsuccessful attempt at an anti-mobilization took place on the evening of August 1. After that, mass unrest began to subside again until August 22, in the same city, when patrol police detained a 25-year-old driver for violating traffic rules. He was wanted as a draft dodger and tried to escape, but the cops blocked his movement. A large crowd of passersby tried to interfere with administrative measures. There was no presence of TRC [Territorial Recruitment Centers] representatives.

On the evening of August 14, in Kharkov, a 36-year-old unemployed man was stopped on the street by a policeman and three TRC employees. When asked to show documents, he stabbed all four of them; two soldiers were hospitalized, one of them in serious condition—doctors fought for his life all night. The suspect was arrested a day later. The court remanded him in custody without setting bail for two months.

On August 7, in the Volyn village of Solovychi, an angry crowd of residents, including the village chairman, attacked enlistment agents and the police. During the document check, a man tried to escape, and another jumped on the hood of a TRC vehicle and smashed the windshield with a stone. Then a woman started banging against the car. Another man ran up with a wrench, smashed the side windows and hit the driver on the hand three times. Then the minivan was blocked by other cars, including trucks; about 10 people surrounded it and began to beat it.

In another village in this region, Novi Chervyshcha, according to a local TV report from August 19, enlistment employees took away a disabled man who was riding a bicycle. After that, elderly women began throwing stones at their car. Then one of them got out of the car and started shooting, wounding one of the pensioners. "Five or six times he fired straight at me. ... And my neighbor was hit in the cheek. They took her to the hospital," a woman told the local TV station. The visitors drove the captured man out beyond the village and then threw him out of the vehicle.

On September 4, in the village of Boratyn near Lutsk, during an attempt to check the military registration documents of a group of four passersby, two of them tried to escape and hide in an abandoned building. They began to physically resist the enlistment patrol officers who caught up with them. Then, one of the soldiers pulled out a traumatic [legally certified] pistol—they knocked it out of his hands and started to shoot in the direction of the pursuers themselves. Tear gas was used against the civilians; one of the military reportedly suffered a broken arm. Those who defended themselves were taken to the police and interrogated. This is the official version from the Volyn Regional TRC.

The workers themselves told a different story in an interview: enlistment agents came to their construction site, one of them started spraying the builders with pepper spray, and the other started shooting. After that, a worker took the spray can and knocked the pistol away from the TRC employee.

On September 9, after the TRC employees forcibly detained some man in the city of Lutsk and put him in a van, people tried to free him. During the incident, the windows of the car were broken and the tires slashed. Local residents also blocked the gate of the residential complex, preventing anyone from leaving. Several police and medical cars arrived at the scene. The conflict eventually ended with the cops taking the detainee to an ambulance.

On September 6, in the village of Bodnariv of the Ivano-Frankivsk region, a crowd of about 50 locals blocked the road between Ivano-

Frankivsk and Kalush (the homeland of Stepan Bandera). The reason was a protest against the mobilization of the village chairman Oleg Drogomyretsky, who was taken from his home three days earlier. The action was supported by the mayor of Kalush. He proposed creating a collective appeal to the regional military administration.

The disunity of the working class due to mobilization and mass migration helps account for the fact that, instead of socio-economic strikes, so far, in labor conflicts people also often prefer individual steps.

For example, on July 25, in the city of Dnieper a woman from Kharkov was sentenced on charges of committing an act of double arson due to the violation of her labor rights. Three months before, in the early hours of April 13, she had gone to a massage parlor, where she had previously worked for the owner as a telecom operator without registration. There, the woman set fire to the beds. A few minutes later, she did the same at another massage parlor. The premises burned down completely. "During the trial, the accused, without disputing the circumstances of the crime she committed, denied that her motive was hooliganism [willful destruction], pointing to the fact that her actions were not without cause, but were, on the contrary, caused by a conflict with the victim [the owner], which arose over the issue of payment in informal labor relations. Fines were imposed on her, and the victim treated her very disrespectfully, which caused her indignation and desire for revenge." Since the arsonist had previously served a sentence for theft, she was given a real [actual] 3 years in prison.

On July 2, a court in Kharkov convicted an employed citizen with no prior convictions for setting fire to the SOCAR gas station. According to the sentence, on the evening of October 5, 2024, the man had gone to the gas station to buy a wood lighter after a drunken walk. "In a fit of bad mood and [given] the situation in the country," he took a bottle of flammable liquid from the shelf, poured it over the cash register area of ??the operator, lit a fire and hid. The cashier put out the fire with a fire extinguisher. The man admitted his guilt, sincerely repented, fully compensated for the damage caused. On the charge of intentional destruction or damage to property, he received four years of probation with an [initial] probationary period of two years.

While the "border serfdom" of the male population has now been slightly alleviated, another side of the coin is the possible adoption of a series of bills that, on the contrary, again tighten the noose: Bill No. 13673, which introduces criminal liability for illegally crossing the state border during martial law; Bill No. 13634-1 on the deprivation of deferment for students who began their studies after 25 years or who exceeded the term of the academic program; and Bill No. 13452, which toughens the punishment for military personnel to 5–10 years in prison for refusal to follow the order of a commander.

But what can they change? No one is surprised anymore by tens of thousands of ordinary soldiers fleeing the army. Indeed, over the past month, some signs have begun to appear that the erosion has reached the very foundations of the regime. The story we reported earlier about a Ukrainian company commander who deserted from the Kursk region and was preparing to go to Romania turned out to be only the tip of the iceberg. Now these processes are going higher and higher.

Roman Donik from the 151st Armed Forces Training Center complained on August 28 that one of the instructors did not return from vacation in Lithuania. This had never happened before. Shortly after the August 5 murder of a patrol officer by a driver during an attempt to check documents in Izmail, in the Odessa region, information appeared that Maxim Standratyuk, another patrol inspector who had previously even served as acting deputy chief of the patrol police in this town, fled to Romania with his partner. On August 8, it became known that Maxim Grimalyak, who was employed with the criminal division of the local police, fled to Romania too: "Literally two weeks ago, he was working in Kharkov, looking for draft dodgers, and now he's telling [others] how to illegally cross the border ..." On the evening of August 9, on the way to the

border in Transcarpathia, the deputy chief of the criminal investigation department in the Kharkov Regional Police Directorate was detained at a checkpoint. With him in the service car were a woman and two men, one of whom was wanted by the TRC. The travelers were taken to the enlistment office, the cop was fired from the police and drafted into the army. His name and rank are not disclosed by the press service.

Finally, although not many people in Ukraine remember that radicalism can be not only right-wing, this summer we learned about some agitation in our city from the opposite flank. “I know and am looking for ultra-leftists who are for an independent socialist republic of Ukraine with genuine democracy and the abolition of private property (it sounds scary, but if you read it, you will understand). Who believe that fighting for Ukrainian or Russian oligarchs is pointless, as Marx, Lenin or [anarchist] Kropotkin explained. Who are against everyone, as they should be,” the author of this leaflet wrote on June 21.

Whatever comes out of the peace talks this year, there can be little doubt that Ukraine will keep the male population on the chain for as long as possible. And a hypothetical truce with Russia could even strengthen border control by sending fresh reinforcements from the eastern to the western front. Moreover, there is no indication that if Ukraine opens an exit door for everyone, Russia will cancel its mocking border filtering system. The European Union will also probably take measures to limit migration flows from Ukraine in such a case—neither it nor Russia needs new millions of refugees. So for us, in any case, there will still be a lot of work in the struggle for freedom, the implementation of which depends on our audience.

As this long, hot summer is drawing to a close we are entering a period of tumultuous events, and your financial support is becoming more and more important to allow our work to continue! You are welcome to visit our fundraising page and subscribe to become our sponsors. Many thanks to all in advance!



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