

National Lawyers Guild calls on Ukrainian court to free Bogdan Syrotiuk

Our Reporter

16 September 2026

The National Lawyers Guild, the oldest progressive bar association in the United States, has written to the Pervomaisk City District Court in Ukraine demanding the release of Bogdan Syrotiuk, the 27-year-old Ukrainian socialist and leader of the Trotskyist Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists (YGBL). On August 10, the court sentenced Bogdan to 15 years in prison for “high treason,” on the sole basis of six antiwar articles he wrote for the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Founded in 1937 as the first racially integrated national bar association, the Guild defended the victims of McCarthyism and later represented Vietnam War resisters and activists targeted by the FBI.

The letter, dated September 15 and signed by the Guild’s president, Suzanne Adely, states that the conviction “rests entirely on acts of expression” and “cannot be reconciled with Ukraine’s binding legal obligations” under the European Convention on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Ukraine’s own constitution. Nothing in the record, it states, “indicates espionage, sabotage, the transmission of information to a foreign power, or collaboration with any armed force—the very conduct that treason statutes exist to reach.”

The WSWs calls on all workers, young people and defenders of democratic rights to send letters and sign the petition at FreeBogdan.org.

The full text of the letter follows.

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September 15th, 2026

Pervomaisk City District Court
18 Ivan Vyhovsky Street
Pervomaisk, 55200, Ukraine
inbox@pm.mk.court.gov.ua

Re: Verdict of August 10, 2026 in the case of Bogdan Syrotiuk, Case number 484/5921/24

On August 10, 2026, the Pervomaisk City District Court sentenced Bogdan Syrotiuk, a 27-year-old writer, to 15 years in prison for high treason under martial law. The court also ordered the confiscation of his property and the destruction of his political literature.

According to the public record, the conviction rests entirely on acts of expression: six articles published on the World Socialist Web Site, a speech delivered on May 1, 2023, and the defendant’s correspondence with the publication’s editors. The verdict cites as elements of the offense his “non-recognition of Ukraine’s legitimately elected political leadership and democratic processes,” his “comparisons with fascists and Nazis,” his “negative assessments of Ukraine’s Armed Forces,” and his “reinterpretation of national heroes and historical figures.”

This conviction cannot be reconciled with Ukraine’s binding legal obligations. Political speech—including speech that harshly criticizes a government, its armed forces, and its official historiography—lies at the core of the protection guaranteed by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to both of which Ukraine is a party, as well as Article 34 of Ukraine’s own Constitution. Nothing in the published record indicates espionage, sabotage, the transmission of information to a foreign power, or collaboration with any armed force—the very conduct that treason statutes exist to reach.

The treatment of the expert evidence deepens our concern. A 65-page report by the criminologist Yuri Irkhin, submitted by the defense, found in Mr. Syrotiuk’s writings no “statements, phrases, sentences, or word combinations that have signs of propaganda aimed at supporting the armed aggression of the Russian Federation.” A further examination ordered by

the court from the Odessa Scientific Research Institute of Forensic Examination likewise found no calls for the overthrow of the state, the seizure of power, or the alteration of Ukraine's borders. A conviction returned against the uncontradicted weight of the expert evidence, in a prosecution built on protected expression, bears the appearance of a predetermined result rather than a judicial finding.

Those concerns are sharpened by the documented condition of the penitentiary system in which the sentence would be served. The Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture has reported ill-treatment of prisoners in Ukrainian penal colonies, intimidation and fear of reprisals among inmates who speak to its delegations, and the "unacceptable" delegation of order and security to so-called duty prisoners.

The United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine has documented arbitrary detention, torture, and ill-treatment of conflict-related detainees held by the Ukrainian authorities. And in August of this year, more than 160 prisoners in Ukrainian facilities—reportedly including the Mykolaiv pretrial detention center where Mr. Syrotiuk is held—began a hunger strike over compulsory labor exacted under threat of solitary confinement, beatings by staff, grossly deficient food, and the denial of medical care. For a chronically ill prisoner in such a system, a 15-year sentence risks becoming, in effect, a sentence of death.

We are aware that Mr. Syrotiuk's case is pending before the European Court of Human Rights. We urge that Mr. Syrotiuk be released, that the orders of confiscation and destruction be vacated, and that he be provided immediately with the medical care his condition requires.

The world legal community is following this case. The standards applied to Mr. Syrotiuk will be understood as a measure of the standards Ukraine applies to all.

Respectfully submitted,
Suzanne Adely, President
National Lawyers Guild, U.S.A.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit: