



GET LOST

REPORT ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF MOBILIZATION IN RUSSIA

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AUTUMN: PUTIN'S MOBILIZATION DECREE, RAIDS AND CALL-UPS

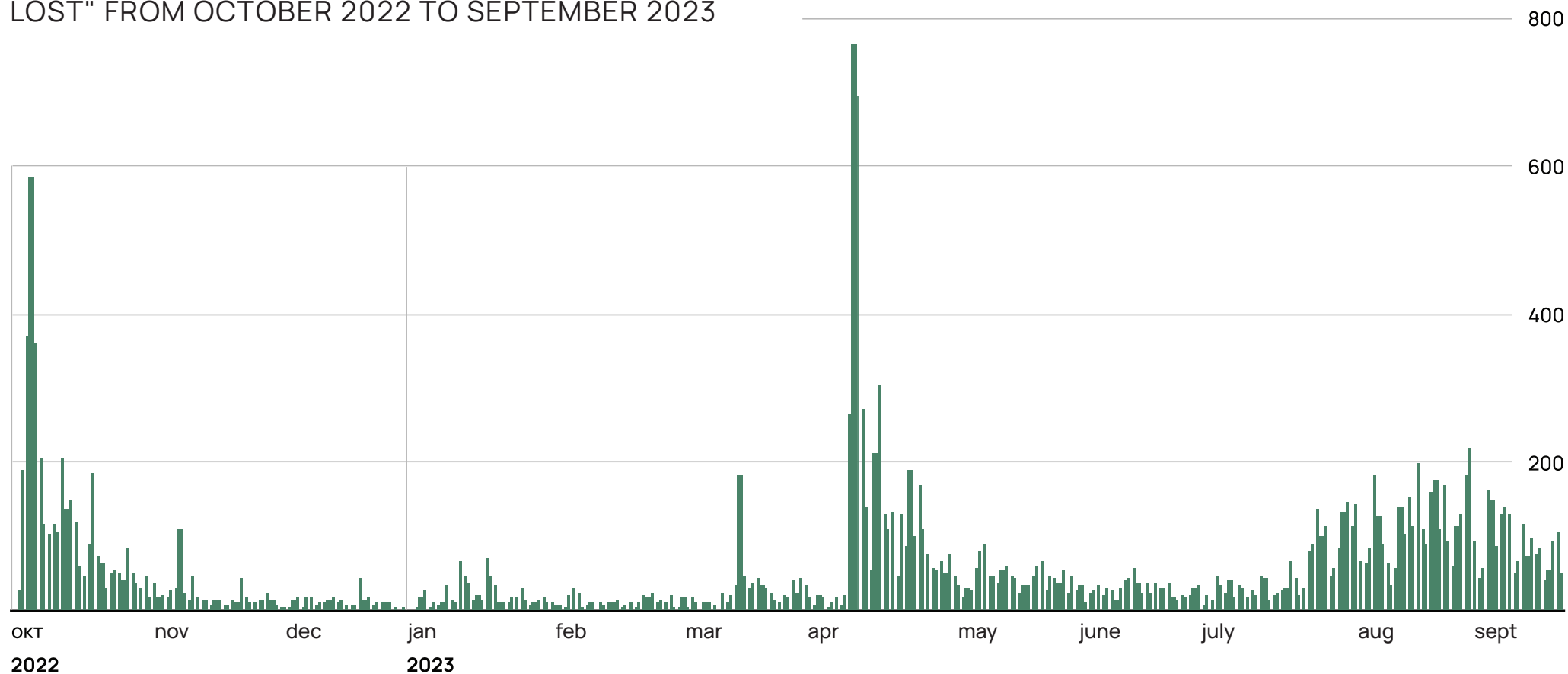
A year ago, on September 21, Vladimir Putin signed a decree on "partial mobilization". The very next day, mobilization offices began to open all over Russia, sometimes in most unexpected places like the Roman Viktyuk's theater. Immediately, people began to receive military call-up sheets that were handed in person, left in doorframes or mailboxes, given to random people on the street. In St. Petersburg, military recruitment officers would stand in the entrances of apartment buildings to hand call-up papers to passing residents. In Vladivostok recruitment officers would climb into houses through the windows.

From the very first day, mobilization was carried out with gross violations on various levels. Despite the fact that it was announced that only military reservists would be mobilized, the call-up papers were handed to citizens who were never supposed to be in the military: fathers with many children, disabled people and people with no military experience at all.

In addition, it quickly became clear that the mobilization would hit the provinces and ethnic republics: in many places like Buryatiya, Yakutiya the absolute majority of men received call-up sheets and were taken to war

TOTAL NUMBER OF REQUESTS FOR HELP TO "GET LOST" FROM OCTOBER 2022 TO SEPTEMBER 2023

15,604 PEOPLE RECEIVED HELP



The police quickly got involved in the distribution of call-up papers and began to organize real raids: men were caught in hostels and train stations, in subways and parking lots. At mobilization points, men caught by the police and military enlistment officers spent days on end in prison-like conditions: they were kept in cramped and stuffy rooms, and sometimes even in cages.

In fact, one of our first successful cases was helping a victim of a raid. Police officers picked up a man among forty other people from a hostel in Moscow and took him to a mobilization point, from where he contacted us. With our help, right in the room where he was held, this man filled out an application for alternative civilian service, calmly informed the military recruitment officers about it, secured a meeting with the military prosecutor, and only then was able to go home. This case proved that there is a chance to avoid mobilization even when a person is already in the hands of the military recruitment officers, but only if they are persistent and well-aware of their rights.

Finally, employers were also involved in mobilization: they were obliged to provide data on employees eligible for mobilization and help the Ministry of Defense to deliver the call-up sheets. For example, employees of an oil company were lured to take their military IDs and go to the HR department under the pretext of "reservation" (reservation is a temporary deferment from military service granted to certain categories of citizens, particularly certain professions). On the spot they were met by military recruitment officers with ready-made call-up sheets — and immediately sent to a mobilization point.

The raids, the distribution of summonses, and the violation of rights caused an atmosphere of fear and depression in society, if not panic. It quickly became clear that there was no enthusiasm for mobilization.

As a result, on November 1, Putin announced that mobilization was over: he claimed that the Russian army had been replenished with another 300,000 people (while, according to official data, only about 20,000 "volunteers" were recruited between September and December). However, the decree on the end of mobilization was never signed: the call-up sheets continue to arrive to this day. The most obvious consequence of the first weeks of mobilization was a mass exile of men to flee the army. According to the most rough estimates (cited by the BBC and Forbes, among others), 600,000 - 1,000,000 people left the country to avoid being summoned and sent to the war front.

Simultaneously with the announcement of «partial mobilization», contracted servicemen were forbidden to leave the army even after the expiration of the signed contract. As a result, regular military personnel had no other way to avoid going to war but to leave the unit. Many of them tried to quit as early as the end of February, but their superiors did everything to delay this process. In the end,

every month more and more soldiers decided to desert. Only with our help 507 deserters left the country. According to "Mediazona", the courts in Russia received 3,049 cases of leaving the military premises during the last year, and every week they pass about a hundred verdicts on such cases.

WINTER: REGULAR MILITARY CONSCRIPTION, RECRUITMENT OF PRISONERS, AND PROMOTION OF JOINING ARMY AS A CONTRACT SOLDIER

Simultaneously with Putin announcing the end of mobilization, the regular autumn military conscription began on November 1. This autumn conscription of 2022 was conducted with flagrant violations. It was difficult to distinguish it from mobilization: the same mass mailing of summonses to everyone, the same raids on places where young people gathered, from hostels and clubs to universities and student dormitories. Military recruitment officers went around to colleges and handed out to students the same kind of call-up sheets for «data clarification». One of the men who contacted us was summoned after going to the police station to check in with the district police officer: he had a suspended sentence. The military recruitment officers were already waiting for him there, they issued a call-up sheet and sent the young man to an assembly point. He only managed to escape by faking an epileptic seizure and getting transferred to a hospital.

Perhaps the main topic of the winter was the recruitment of prisoners by PMC Wagner: many people saw how its head Yevgeny Prigozhin personally flew to the prisons and spoke to the prisoners. However, our experience shows that only few people were recruited this way. Usually, the prisoners simply disappeared, no one flew to the prisons to talk to them. The families of prisoners tried to find them, and after some time they received a message from an unknown number: "Your husband died while fighting in the units of PMC Wagner, please accept condolences".

After the obviously unpopular mobilization, the authorities decided to change tactics and launched a campaign to attract new contract soldiers to the army. According to the announced plans, the Ministry of Defense was going to replenish the army by another 500,000 people in this way. Streets and mailboxes were flooded with billboards and leaflets advertising contract service, and there were commercials encouraging people to join the army. The propaganda promised substantial money and also the authorities of the Russian regions promised special bonuses. This campaign was to be carried out by local officials - they were to go door-to-door and also inform employers about the necessity to provide data on enlisted personnel. For example, in the city of Cherepovets, a city of 300,000 people, ten thousand call-up sheets were sent out over three spring months, meaning that every thirtieth person was called to the military enlistment office.

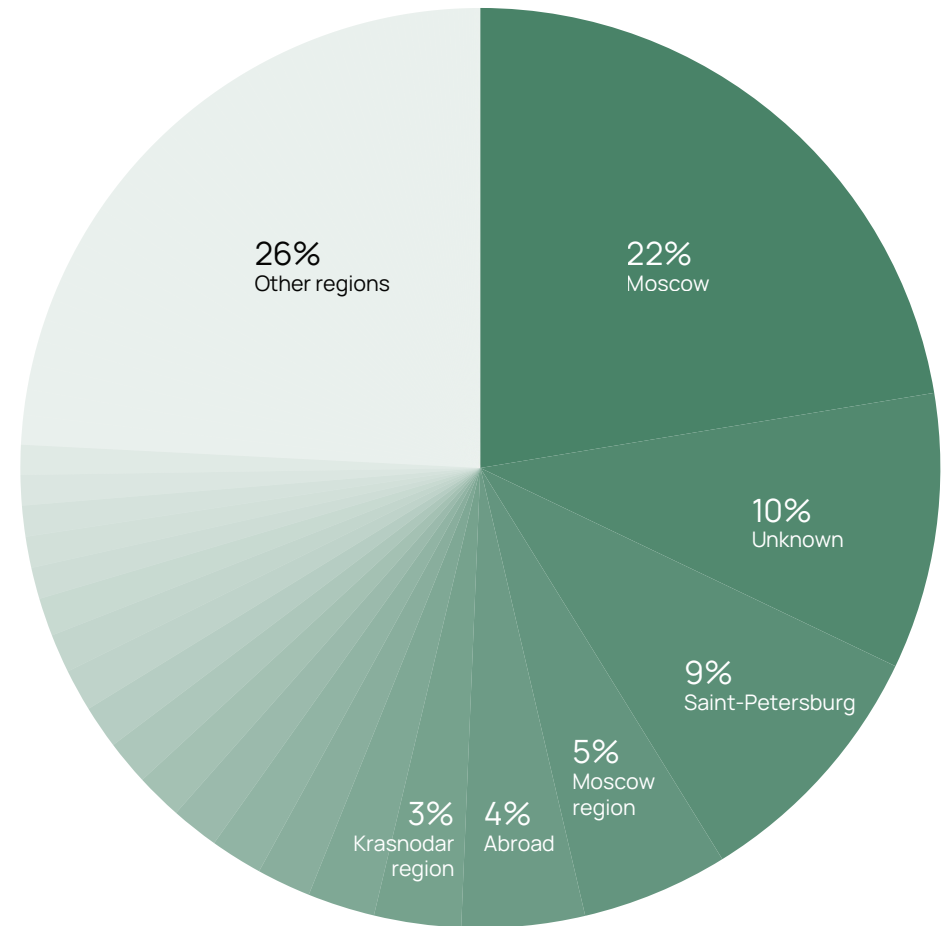
SPRING: AMENDMENTS IN MILITARY LEGISLATION AND A NEW CONSCRIPTION

On April 11, the Russian parliament adopted a package of amendments to six federal laws at once, which was called the "law on electronic call-ups". According to these amendments, call-up sheets will be delivered not only in person, but also through the state-owned portal of public services "Gosuslugi". Once sent on this portal, the call-up sheets will automatically be considered delivered. Apparently, the idea was that Russians would run to military enlistment offices more actively and stop ignoring the call-up sheets. At least, it will be more difficult to do so after the amendments will be fully implemented. At the same time, with the electronic call-ups deputies passed another law: an important one, but one that was almost ignored. On April 12, the same deputies allowed conscripts to sign contracts immediately, without waiting for three months of training, as it was before. This means that they can be sent to war immediately and en masse.

The spring conscription even surpassed the autumn one in terms of cruelty. There was a wave of new raids across the country, but now not only in hostels and places popular among young people, but also in apartments and houses. In Moscow, young people who called the police for other reasons ended up being handcuffed and forcibly taken to the military enlistment offices, allegedly as persistent draft dodgers. The call-ups were brought not only to the universities' dormitories, but also directly to lectures, as indignant teachers wrote to us.

Finally, university graduates became victims of conscription this time, at universities that had military training centers. In the past, such organizations were used as a kind of bank - by signing a contract with such a center, a student received a supplement to his scholarship and a place in a dormitory. The students were obliged only to attend classes explaining how their specialty was applicable to the military. Upon graduation, it was only necessary to return the money spent on these classes, a manageable sum of 200,000 rubles (approximately \$2,000). However, last spring the rules changed: the amount of tuition was raised to several million rubles, students were threatened with problems with graduating, and forced to sign a military contract. They found themselves practically enslaved and after signing the contract, they asked us to help them to leave the unit without permission.

"GET LOST": NUMBER OF REQUESTS OVER THE PAST YEAR BY REGION



SUMMER: NEW REPRESSIVE MEASURES AND AWOLS

The summer season started with the discussion and adoption of new repressive laws against draft dodgers. The Ministry of Defense proposed new rules for military registration. The essence of them boiled down to the fact that failure to show up when summoned would now entail not only a fine, but also a ban on leaving the country. In addition, they decided to confiscate foreign passports (a type of ID that enables Russians to leave the country) from conscripts. At the same time, there were reports of other, absolutely voluntaristic rights violations: like the systematic refusal to provide medical examinations without the permission of the military commission (in such cases, doctors at polyclinics usually referred to "verbal orders from the chief physician", and conscripts had to go to paid clinics).

Soon the deputies introduced several other restrictive measures. First, they raised the conscription age to 30 (at first they promised to change the lower limit from 18 to 21, but this idea was abandoned). As usual, this widely debated law was quietly followed by another one: the responsibility for not showing up on call-up was toughened - the fines were increased tenfold to 30,000 RUB (at the same time, there were rumors circulating about the forthcoming introduction of criminal liability, but so far they have not been confirmed). In addition, the punishment has been toughened for employers: it was decided to fine them 400,000 RUB for not notifying an employee on the necessity to come to the military enlistment office. So far, it is too early to talk about any results of these toughened laws: they have not yet come into force, but they will obviously play an important role in the upcoming autumn conscription.

In July and August, a record number of soldiers decided to desert and contacted us for help. Even though in September, simultaneously with other "mobilization" laws, the responsibility for this was tightened, and now deserters face up to ten years of imprisonment. There are several reasons for this increase in requests. First of all, in spring those who were mobilized in September started to get short vacations. And they used them not to return. Besides, it quickly became clear that repressive laws do not work. Deserters who were found and arrested often ended up not in prison, but in the same military unit from which they had escaped. There they were persistently offered to go back to the war front in exchange for closing (or not opening) the criminal case. This proves once again that officials are ready to do anything for the sake of replenishing soldiers at the war front - even to violate the repressive laws that they themselves have adopted.

At the beginning of September this year, rumors about new mobilization - and even demobilization of those drafted a year ago - began to circulate with increasing frequency. It has now been officially stated that there will be no rotation of mobilized individuals, which means that those who went to war a year ago will not return home. As for new mobilization, so far the only and very telling

evidence that it is approaching is the obvious problems with the army replenishment and the persistent recruitment of new contract soldiers. The autumn conscription has just started, and the amendments adopted in recent months will come into force during this period. It will show what strategies in the changing circumstances will help to survive and not to participate in a criminal war.

NUMBER OF REQUESTS TO "GET LOST" BY CATEGORY FROM OCTOBER 2022 TO SEPTEMBER 2023

