

CARCERAL ORDERS: INFORMAL PRISON HIERARCHIES IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE AND THE POLITICAL WEAPONISATION OF PRISON SUBCULTURE

Dmytro Yagunov, D.Sc. in Political Science,
Ph.D. in Public Administration

Eberhard Karls University
Vasyl Stus Donetsk National University



9-12 SEPTEMBER 2026, WARSAW

EUROCRIM 2026

FRONTIERS OF CRIMINOLOGY



CARCERAL ORDERS

- ❑ Informal prison hierarchy as a system of power
- ❑ Amalgamation of prison culture, state governance and warfare
- ❑ The prison yard as a model of the Russian state



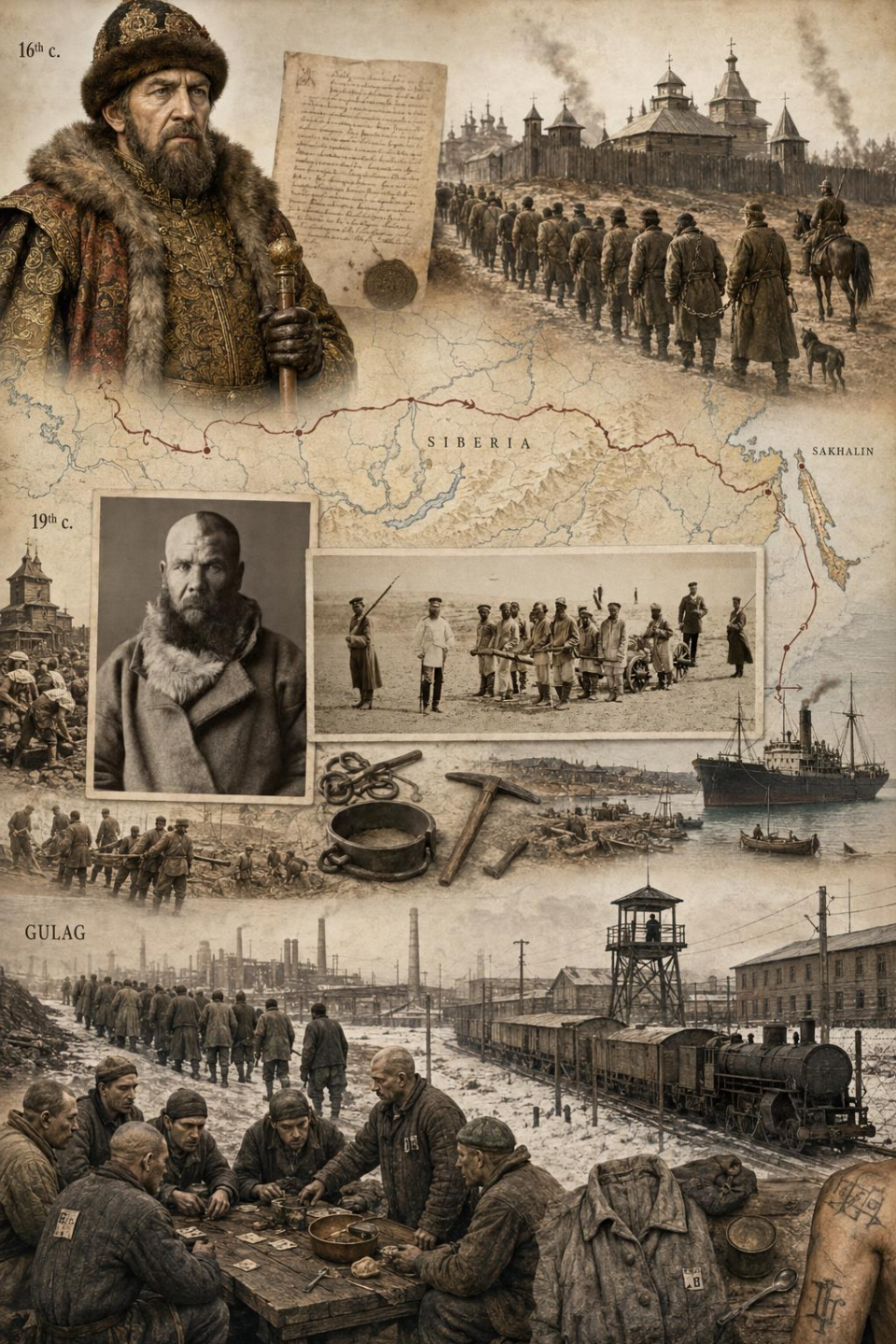
INFORMAL PRISON HIERARCHY AS POWER

- ☐ Status and resource distribution
- ☐ Unofficial rules, sanctions and violence
- ☐ Informal leaders as intermediaries of control
- ☐ A parallel normative order



FUSION OF FORMAL AND INFORMAL AUTHORITY

- ☐ Administrative hierarchy + prisoner caste hierarchy
- ☐ Delegated discipline, surveillance and coercion
- ☐ Privileged prisoners as informal enforcers
- ☐ Cheap control in exchange for status and immunity



HISTORICAL ROOTS

- ❑ Sixteenth-century forced colonisation and exile
- ❑ Penal servitude under Peter I
- ❑ Siberian and Sakhalin penal settlements
- ❑ The Gulag as expansion, not origin

VORY V ZAKONE: PARALLEL GOVERNANCE

- ❑ **Skhodka:** collective decision-making
- ❑ **Smotryashchie** and **polozhentsy:** enforcement
- ❑ **Obshchak:** financial foundation
- ❑ **Ponyatiya:** informal rules above formal law





OBSHCHAK AND THE POWER VERTICAL

- ☐ Obligatory tribute from lower levels
- ☐ Opaque redistribution by an unaccountable elite
- ☐ Protection and enrichment conditional on loyalty
- ☐ Property and status dependent on the centre



WHEN SUBCULTURE LOSES THE PREFIX 'SUB'

- ☐ Prison *argot* as political prestige
- ☐ Brutality as decisiveness
- ☐ Legal compromise as weakness
- ☐ Personal loyalty above institutional rules
- ☐ Criminal-prison culture as *national culture*



WAGNER: THE CARCERAL MODEL OF WARFARE

- ☐ Mass recruitment of prisoners
- ☐ Convicts as disposable manpower
- ☐ Absolute command and demonstrative violence
- ☐ **Storm-Z** and **Storm-V**: state institutionalisation

EXPORTING THE CARCERAL ORDER

- ❑ Occupied Ukrainian territories and filtration camps
- ❑ Private military formations in Africa
- ❑ Informal detention, torture and collective punishment
- ❑ State distancing and absence of accountability
- ❑ Carceral governance as neocolonial influence





‘PATSAN-STYLE’ DIPLOMACY

- ☐ International agreements reduced to **ponyatiya**
- ☐ Personal promise above written procedure
- ☐ No guaranteed rights for the weaker party
- ☐ Obligations revised with the balance of power
- ☐ Force, status and loyalty above law



ECHR, ECtHR AND THE CPT

- ☐ **Informal prison hierarchies** as an independent torture risk
- ☐ Caste status, extortion, humiliation and sexual violence
- ☐ Delegated authority and staff complicity
- ☐ Separate assessment in extradition and transfer cases
- ☐ State responsibility for known prisoner-on-prisoner abuse



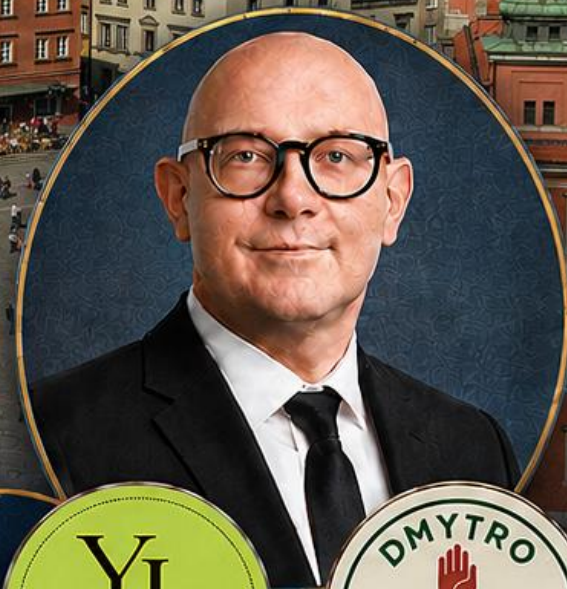
CONCLUSION

- ❑ The prison hierarchy is not merely a subculture within the Russian state; it is a **model** through which the Russian state understands and exercises power
- ❑ Prisons as **infrastructure** for military mobilisation
- ❑ Informal coercion as a channel of **neocolonial influence**
- ❑ Prison logic as a key to Russian **foreign policy**

The background of the image features a large, waving Polish flag (white top, red bottom) on the left side. The right side shows a panoramic view of a historic city, likely Warsaw, with colorful buildings, red-tiled roofs, and a large church with a green roof and a tall spire. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

Dmytro Yagunov



REFERENCES

Yagunov, D. (2026). Sacred Imperialism: 'Traditional Values' and the Continuity of Russian Colonial Policy. *Evropský politický a právní diskurz*. 13. 1.

Yagunov, D. (2025). Formal Empire, Informal Hierarchies, Carceral Violence, and 'Naturalness' of Russia's Presence as Imperial Strategy (The Army and Prison as Tools of Russian Neo-Imperialism). *Evropský politický a právní diskurz*. 12. 6.

Yagunov, D. (2025). Naturalising Empire: The Birch Tree as Instrument of Colonisation in Russian Imperialist Politics. *Evropský politický a právní diskurz*. 11. 4.

Yagunov, D. (2025). From Mercenaries to Power Brokers: Private Military Companies and Irregular Warfare Doctrine Under Russian Imperial Ambitions. *Evropský Časopis Ekonomiky a Managementu*. 11. 6.

Yagunov, D. (2025). Russian Criminal and Prison Culture: Historical Background, Importation in the 21st Century, and the Wagner Phenomenon. *European Philosophical and Historical Discourse*. 12. 5.

Yagunov, D. et al (2023). The Phenomenon of Informal Prison Hierarchies and the Simulacrum of Prison Subculture in Contemporary Power Relations. *Evropský Politický a Právní Diskurz*. 10. 4.

Yagunov, D., Melnychuk, T., Meliukhov, V. (2023). The Prison Gang as a «Brand» (an Overview of Informal Prison Hierarchies in Modern Prison Systems). *Political Life*. 4.