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**THE NEW WAVE OF RUSSIAN
POLITICAL EMIGRATION TO GERMANY**
ORGANISATIONS, ACTIVITIES,
PROSPECTS

Maria Domańska

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MAIN POINTS

- Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has resulted in an unprecedented scale of emigration from Russia, estimated at around 500,000–600,000 individuals. Among them special attention should be paid to political emigrants such as members of the opposition, activists, human rights defenders and independent journalists, who were forced to leave Russia because they faced imminent repression.
- Germany is one of the most appealing destinations for Russian political emigrants. There are several reasons for this. First, the long tradition of contacts between the civil societies of both countries. Second, the capability and political will of the German authorities to provide Russian independent media outlets and civil society initiatives with long-term support, including financial assistance. Third, the presence in Germany of Russian active pro-democracy organisations established prior to 2022. The generally positive attitude of the German government and society towards Russians is another significant factor.
- Russian political emigrants in Germany are involved in three main types of activity, and share the ideological platform of protesting against the war. Firstly, these are ad hoc actions intended to assist those who are fleeing repression and to organise their stay abroad. Secondly, most emigrant groups are involved in various initiatives to help Ukrainian refugees. Thirdly, numerous initiatives aim to continue and expand in exile the political and civic activism focused on Russia. The political relevance of the latter boils down to its potential impact on domestic developments in Russia at present and in the future. In this context the most important areas of activity include providing help to those politically-repressed individuals who have stayed in their home country, attempting to influence the views and attitudes of the Russian public, as well as rebuilding and expanding Russian civil society structures in exile. Other efforts focus on exploring the Western models of grassroots democracy and democratic institution-building, promoting the visibility of Russian pro-democracy groups in their host countries and lobbying in favour of a tougher Western stance towards the Putin regime.
- Although civil society in exile will not be a crucial factor in the political transformation of a post-Putin Russia, it may provide an important support base for this process.

- Russian activism abroad is encountering numerous obstacles. First, exiled groups are scattered among different host countries and often suffer from internal discord. Second, most of them face problems with funding and long-term planning of their activities. Third, spreading anti-war and democratic ideas among Russian society is increasingly difficult due to the wartime censorship and mounting repression.
- The scale of Russian political migration and the increasingly repressive nature of the Putin regime mean that Russian civil society requires coordinated Western assistance. It is necessary to devise new flexible mechanisms of support, including financial ones, and to simplify the procedures to legalise the stay of repressed activists and journalists in host countries. The most important directions of action should include increased cooperation between emigrants and the local civil societies of their host countries, as well as the promotion of new valuable initiatives intended to overcome the barriers in communication with Russian society.

INTRODUCTION

At present, Russia is experiencing the biggest wave of politically-motivated emigration in its modern history. Its scale, international context (the aggression against Ukraine) and the domestic political situation (the neo-totalitarian nature of the Putin regime) require an efficient and well-thought-out reaction from the West, including the EU member states and institutions.

The large numbers of activists, independent journalists and opposition figures who are leaving Russia and their active engagement in political and civil society activism indicate that the new diaspora may play a role in the post-Putin political transformation. One group that deserves particular attention is the small, albeit dynamic, community of Russian civil society representatives (at least several thousand individuals) whose main declared intention is to maintain their ties with Russia in the long term and to return to their home country once they are no longer threatened by repression. Their activities are currently focused on the reconstruction of civil society organisations abroad and on support for pro-democracy groups in Russia, which are being subjected to increasing persecution. Anti-war initiatives, including those focused on support for Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees, are another important form of their activity.

This analysis of the potential and the needs of Russian civil society in exile sums up a six-week research project (carried out in October and November 2022) focused on a qualitative study of the new wave of Russian political emigration to Germany. It was mainly conducted in Berlin, which Russian political emigrants view as their principal centre of activity in Germany.

The purpose of this research was to investigate the emigrants' main areas of activity, the most important challenges and opportunities they face and their prospects for influencing the situation in Russia. However, the principal question that this research attempted to answer was: how should Western support for these groups be organised to help them contribute to a future political change in Russia?

To determine these issues, the author has conducted around 30 in-depth interviews with representatives of the Russian diaspora, which were supplemented by interviews with representatives of German civil society and organisations involved in supporting Russian activists and journalists.

I. THE BACKGROUND AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEW WAVE OF RUSSIAN POLITICAL EMIGRATION

At present, Russia is experiencing the biggest wave of politically-driven emigration in its modern history. It is mainly motivated by the general political situation (the war and military mobilisation). As of the end of 2022 it was estimated at around 500,000 individuals.¹ The reasons behind the decision to leave the country include fear of conscription and awareness of Russia's gloomy development prospects and an imminent economic slump. Other reasons are opposition to the war and the conviction that the remaining civil liberties may soon be cancelled. The emigrants hail from the most creative part of Russian society – they include educated, relatively young and professionally active individuals such as business owners, IT specialists etc.

A much smaller group of people (estimated at several thousand individuals at least), who chose to emigrate, are political and civil society activists, as well as journalists, who were forced to leave Russia due to persecution or increasingly repressive laws that effectively penalised their professional activity. This text focuses on this latter group, that is political emigration in its narrow sense.

This paper does not analyse the entire Russian diaspora in Germany, which includes individuals who had arrived there in previous decades mainly as economic migrants.² These groups are usually 'apolitical' and often even support the Putin regime. However, most of them are passive consumers of Kremlin-sponsored propaganda, who do not and most likely will not play any part in domestic political processes in Russia in the future. As a rule, political emigrants do not maintain contacts with these groups, mostly because of profound differences as regards their world views.

Nor does this study analyse the relationship between Russian political emigrants and Ukrainian emigrants. In the public sphere, cooperation between these two groups is infrequent, mainly due to the principled attitude of Ukrainian activists and to the divergent priorities of the two communities.

¹ С. Кутепов, '«Агентство»: из России в 2022 году может уехать до 600 тысяч человек', RTVI, 21 November 2022, rtvi.com. For more on emigration triggered by military mobilisation see K. Chawryło, I. Wiśniewska, 'Mobilisation in Russia: society's reactions and the economic consequences', *OSW Commentary*, no. 486, 20 January 2023, osw.waw.pl.

² The number of individuals from the former USSR, including Russia, who reside in Germany is estimated at 3,5 million and the Russian-speaking community at 2.2 million. 235,000 individuals of Russian origin hold German citizenship. See P. Lokshin, 'Wie viele Russischsprachige leben in Deutschland?', *Mediendienst Integration*, 3 December 2020, mediendienst-integration.de.

Despite their frequent involvement in support for Ukrainian refugees, Russians mainly focus on issues linked with resistance to the Putin regime.

The new wave of Russian political migration in its narrow sense began in 2021, a year marked by unprecedented repression against the democratic opposition and civil society organisations. According to the Free Russia Foundation, more than 1,500 activists and journalists left Russia in 2021.³ They mainly fled to Georgia, Lithuania and Ukraine. In 2022, the number of Russian political emigrants was several times higher and is estimated at a level of at least several thousand activists and more than 500 journalists (according to figures published by the Proekt website, proekt.media). The geographical diversity of their destinations has also increased (EU member states including Germany, the South Caucasus, Central Asia etc.).

The previous waves of emigration were much smaller (including those triggered by repression following the 2011–12 protests and the 2014 annexation of Crimea, and by instances of persecution of attendees of large anti-Kremlin rallies held in 2017–19). This reflected the isolated and selective nature of repression carried out at that time, as the law enforcement bodies and the so-called judiciary did not target specific groups of regime opponents which operated in an organised manner.

The qualitative change that occurred in 2021 involved a crackdown on groups linked to Alexei Navalny (the most important figure in the democratic opposition) and a portion of NGOs and independent media outlets (July 2021 saw the first decision to strip an independent media outlet, the Proekt website, of its licence on the basis of the legislation on ‘undesirable organisations’). As part of repression carried out at that time, in January 2021 Navalny was incarcerated and the network of organisations he had created was banned as ‘extremist’. Following a series of thousands-strong demonstrations in his defence, Russia saw a wave of detentions and arrests. More than 17,000 individuals were detained at that time. A significant increase in the number of criminal cases against the attendees of ‘illegal’ peaceful rallies was also recorded.

In May 2021, when regulations were again made more restrictive, Mikhail Khodorkovsky’s Open Russia dissolved. This was a socio-political organisation which for many years had been involved in human rights defence, the promotion of independent media outlets and support for opposition candidates in

³ ‘В 2021 году Россию покинули 1,5 тысячи активистов и журналистов’, Север.Реалии, 14 January 2022, severreal.org.

elections at various levels. With the Russian authorities increasingly affirming the country's totalitarian legacy, December 2021 saw the symbolic decision to shut down two leading organisations involved in documenting Communist-era crimes and defending human rights: the International Memorial society and the Memorial Human Rights Centre. A significant increase in pressure on organisations operating in the spheres of science and education was also recorded, particularly as regards institutions with extensive international contacts. These included the Moscow-based Higher School of Economics, a prestigious state university which had long been viewed as relatively liberal by Russian standards. It was forced to toe the government line, for example in dismissing lecturers who openly expressed anti-Kremlin views and modifying the curricula.

In 2022, when Russia launched its full-scale aggression against Ukraine, the Kremlin's policies took on an overtly totalitarian nature, as demonstrated by mass-scale propaganda, violent indoctrination (including the spread of hate speech at schools and universities), mass surveillance and wartime censorship. A distinct tendency towards increasing international (self-)isolation of the state is evident. Following the outbreak of the war, the Ministry of Justice removed 15 entities (including all German political foundations) from the official register of foreign organisations operating in Russia. As a consequence, many members of their Russian staff had to be evacuated from the country. Universities, for their part, received a clear signal that any contacts with Western partners would be viewed as suspicious or illegal. There has been a major increase in the practice of informing on fellow citizens to the authorities, and citizens are encouraged to be 'vigilant' against the 'enemies of the people'.

The few anti-war protests that were held were quickly stifled. Political persecution often involves charging the protestors with criminal offences (such as alleged terrorist and extremist activity, financial embezzlement, disruption of public order). At the same time, Russia's borders remain open (it is unclear whether this will continue), as the authorities prefer to rid themselves of 'disloyal elements' by encouraging citizens viewed as inconvenient to emigrate, rather than risk the emergence of a significant potential for protest at home.

The OVD-Info project, which monitors instances of political repression, estimates the number of politically-driven arrests and detentions carried out in 2022 at almost 20,500 (in 2021 the corresponding figure was 23,500), including around 19,500 individuals who have been detained for protesting against the war. Even children who express anti-war views are subjected to scrutiny

by the police, while their parents are frequently threatened that administrative and criminal investigations will be launched against them, and they may even be stripped of their parental rights. Violent behaviour against detainees on the part of police officers, members of the FSB and Rosgvardiya is becoming increasingly frequent. The use of force has become a mass-scale occurrence and there have been reports of torture being inflicted on detainees at police stations. Political pressure on independent lawyers is also increasing.

An investigation has been launched against at least 23 individuals suspected of having contacts with organisations established by Alexei Navalny, which the Russian leadership views as ‘extremist’. The most important organisations and grassroots initiatives involved in anti-war protests have been recognised as ‘foreign agents’ (for example the Feminist Anti-War Resistance, FAS) or banned due to their allegedly extremist activity (Vesna).

2022 saw a major increase in the number of individuals detained (20 such instances in that year as a whole) and sentenced (11 individuals) for ‘high treason’. The toughest sentence (22 years’ imprisonment) was passed on Ivan Safronov, a former journalist of the *Kommersant* daily newspaper. There are many indications that he has been punished for his activity in the sphere of investigative journalism.

In 2022 as a whole, almost all independent media outlets were shut down, blocked or forced to significantly reduce their activity. Nearly all editorial teams who are critical of the Russian leadership have fled Russia (although they continue to have a network of domestic correspondents who usually prefer to remain anonymous).

II. GERMANY AS A DESTINATION FOR RUSSIAN POLITICAL EMIGRANTS

The choice of the country for relocation is usually based on several factors: whether the potential emigrant has contacts on the ground, has all the required documents (foreign passport, visa) and is able to easily obtain entry and residence permits. Other factors include their financial standing and the scope of social assistance offered by the host country. Assessing the level of personal safety is also relevant. This refers both to the public's attitude towards Russians in general, and to the critics of the Putin regime in particular, the activity of Russian secret services, and the risk of deportation to Russia for individuals facing politically motivated criminal charges back home. The emigrants exchange information, including via social media networks, on how to legalise and organise their stay and how to help each other.

According to unconfirmed estimates provided by the interviewees, the number of Russian political emigrants living in Germany who have arrived there over the past few years is likely to be at least in the thousands. Most of them are representatives of Russian NGOs and independent media outlets. A group of local level opposition politicians, estimated at a level of at least around 150 individuals, has also left Russia for Germany. More precise calculations are impossible, unless the German federal authorities collect and publish the relevant data. Russian political emigrants enter Germany using different types of visas and legalise their stay according to several different procedures. Once in Germany, some of them choose not to be active members of the Russian diaspora and therefore are not monitored by the organisations which compile estimates regarding the number of emigrants.

If the need to flee Russia is urgent, Germany is generally not the first country of choice, due to the visa regime and the logistical problems resulting from the suspension of air traffic between Russia and the EU. In these situations, Armenia and Georgia are the most attractive destinations for political emigrants (some of them also choose Kyrgyzstan and Turkey). This is because Russian citizens are allowed to stay there without the requirement to hold a visa for up to 180 days in Armenia and up to 365 in Georgia. Moreover, Russian citizens are allowed to enter Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan using their identity card instead of their passport.⁴ However, it is not rare that those individuals who first moved to the South Caucasus or other countries relocate to Germany.

⁴ For more on immigration rules applied by the host countries see K. Chawryło, M. Domańska, M. Menkiszak, I. Wiśniewska, 'Restrykcje wizowe dla Rosjan: stan rzeczy, debata, konsekwencje', OSW, 6 September 2022, osw.waw.pl.

Germany's appeal results from:

- long cooperation between Russian civil society actors and German political foundations and NGOs (sometimes dating back to the Soviet era);
- the presence of a relatively large group of Russian political emigrants who fled to Germany following the wave of post-2011 repression;
- a generous social assistance package (although only refugees and humanitarian visa holders are eligible to receive it; it is unclear how long the German state will continue to offer these generous programmes given the migration pressure from citizens of Ukraine and the Middle Eastern states);
- the positive experience regarding the general attitude of the German public towards Russians. This is due to historically-motivated pro-Russian sentiment (which some Ukrainian activists who reside in Germany openly complain about), the Russian diaspora's cultural proximity, and the relatively successful integration of its youngest members into German society.

The humanitarian and freelance visas offered to Russians

Since July 2022, Germany has issued so-called humanitarian visas to Russians on the basis of the amended regulations on the residence of foreigners. According to the available information, by January 2023 more than 600 of these visas have been issued and more than 1,100 visa applications are pending. Moreover, the amended laws have introduced the possibility of extending Schengen visas close to expiry. These can now be replaced with another type of German residence permit, such as a 'freelance' or work visa. In this situation, to apply for a humanitarian visa the emigrant needs to leave Germany and submit their application in a third country (outside the EU).

A humanitarian visa is issued for three months and enables the emigrant to apply for a permanent residence permit (it is granted for up to three years and includes the right to work and study in Germany). The applicant is required to meet two criteria: provide evidence that they were subjected to politically-motivated persecution and to prove that they have links with Germany.

Holders of a humanitarian visa are eligible for a social assistance package which includes insurance, a housing cost subsidy, social benefits, child

benefit, free German language classes, integration classes and, subsequently, assistance in finding employment. Although the emigrants enjoy a great degree of comfort and a sense of financial security when they reside in Germany on the basis of these visas, the negative aspect of this situation, as declared unanimously by the interviewees, is that they are required to settle in a location imposed on them by the immigration authorities. This effectively rules out the possibility of them moving to Berlin because of the difficult situation on the local housing market. The emigrants unanimously say that the requirement to settle in those federal states which are located far from the German capital, often in small towns, is a serious problem for those who wish to continue their civic-political activism focused on Russia. They fear that they may be unable to continue their activity away from major urban centres and from emigrant communities and their German partners who reside there. However, many emigrants do manage to remain in the capital, although this usually requires considerable effort and political support from the German side.

As regards freedom of settlement, the so-called freelance visa is more convenient. It can be applied for by those individuals who do not need social assistance. This type of visa is popular with journalists who cooperate with Russian-language media outlets and this cooperation is their source of income in Germany. However, after several years, if they wish to continue to reside legally in Germany, the emigrants are required to prove that they earn a sufficiently high monthly income per each member of their family (at present this is €1,500).

It is very infrequent for Russians to apply for refugee status. This is because the procedures for processing these applications include restricted freedom of movement across Germany and abroad and limited choice of the place of residence. This is particularly important as mobility is one of the key aspects enabling emigrants to continue their civic-political activism.

In April 2022, Germany halted the deportation of citizens of Eastern European countries, including the Russian Federation (and also Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova etc.). According to unofficial information, it is in the interest of the German authorities to facilitate the legalisation of these migrants' stay rather than create a legal vacuum in which an individual without a residence permit cannot be deported from the country (in some instances these individuals are granted the right to a so-called tolerated stay).

On the other hand, the emigrants list a high level of bureaucracy and time-consuming immigration procedures as well as non-transparent, complicated regulations as examples of the negative aspects of their emigration to Germany. This situation is partly due to the fact that the German immigration system is overloaded with work resulting from the mass-scale influx of refugees from the Middle East and Ukraine. Some interviewees complained about the problems they encountered when attempting to open a bank account (this concerns both natural persons and companies). In this case, the reasons likely include the bank clerks' meticulous compliance with anti-money laundering regulations and red tape. The limited availability of affordable housing is another major problem. In this context, the situation is particularly difficult in Berlin. The Russian diaspora has offered assistance to the newcomers in finding accommodation, and is often successful. Sometimes help from local politicians involved in supporting Russian civil society is of key importance from the point of view of emigrants struggling to cope with difficulties.

From the perspective of Russian émigré initiatives, Germany's attractiveness often results from the long history of cooperation between the civil societies of the two countries, which in some cases dates back to the late 1980s. For example, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (which is linked with the SPD) launched its activities in the USSR in 1989, at the invitation of Mikhail Gorbachev. The German authorities have declared they are prepared to provide comprehensive support to Russian activists and journalists (other mainstream political parties have adopted a similar approach). For example their intention to establish a Russian media 'hub' in Berlin is clear. The comparative advantage of Germany in this field refers to much greater funding available than in the case of similar 'hubs' operating in Riga and Tbilisi, and the absence of perceptible anti-Russian sentiment in Germany. Despite the differences between the SPD and its coalition partners with regard to their policy towards the Putin regime, the German approach towards the political diaspora is cross-party in nature.

The new qualitative challenges that have emerged since early 2022 include: the large number of political emigrants who have arrived in Germany and the need to overhaul the former operational patterns due to the emergence of a neo-totalitarian regime in Russia. The unprecedented repression and the Kremlin's policy of self-isolation from the West have resulted in growing difficulty in attempts to reach Russian society with reliable information. Moreover, Western support for civil society organisations in Russia is now effectively illegal. Russia has recognised several German organisations with a long history of cooperation with Russian pro-democracy groups (such as the German-Russian

Exchange – DRA-Austausch and the Heinrich Böll Foundation) as ‘undesirable’. This means that their activities are banned in Russia and that individuals who cooperate with them (both in Russia or abroad) face sentences of several years’ imprisonment. These organisations were forced to officially cease their activities in Russia.

Our interviewees representing German organisations listed their main challenges as follows:

- adjusting their legal, organisational and financial framework to the needs of Russian civil society in exile;
- the coordination of projects targeted at the new Russian diaspora in various host countries;
- finding effective and safe methods of providing support to groups which continue to reside in Russia (this task is viewed as the most difficult).

A large portion of Russian political emigrants (mostly those who were actively involved in political and civil society activism at home) join Russian civil society organisations operating in Germany. Although the number of Russian entities and initiatives which are currently active in Germany is significant, many of them operate on a limited scale and rely on informal networked cooperation mechanisms. The degree of integration between the emigrant groups varies. The newcomers often remain in contact, for example in order to help each other to solve the most common problems regarding relocation. Numerous well-organised and more permanent cooperation formats focused on specific issues have emerged (concerning relocation assistance, devising strategies of how the independent media outlets should operate etc.).

The ‘institutional landscape’ of Russian political emigrants in Germany, united by the common anti-war agenda, includes both organisations established by representatives of previous waves of emigration (the Dekabristen organisation, the Russian-language section of the German Deutsche Welle broadcasting company, the Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom and the PANDA culture and education initiative) and those which relocated from Russia in recent years, and also new initiatives involved in anti-war activities. The latter include Demokrati-JA, the Feminist Anti-War Resistance, InTransit (which offers relocation assistance) and various media initiatives targeting the Russian-based audience. The Russian-language ‘Bild in Russian’ project with more than 200,000 subscribers on YouTube is one of these initiatives. It should be

noted that, unlike the German-language tabloid newspaper under the same title, the Russian-language content is of a high quality.

Moreover, over a dozen anti-war initiatives and groups have been established in Germany. They operate in Berlin, North Rhine-Westphalia, Munich, Frankfurt am Main and other cities.

The following organisations which operate in Germany and support independent Russian media outlets are worth mentioning: the Berlin Incubator for Media in Exile (BIMEX), the Network for Reporting on Eastern Europe (n-ost) and Media in Cooperation and Transition (MiCT). Important fields of their work include: organising training about Germany's legal system, optimising how the media outlets operate and the funding model in exile, cooperation with German organisations, the preparation of grant applications, crowdfunding, marketing, advertising and cyber security activities etc. One of the new initiatives carried out by n-ost involves providing training on the de-colonisation of the language used in the media (also in the context of Russia) so as to avoid spreading clichés and ideas linked with colonial-imperial domination.

In October 2022, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock and Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media Claudia Roth launched the Hannah Arendt Initiative. It offers assistance to independent journalists who are affected by political persecution. Its activities also include providing support to reporters working in conflict and crisis areas and to those who have been forced to flee to Germany. Its priority target group includes journalists from Afghanistan, Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. Another noteworthy and relatively new initiative is the JX Fund, an NGO that supports journalism in exile; it was established in April 2022 in Berlin by Reporters Without Borders and other organisations. In autumn 2022, in cooperation with the Centre for Media Studies at the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga and the London-based The Fix Media, the JX Fund published a report on Russian independent media outlets in exile (*Rebuilding Russian Media in Exile: Successes, Challenges and the Road Ahead*). It contains an analysis of the challenges and needs, as well as recommendations regarding the most desired forms of support.⁵

Furthermore, numerous international organisations with many years of experience in supporting Russian civil society operate in Germany, such as the Free Russia Foundation and the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum.

⁵ See *Rebuilding Russian Media in Exile: Successes, Challenges and the Road Ahead*, JX Fund – European Fund for Journalism in Exile, Berlin, November 2022, jx-fund.org.

As the first months of 2023 have demonstrated, Russian activists and journalists continue to leave Russia for Germany (sometimes this involves relocation to Germany after several months spent in third countries, including Poland). This means that Germany has become one of the main centres of Russian political emigration (alongside Lithuania and a few others). This process is facilitated by the local institutional environment, the cross-party political consensus and the considerable financial resources allocated by the state and NGOs to support initiatives geared towards Russian civil society. This may significantly boost Berlin's voice in the European debate on the future of Russia and EU-Russia relations in the post-Putin era.

III. RUSSIAN CIVIL SOCIETY IN EXILE: MAIN FIELDS OF ACTIVITY

Russian political emigrants in Germany focus on three key fields of activity (see below) and their common ideological platform is their anti-war stance. This is manifested in a number of ways: from street picket lines organised abroad (usually attended by a handful of protestors), through larger street protests, boosting anti-war attitudes among Russian social media users, information campaigns on the Russian military's crimes in Ukraine and the domestic political consequences of the war for Russia, to providing assistance to Ukraine.

Firstly, the activity of these groups of emigrants mainly includes ad-hoc initiatives aimed at the needs of the new diaspora and individuals forced to leave Russia. They are intended to save more activists from repression (through evacuation, assistance in obtaining entry visas issued by the host countries and other travel documents) and to organise their stay abroad.

Secondly, most emigrant groups are in one way or another involved in providing help to Ukrainian refugees residing in their host countries, to Ukrainians who have been forcibly deported to Russia (this includes their evacuation from Russia) and to those fighting in Ukraine.

Thirdly, numerous activities are intended to support the continuation and development of political and civic activism focused on Russia. Their authors intend to at least maintain the potential built up over the years they spent working in Russia. Their aim is to organise the support base for Russia's democratisation in the future.

These activities include in particular:

- the reconstruction in host countries of the civil society networks built in Russia; fundraising, legalising the work of Russian organisations abroad, organising the human resource base, including volunteer groups;
- seeking coordination and synergy between the existing and the newly established projects, initiatives and organisations; networking, exchanging know-how (including in the field of cyber security), joint project planning;
- organising the work of independent media outlets, seeking effective methods of reaching the Russian audience;

- maintaining contacts with activists and journalists based in Russia in order to obtain the most recent information on Russia's domestic political situation and public sentiment, and to carry out joint projects;
- human rights defence (supporting lawyers and human rights defenders residing in Russia, providing legal aid for those accused in political trials, publicising instances of human rights abuses in Russia);
- building expertise on Western solutions in the field of grassroots democracy, self-government, electoral systems and efficient public administration, and the popularisation of respective ideas among Russian audiences.

IV. MAIN PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

The analysis of the situation of Russian political emigrants in Germany has revealed a number of problems and challenges common to Russian émigré groups. Although some of these could be remedied if Western actors devise an efficient support policy aimed at these groups, the remaining ones will be difficult to overcome.

In the most recent wave of emigration, in particular following the outbreak of full-scale war, many people left Russia in an unplanned and chaotic manner. Some left without money to support themselves in a foreign country or with just small savings. The situation was further aggravated when sanctions were imposed on financial transactions involving residents of the Russian Federation and using payment cards issued in Russia. For emigrants arriving in countries outside the so-called post-Soviet area, the language barrier may be another problem. Stress linked with forced emigration and concern about the safety of their loved ones who remained in Russia is often combined with trauma caused by political repression. Such people usually need psychological counselling. All of these factors undermine the prospects for rebuilding Russian civil society organisations in exile even though some of the problems can be dealt with over time.

The most frequent problems and challenges reported by the interviewees in the context of the organisation of their political and civil society activism are as follows:

a) Scarce funding

A significant proportion of emigrants prefer to continue their political and civic activism abroad (or to combine it with additional paid work) regardless of whether they are able to find employment on the local labour market. Although most of the emigrants do not hold out hope for an imminent political change in Russia, they declare their willingness to maintain ties with their home country, to facilitate Russian society's empowerment and to return to their homeland once the situation improves.

This type of activity involves efforts to obtain funding in the form of grants, through crowdfunding or the monetisation of online media content. At present, the latter two options are being hampered by:

- restrictions imposed on financial transactions between Russia and the EU;

- the Russian authorities opening criminal cases (or using other methods of persecution with similar effect) against Russian citizens who support civil society organisations;
- Russian society's increasing pauperisation;
- IT companies imposing restrictions on Russians regarding the monetisation of online content.

As a consequence, grants will remain the most stable and thus the most desirable source of funding even if it will not be the main one. However, in this context two problems are worth noting. Firstly, some activists are calling for greater independence from Western grant-providers. They point to practical reasons (the need for greater flexibility in planning their work) and to image-related issues (they intend to avoid being labelled as 'grant-eaters' and to boost their credibility in the eyes of the Russian public).

Secondly, due to the deteriorating domestic political situation in Russia and the expected surge in political emigration in the coming years, a significant increase in competition for funding from the EU and member states' national budgets for projects focused on Russia may be expected. This is particularly important in the context of Ukraine's growing needs (which are widely viewed as a priority). Therefore, the absence of alternative sources of funding may, in the short- or mid-term perspective, result in the shutdown of many small, worthwhile projects and organisations which will be unable to switch to a commercial model of operation.

Consolidation spurred on by financial difficulties will likely affect the media, especially given that multiple media outlets often target similar audiences. So far, no complex in-depth research on the size and diversity of Russia's permanent anti-regime audiences has been carried out. The number of the most active users of the independent media outlets (for example those who interact with other users) is estimated to be at least several million people. The most optimistic (albeit difficult to verify) estimates indicate that up to 25-30% of Russia's adult population regularly access independent sources of information. It is difficult to estimate the size of the likely bigger group of 'occasional' users.

In this context, the need for the broader Russian diaspora to offer greater financial commitment to support the media and NGOs is increasingly apparent. This also includes the representatives of previous waves of emigration and Russian private businesses abroad.

Due to problems with securing sufficient funding, activism frequently relies on volunteering. However, volunteers are unable to devote a sufficient amount of time and energy to full-time involvement in civil society activism. In the short term, this causes activists to focus on the most urgent and immediate issues, in particular those which consume the most time and energy, like organising the relocation of repressed individuals from Russia, involvement in support initiatives for Ukraine, and providing assistance to Ukrainian refugees. As a consequence, they have too little time and insufficient resources to deal with strategic projects and to devise plans for the long-term development and institutionalisation of their core activities. This situation was frequently cited as one of the reasons behind the low visibility of Russian anti-war protests in host countries – something that emigrants are regularly (and often unfairly) criticised for. However, to refute these accusations the activists usually reply as follows: “we focus on practical activities and on providing urgent help to Russians and Ukrainians in need”; “street protests do not make much sense, we prefer to concentrate on more pragmatic and productive activities”.

In the longer term, permanent underfunding and a feeling of instability will most likely result in emigrants shifting to other types of activity which offer a stable livelihood. This will significantly weaken their potential for maintaining their links with Russia, returning there one day and supporting Russia’s future transformation. From the point of view of Western strategic interests, this prospect is unfavourable. On the other hand, undeniably, from the perspective of the host countries, the presence of high-quality Russian human capital can be viewed as a major economic benefit.

b) Other organisational problems and challenges

The most demanding organisational challenges recorded at an early stage of development of Russian civil society in exile include:

- finding ways to maintain contacts with civil society representatives in Russia and organising channels of assistance offered to them should Russia become increasingly (self-)isolated and see mounting repression;
- devising methods to effectively influence Russian society’s attitudes and sentiment amid wartime censorship and the mass indoctrination of the public (this challenge is viewed as one of the most important ones). Although following their relocation the independent media outlets do regain their audiences (this was confirmed by all interviewees), maintaining a stable

increase in the number of viewers/listeners and efforts to go beyond the 'liberal-democratic bubble' are a major problem;

- efforts to adjust the forms of activity and the organisational models in exile to the conditions offered by the host countries without abandoning the priorities which result from the focus on Russia;
- building channels of dialogue between Russian political emigrants and political and expert communities in the host countries.

c) Internal divisions

Severe conflicts between democratic opposition groups in exile and civil society representatives are not uncommon. Activists do not usually perceive politicians as representatives of their interests, visions and values. They complain about being neglected or instrumentalised by the opposition. Moreover, they point to the fact that the opposition organisations are managed in a hierarchical fashion, the politicians are unable to engage in dialogue, show egotism and have a conservative outlook on life (for example they are insensitive to the needs of disadvantaged groups such as women and national minorities). In turn, the opposition has repeatedly criticised civil society activists for insufficient determination to fight the regime and for ostentatiously apolitical attitudes that lead to deep distrust towards all types of leadership and structures in favour of strictly "anarchic", horizontal networks. Although some visible progress has recently been made to overcome these divisions, cooperation between members of the opposition and activists is still mainly based on their personal ties and mutual trust, while regular systemic contacts are underdeveloped.

Alongside this, divisions between civic activist groups have been recorded, including between different generations of activists, although what they do share a strong anti-war stance. Disputes and conflicts sometimes emerge already at the level of language and priorities. Activists from younger generations (who are often the most dynamic promoters of new initiatives in exile) tend to pay much greater attention to issues such as feminism, anti-imperialism and the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. They refer to these topics using terminology which takes into account the sensitivities of the disadvantaged groups, including non-ethnic Russians living in the Russian Federation (national minorities, non-Russian ethnic groups, indigenous people).

d) Geographic fragmentation of the Russian political diaspora

Due to their geographic fragmentation, different parts of respective teams, including the editorial teams of independent media outlets, operate in various legal and cultural environments and often choose to operate as different kinds of legal entities. Sometimes this considerably hampers the organisation of work and the development of uniform strategies for communicating with the audiences. Media outlets usually operate in two or three locations. In addition, they are affected by uncertainty resulting from the local communities' negative attitude towards Russia. When the Russian online TV Rain channel was stripped of its broadcasting licence in Latvia in December 2022 (it later relocated to the Netherlands), serious concern emerged among the remaining independent media outlets in exile. However, as already mentioned, Germany's policy in this field is perceived as reliable.

e) The activists' reluctance towards centralised cooperation and hierarchies

This attitude has often hampered the coordination of initiatives and made it more difficult to speak with one voice. The emigrants are increasingly aware that it is necessary to boost the degree of coordination and implement specific solutions to achieve this goal. However, they will likely continue to rely solely on horizontal networks. Examples of successful cooperation include the activity of feminist groups or those involved in the relocation of political emigrants.

December 2022 saw the first serious attempt to integrate and consolidate Russian civil society in exile. The Anti-war Initiatives Congress held in Berlin on 3–4 December gathered almost 300 representatives of 170 initiatives and organisations operating in 25 countries. This was the broadest representation of anti-war civil society groups to date, both in terms of their activity profile and generational and ethnic-national cross-section. The event brought together human rights defenders, feminist movements, civic education initiatives, historical memory projects, environmental protection groups, the LGBTQ+ community, relocation initiatives and independent media outlets. Many young people attended the congress, as well as activists representing the titular nations of Chechnya, Buryatia, Tuva, Kalmykia and Sakha. One of the meeting's purposes was to launch work on devising a relatively durable horizontal network to improve communication and cooperation and to boost the visibility of these initiatives both in Russia and abroad. The congress's

first measurable effects include improved methods of using the available resources and increased efficiency of work owing to broader contacts, the exchange of information and experience, and sharing best practices. In addition, the [mapofpeace.org](https://www.mapofpeace.org) website was launched to spread information on cooperation between Russian-language anti-war initiatives across the world (as of May 2023 it lists a total of 144 organisations).

It is an open question whether the new organisational structure will succeed in playing an important role not only among the Russian diaspora but also at the international level, and to become a recognised participant in debates on the West's policy towards Putin's Russia.

f) Expected difficulties with legalising the long-term emigrants' stay in Germany

The increasingly long stay of Russian political emigrants in Germany and other countries will require the prolongation of their identity documents issued in Russia. Many emigrants (in particular those against whom criminal cases have been opened) will not only be afraid to travel home to renew their documents but also to visit a local Russian consulate. This problem will undoubtedly require a systemic solution. Emigrant communities have started a debate on the need to introduce a 'Nansen passport 2.0' modelled on 20th-century Nansen passports which were issued in the interwar period to refugees and stateless persons by the authorities of their host countries.

V. THE POLITICAL POTENTIAL OF THE RUSSIAN EXILED COMMUNITIES

The vast majority of those who left Russia as victims of political persecution declare their intention to continue their previous activities in exile and to become involved in the activity of the émigré civil society organisations. This is the first such politically engaged wave of emigration in Russia's history. Moreover, a significant number of activists have expressed their desire to return to Russia one day. Nonetheless, few believe that this will be possible in the foreseeable future. Unlike those who chose to emigrate because of the general political situation, individuals fleeing Russia as victims of political persecution will only return home if political transformation happens and they no longer fear for their safety.

The four most politically important lines of activity of Russian civil society in exile are:

- providing help to victims of political repression in Russia (including human rights defenders and independent lawyers);
- boosting the activity of independent media outlets, winning new audiences in Russia (and among members of the new wave of Russian emigration) – the purpose of this is to facilitate the transformation of the Russian public's views and attitudes;
- expanding civil society organisations in exile, exploring Western models of grassroots democracy and democratic institution-building;
- promoting the visibility of the 'other Russia' (anti-regime groups) in host countries, lobbying in favour of a tougher stance towards the Putin regime.

However, the process of achieving these goals will likely run into numerous obstacles linked to the rifts within the émigré groups, the domestic political situation in Russia and the political interests of Western decision-makers.

a) Challenges and risks

The political emigration will continue to be affected by the consequences of its deep internal divisions for a long time to come. No single group can effectively claim to represent this 'other Russia' and shape a credible narrative shared by the majority of political emigrants.

Furthermore, it should be expected that the growing political diaspora will come under the scrutiny of the Russian secret services. They will attempt to stoke discord, seek to ridicule selected individuals or groups, and intimidate the exiled communities, including through physical attacks or murders targeting the leading figures.

It is obvious that when emigrants permanently reside abroad, their ties with their home country gradually fade and they lose their former status and authority in the eyes of local communities in Russia. Moreover, they have increasing difficulties with communicating with Russian society as a whole, especially during mounting censorship and mass-scale war propaganda.

So far, independent media outlets in exile have managed to regain their former reach in Russia which had existed prior to March 2022 (when wartime censorship was introduced). However, one of the important challenges they currently face as the main channel of civil society's communication with the residents of Russia is moving beyond the 'liberal-democratic bubble' which gathers individuals who have strong democratic and anti-regime views.

The absence of reliable tools to assess public sentiment in a neo-totalitarian system is a major impediment to devising an effective communication strategy. Sociological research has revealed a relatively high level of declared support for or passive acceptance of the Kremlin's policy, which can be viewed as an expression of resignation and a sense of helplessness. At the same time, no significant change has been recorded in this sentiment despite the prolonged war, the significant losses suffered by the Russian military and the growing conviction that the 'special military operation' is not going according to plan. A large portion of the Russian public is distancing itself from war-related issues, and even more so from active forms of anti-war protest. This attitude results from both fear of repression and, to an even greater degree, from the feeling of being unable to influence the situation. Moreover, people focus on their everyday problems, including the increasingly difficult financial situation. In the case of most Russians, this sentiment is seen, for example, in their unwillingness to seek information in the independent media on a daily basis. In addition, the authorities have attempted to instil the belief in people's minds that there is a powerful 'pro-Putin majority' which unambiguously supports the government's policies. Many individuals choose an 'internal emigration' in an attempt to wait out the difficult times. According to surveys carried out by the Levada Center, an independent polling and sociological research institution, state-controlled television remains the main source of information

for almost two thirds of Russians, while a much smaller group of citizens relies on the internet and social media networks. It should be noted though that social media networks (such as Telegram) are frequently dominated by pro-Kremlin channels.

Continuing support for activists, journalists and human rights defenders who remain in Russia is another challenge. Their field of activity has gradually diminished due to increasing repression and the Kremlin-orchestrated smear campaign targeting the ‘enemies of the people’. Any form of cooperation with foreign entities (or Russian actors operating abroad) can now be considered illegal. At the same time, maintaining contacts with civil society organisations in Russia is essential for the emigrants if they want to avoid losing touch with Russia’s domestic political situation. New forms of activity are currently being developed: they are dispersed, horizontal and networked, as this makes them a more difficult target for the repressive apparatus. However, it cannot be ruled out that in the near future help for the repressed will amount to no more than monitoring and documenting instances of human rights violations. This will be intended to create effective international instruments which could be used in the future to punish the perpetrators and compensate the victims of persecution for their suffering (similar efforts were made by Soviet-era dissidents).

Since no political transformation in Russia is likely in the foreseeable future, the emigrants’ activity cannot take the form of a ‘roadmap’ outlining specific goals and the time-frame for achieving them. Assessing the expected short- and long-term results of support offered by Western donors will be even more difficult. As the cost of aid to Ukraine increases and the Russian public continues to be passive in the face of the war, the question will be raised increasingly often about the sense of long-term support for groups that cannot have a direct impact on domestic political changes in Russia.

Germany’s example shows that Russian political emigrants rarely integrate into the societies of their host countries in a way which would enable them to effectively reach the wider local public with their message about Russia. This results in part from the fact that (on average) their period of residence in the host country is relatively short and that they are not fluent in the local language. Other reasons include their focus on purely Russian issues and the fact that their activities are aimed at a Russian audience and diaspora groups.

As a consequence, and because of the vested interests of Western decision-makers, Russian civil society may likely fall prey to the West's misguided conciliatory policy towards the Kremlin (especially if this involves seeking peace or a ceasefire at all costs, which will only strengthen the Russian autocratic regime both at home and abroad). Such an approach would undermine the emigrants' efforts and lead to an insignificant return on all the financial assistance they manage to receive. This, in turn, will only boost the narrative that 'Russia cannot be changed'.

The attitude of Chancellor Olaf Scholz and the older generation of the SPD party members towards Russia is a separate problem. Although in Germany the level of public support for helping Ukraine is close to the EU average (73%)⁶ and the German government has declared that it rules out any return to the pre-war conciliatory policy towards the Kremlin, numerous statements from high-ranking SPD representatives indicate a certain degree of readiness to resume 'dialogue' with Russia once an opportunity arises to freeze the conflict in Ukraine. This will jeopardise European security and the victims of this approach will include not only Ukraine but also Russian political emigrants and democratic groups in Russia as this will mean there will be no favourable political 'climate' in Germany for boosting the support for Russian civil society against the Kremlin's will.

b) Opportunities

Due to their networks of contacts and their knowledge of practical concerns in Russia, activists in exile will continue to serve both as an important source of knowledge for Western experts and policymakers regarding the situation in Russia and as a significant link between Western donors and activists operating in the Russian Federation. Channels of support (including financial support) will remain open as long as the tools to bypass state censorship continue to be improved and the Russian authorities choose not to close the state borders (this move seems unlikely because the government prefers to see the dissidents leave the country rather than form a potential base for mass-scale protest). Another important goal will be to enable Russians to communicate freely outside Russia. Focus should be placed on those countries which Russian citizens are allowed to enter without a visa or on the basis of their identity card: Turkey, the countries of the South Caucasus and, to a lesser degree, Central Asia (where security risks must be taken into account).

⁶ 'EP Autumn 2022 Survey: Parlemeter', Eurobarometer, europa.eu/eurobarometer.

Although the reach of the independent media in Russia is limited, in situations which generate a sense of threat (such as the ‘partial military mobilisation’ announced in September 2022), all independent media outlets tend to record a major increase in the number of viewers and listeners (which then drops as the public gets used to the new situation). The quality of independent Russian journalism, including investigative journalism is very high. Despite censorship, small online media outlets and social media channels continue to operate in Russia and target their content at the residents of the Russian regions. Together with the high probability that over time Russia’s setbacks on the front will likely increase, all these factors may result in a gradual rise in the number of consumers of independent media outlets. This, in turn, will create a genuine opportunity to successively dismantle the pillars of the Putin regime; these include the absence of a political alternative and the artificially created belief that Russian society relies on an active, overwhelming pro-Putin majority.

The Russian diaspora, mainly the representatives of the new wave of the politically-motivated emigration that left Russia in 2022, is another important audience for Russian independent media outlets and activists. Many of these individuals are young, are often well-educated, and most of them intend to maintain their ties with Russia.⁷ This audience is valuable for two reasons: firstly, they are interested in Russian affairs, and secondly, they are ready to become actively involved in various initiatives. This, in turn, suggests that they are capable of mediating between civil society in exile and the society at home.

Although civil society groups in exile will not play a decisive part in either a potential political transformation or the power games in post-Putin Russia (it is unlikely that the future leaders with authority in Russian society will hail from the émigré communities), they may form an important support base for these processes. They will have unique knowledge of Western solutions regarding grassroots democracy, the organisation of local self-government, free elections and an efficient state administration. Furthermore, they may be able to practically adapt these solutions to the situation in Russia.

However, before a window of opportunity opens for such a transformation, these groups can play an important part in shaping the policies of EU and NATO member states towards Russia, including in the context of the war in Ukraine.

⁷ N. Kostenko, M. Zavadskaya, E. Kamalov, I. Sergeeva, ‘The Russian rhizome: a social portrait of new immigrants’, RE: Russia, 11 January 2023, re-russia.net.

Both the international public and decision-makers usually equate the Russian state with the autocratic regime that currently rules it, and succumb to harmful myths spread by the Kremlin's propaganda apparatus. One of these describes Russia's inevitable collapse and the destabilisation of its international environment should its authoritarian system be dismantled. The voice of the 'other Russia' can be a source of reliable information about possible scenarios for socio-political developments, taking into account the ethnic, cultural and socio-economic diversity of the country, which is usually disregarded.

Political emigrants can also play a major role in future Russian-Ukrainian relations, regardless of the magnitude of problems and challenges and the current mutual distrust. Many activists abroad focus on anti-war protests and organise help for Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees. There is a widespread belief in these groups that the key way to change Russia is to provide Ukraine with more weapons and, ultimately, help it win the war. Many activists and journalists (including ethnic Russians) are strongly committed to transforming the current discourse about the Russian Federation and its neighbours by debunking imperial, colonial and patriarchal clichés. This suggests that these groups may play a stabilising role in the region in the future.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE COMING YEARS

The strategy for supporting political emigrants should be adapted to how Russian civil society operates in exile: it is fragmented and resides in different host countries, and thus relies on cross-border cooperation to a large degree. This mainly implies that EU member states and institutions will need to demonstrate a high degree of flexibility and a great ability to coordinate their activities. Each host country has gained slightly different experience in working with Russian emigrants. Therefore, they need to more actively communicate and cooperate to avoid the unnecessary overlaps and to identify the strong and weak points of specific assistance programmes to make them more efficient. Another challenge involves defining the EU's role in supporting those activists who reside in third countries such as Georgia, Armenia and Turkey, where coordination of activities with local governments is unlikely or impossible.

The support strategy should be based on two key principles. Firstly, Western donors should be open to new valuable initiatives and young activists. At present, the problem is that for years the same well-known people and groups have been helped. They are recognised in the West, but not necessarily capable of performing the most effective activities. A more objective approach is needed, one focused less on supporting people and organisations and more on specific initiatives and projects. However, it will require an extensive and up-to-date knowledge of the situation in Russia and among groups operating in exile. Secondly, contacts and cooperation between Russian activists and civil societies in their host countries should be boosted, including through the joint implementation of projects (which will additionally increase the Russian activists' expertise in the EU's project management procedures).

The number of currently operating organisations and initiatives founded by Russian emigrants is significant. Therefore, another challenge will be to design Western support (organisational, legal and financial) in such a way as to boost diversity (which is particularly needed in the media) but avoid spreading the limited resources too thinly. It should be expected that support will be needed for a long time and that it will be costly, if it is to generate the expected results (such as high quality media products).

Regardless of the activists' potential and enthusiasm or the effectiveness of Russian civic initiatives, providing help to Ukraine will continue to be the priority for Western actors. At the same time, the available resources will likely

shrink, mainly due to the cost of the war effort and the economic decoupling from Russia that is being borne by European budgets. Russian actors will therefore be forced to compete fiercely with each other by cutting administrative costs and improving the quality of their projects. Some of them, especially the media outlets, will need to gradually reorient to a business-like model of operation (preferably this should happen within the next year or two), which may prove very difficult (for reasons discussed earlier in the text).

It should be expected that a forced partial consolidation of the Russian civic sector will happen over the next few years (although many organisations are sceptical about it, as they distrust hierarchical, centralised models of work) and only some initiatives will survive. The positive consequences of this process will include a more effective pooling of financial resources, reduced overlaps and increased visibility for Russian émigré groups and their activities in their host countries and on the international arena.

Due to the strategic interests of the transatlantic community, it is important to take into account the following demands and needs communicated by the activists as regards Western support:

- the creation of consultation mechanisms involving not only Western public administration officials and selected experts, but also businesses, start-ups, NGOs, media outlets, analysts etc. which are based in the West. This will ensure more comprehensive and better thought out forms of support;
- the simplification of EU entry regulations and residence permits for individuals persecuted by the Putin regime;
- boosting the flexibility of assistance mechanisms. A quick and flexible adjustment of assistance procedures to meet the increasingly difficult conditions in which the activists operate will be necessary. The Russian authorities block the channels through which members of the opposition and activists communicate with Russian society, the censorship and surveillance of internet users are becoming more restrictive and Russia's regulatory environment is unstable;
- increased investment in the dissemination of know-how in the field of NGO project management and in the field of IT (including the improvement of network security and free VPNs for recipients on the territory of the Russian Federation);

- developing unconventional models for content distribution (such as mobile applications, improved technological solutions to circumvent censorship, including via the VPN network) given the problem of reaching audiences due to stepped-up censorship. This requires the constant development of digital tools;
- improving the channels of communication with Russian society and increasing the number of media consumers – this will also require investment in media market research in Russia;
- expanding the scope of assistance to include new categories of journalists. It is necessary to constantly increase audience numbers in Russia and to seek indirect forms of reaching Russian society with anti-war and anti-regime messages. News and investigative journalism need to be supported because their contributions are crucial in the context of gathering information on members of the Russian elite and work on successive sanctions lists. However journalists dealing with ‘non-political’ issues such as culture, science and ecology can play an important part in eroding the societal foundations of Putinism.

Western assistance should also involve efforts to increase the presence and visibility of Russian democratic and anti-war groups in the public space of their host countries. Spreading information about the ‘other Russia’ is of strategic importance as it can help to debunk a myth widespread in many countries that Russian society is a pro-Kremlin monolith and that any strategy towards Russia should, by definition, involve continued attempts at dialogue with the dictatorship. In this context, a lot will depend on the ability which emigrants have to present measurable results of their work to the wider public, to join their efforts and devise a consistent vision of Russia’s future.

CONCLUSIONS

Although Russian civil society abroad is still at an early stage of self-organisation, the first results of its reconstruction in exile can already be seen. While many new initiatives are also emerging, it is unclear how many of them will survive the next few years, especially as competition for support and visibility will be tough, both in Russia and in the host countries. The independent media has coped particularly well with the effects of emigration and has relatively quickly managed to regain the listeners and viewers it had temporarily lost due to relocation. Similarly, the first initiatives to unite the émigré communities have also been launched, although it is too early to assess their effectiveness.

The scale of political emigration from Russia and the increasingly repressive nature of the Putin regime require coordinated Western support for Russian civil society. This support should not only be viewed as humanitarian aid offered to victims of repression, but above all as a strategy fostering the future political transformation in Russia. Since the Kremlin's aggressive, revisionist foreign policy is to a large degree rooted in the logic of the regime's domestic political evolution, the only chance for a lasting stabilisation of Russia's neighbourhood rests in political liberalisation in the post-Putin period. Since the key actions may be taken only by the political elite under pressure from the West, civil society will not have a decisive role in making this happen. Nonetheless, it may serve as an important support base facilitating the process of reforms, including due to the expertise on democratic solutions it will have acquired in the host countries.

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