

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

LIMITATIONS OF ANTI-WAR MESSAGING ORIENTED AT RUSSIANS

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The first six months of the war showed that the Putin regime's system of communication with the loyal to him Russian-speaking public in Russia and around the world was much better prepared for war than many thought.



The Kremlin has been preparing its loyal audience for the war (or something similar) for many years. Its priorities were clear: to fight for the minds of dissenters was less important, whereas all available energy and means were used to maintain control over the loyal audience.



After 2014, Putin has worked in a targeted way only with Western counter-elites including outright fringe figures as well, not so much promoting himself and his ideas (which he simply does not have) as trying to split the Western democracies.

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LIMITATIONS OF ANTI-WAR MESSAGING ORIENTED AT RUSSIANS

Fyodor Krasheninnikov

This paper offers a critical overview of anti-war propaganda in the Russian language during the first six months of the war and identifies the reasons for its limited success. After a review of the challenges to current forms of propaganda, the paper offers practical recommendations to improve the work in this area.

The first six months of the war showed that Putin’s communication system, with his supporters among the Russian-speaking population in Russia and around the world, was much better prepared for the war than many thought. Success in this area becomes even more apparent compared to the regime’s outright failure to communicate with the Ukrainian, Western, and Russian opposition communities. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that Putin’s information policy has failed “on foreign turf,” i.e., in an unfriendly environment where the pro-Kremlin media has intense competition. One should not underestimate that the Kremlin media in Western countries and Ukraine have been physically removed from the airwaves, while global social networks have blocked many pro-Kremlin accounts and continue to do so.

The situation is somewhat different in Russia and partly within the Russian-speaking community: Kremlin propaganda fails only in places where people do not endorse Putin. Presumably, the pictures of war and destruction shown on all channels have alienated some initially sympathetic or neutral-minded people. Nevertheless, we have not yet seen any signs of the Kremlin losing control over its core audience in Russia or in the pro-Putin groups in the global Russian-speaking community.

The Kremlin managed to maintain command over the audience because the latter had been expecting the war (or something similar) for many years. While investing little effort in winning the minds of the opposition, the Kremlin spared no available means and resources to maintain control over its loyal audience.

It seems that this policy was deliberately pursued by Putin, starting from his return to the presidency in 2012. After the mass protests of 2011-2012, he decided to communicate only with those parts of the audience who were either sympathetic to him or at least ready to show their support in a critical situation. Putin’s regime either ignored its opponents in Russia or repressed them, always seeking to discredit any criticism by exposing it as the product of the Western intelligence services.

As for working with foreign audiences, the logic is the same. Putin clearly understands that the current Western elites do not appreciate him, so there is no point in trying to make them like him, as he did in the early years of his presidency. The last attempts to establish contact with Western elites date back to 2013 when Mikhail Khodorkovsky was released from prison, and to the beginning of 2014 as the Sochi Winter Olympics took place. Since 2014, Putin has been working only with Western counter-elites, including outright outsiders, not promoting himself and his ideas (which he does not have) but trying to split Western democracies.

For Ukraine, the situation is similar: Kremlin propaganda and Putin personally, through the articles published under his name, addressed not the entire Ukrainian society, not the nationally minded elites with whom he has nothing to discuss, but those segments of Ukrainian society that were skeptical about the current government, the overall situation in Ukraine, or Ukraine itself as an independent state. Therefore, the arguments and the very vocabulary of the information campaign for Ukraine seem irrelevant, strange, and even foolish

to pro-Ukrainian Ukrainians and all those who look at the situation from their perspective. At the same time, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that in some cases, even Ukrainians who are shelled by the Russian army continue to be exposed to Putin’s propaganda and relay its narratives. The presence of a small but notable percentage of Putin sympathizers is also openly mentioned by Ukrainian officials¹. That is, Putin managed to reach the part of Ukrainian society he initially targeted, even though the scale of his influence and his audience in Ukraine turned out to be significantly smaller than he expected.

For a detailed analysis of how Putin’s system of communication with communities of his supporters operates, see the policy paper “Why does the Kremlin’s propaganda remain effective in wartime?” of the Russian Crisis series.

THE STRUCTURE OF ANTI-WAR PROPAGANDA IN THE RUSSIAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY, ITS SUCCESSES AND LIMITATIONS

Since the beginning of the war, anti-war campaigning in the Russian-speaking community has been carried out by three groups of media and activists on social networks: Ukrainian, Russian opposition immigrants, and those from third countries, primarily from the West.

Successes achieved in this field are obvious. Despite years of anti-Ukrainian propaganda, the influence of Ukrainian media on the Russian-speaking audience has grown since the start of the war, as indirectly confirmed by the ban on the leading Ukrainian news resources from broadcasting in Russia.

Despite the defeat of organized opposition structures in Russia and the almost complete elimination of all independent media, the opposition and anti-war part of Russian society remain in contact with its leaders and continue to receive information from sources alternative to the Kremlin. The anti-war Russian-language media have a stable audience, and in the event of radical changes on the fronts or a sudden collapse of Putin’s regime, they could significantly expand their audience.

As for Western resources, this primarily refers to specific organizations that traditionally work with the Russian-speaking audience, though publications in

the leading Western media are also read by the Russian elites. It is difficult to assess the real audience of the Western media within the Russian-speaking community, but the Russian authorities’ active attempts to block their content indicate that this audience exists.

Nevertheless, the anti-war propaganda in the Russian language cannot be considered successful. Below we examine the three media groups targeted at Russian-speaking audiences and discuss their performance and the challenges they face. From the outset, however, we should discuss a problem common to all of them, which is becoming increasingly evident after six months of hostilities.

In the first weeks of the war, when the fighting had just started, and it became clear that Russia would not be able to capture Ukraine in a few days, the Ukrainian media, and then many others, began to broadcast an optimistic agenda that boiled down to several theses that are repeated to this day: 1) Putin’s war plan has failed, and he has thus already lost the war; 2) Ukrainian troops are well motivated and ready not only to defend Ukraine but to go as far as Moscow; 3) the Russian army is demoralized, poorly trained, poorly armed, constantly retreating and suffering enormous losses; 4) the sanctions imposed against Russia threaten to cripple its economy.

Undoubtedly, this approach was well-suited to mobilize Ukrainians to fight, and it had its effect. However, six months into the war, it is strange to continue broadcasting these narratives: if things are so bad for Russia, why is the war still going on? Why is Russia’s economy not collapsing, as it has repeatedly promised?

It is time for all those who organize, lead, or fund anti-war propaganda to admit that it is time to abandon the inflated and optimistic expectations of the first weeks of the war. The audiences we are working with must be prepared to accept that the war is dragging on and that Putin’s Russia is a severe and well-armed adversary unwilling to give in. Defeating it requires excellent resources, lots of time, and patience.

CHALLENGES TO UKRAINIAN ANTI-WAR PROPAGANDA IN RUSSIAN

As already mentioned, the main achievement of Ukrainian anti-war campaigning is that it managed to gain an audience in Russia and among the global Russian-speaking community. Naturally, the outbreak of war provoked an increased interest in any informa-

¹ <https://skeptik.com.ua/tysiachi-jitelei-severodonecka-i-lisichanska-pomogali-voiskam-rf-sergei-gaidai/>

tion from Ukraine, and Ukrainians were ready and able to use the situation to their advantage, offering some exciting speakers and media projects.

The main problem with the Russian language anti-war propaganda produced by Ukraine is that it is not so much anti-war as pro-Ukrainian, since it primarily addresses Russian-speaking Ukrainians. Its effectiveness for Russian and Russian-speaking audiences, in general, is questionable because a Russian citizen at war is unlikely to trust the propaganda of the “enemy” more than their own. Indeed, some sympathize with Ukraine and consciously want to know what the “enemies” are saying, but they are hardly many. Few people have changed their initial opinion under the influence of Ukrainian media.

The second most important problem of Ukrainian propaganda is its internal inconsistency. Because Ukrainian propaganda in Russian simultaneously addresses both the country defending itself and the aggressor, it contains mutually exclusive theses. On one hand, it calls on Russians to overthrow Putin and support Ukraine, while on the other hand, the Ukrainian media call Russians “slaves by nature” with lousy genetics and dehumanize them in various ways. The same media sources curse the Buryats and other ethnic groups, who serve in the Russian Armed Forces, and, being openly racist, depict them as some beasts while calling on them to overthrow the regime. Putin’s information strategy, on the contrary, shows no disrespect for other ethnic groups in Russia.

In contrast to Putin’s information machine, which has formed numerous information bubbles in advance and now expertly distributes information, Ukraine tends to transmit the same message to everyone. Even if this message can scare away Russian listeners and leads them to believe that they will be better off staying loyal to their country than listening to curses and insults, even if they oppose Putin and the war.

A third serious problem of Ukrainian agitation in Russian aimed at Russians is its low quality induced by the belief of its makers that they are very well aware of the realities and public sentiments in Russia and can speak the same language as them. In reality, life in Russia and Ukraine has long been very different, and Ukrainians’ view of Russia is just about as accurate as Russians’ view of Ukraine. There is also little sensitivity to linguistic differences; one does not need to be a linguist to see that. It seems that Ukrainian journalists and

propagandists do not realize that the words and phrases they use may be perceived somewhat differently by speakers of Russian in Russia. A typical example is the use of swear words in political narratives, which are legal and legitimate in contemporary Ukrainian, which causes confusion and adverse reactions primarily among older people in Russia (who, judging by all polls, are the base of support for Putin and the war).

The homogeneity and intolerance of Ukrainian agitation to any half-tones and transitional positions is also a quality problem. Ukrainian officials and the active part of the Ukrainian audience on social networks demand that Ukrainian speakers and their listeners should approve of any anti-war and anti-Putin rhetoric. Any deviation from the harshest possible rhetoric against Putin or Russia is interpreted almost as collaboration with the enemy.

Perhaps, inside a country at war, such an approach makes sense. Nevertheless, the attempt to impose such rhetoric as a general norm creates additional problems working with the Russian audience. This language is useless if we want to make Putin’s supporters change their minds. Moreover, it can produce the opposite consolidating effect. At the same time, any attempt to alter or soften the tone or find common ground, even among Putin’s passive and doubting supporters, is blocked and puts those who use it in trouble.

The diversification of the audience is dealt with in detail in the policy paper “Why does the Kremlin’s propaganda remain effective in wartime?” of the Russian Crisis series and generally applies to the products of all the media groups discussed.

CHALLENGES TO THE RUSSIAN OPPOSITION MEDIA IN EXILE

Since the crackdown on the opposition and free media in Russia, all anti-Putin and anti-war propaganda has moved abroad. Working from outside Russia makes opposition media less credible given that Putin’s media strategy has always appealed to xenophobia and conspiracy theories. Thus, the émigré media broadcasting from NATO countries has two shortcomings for Putin’s passive supporters: first, all opposition media is biased because it criticizes Putin no matter what he did; second, they broadcast from abroad. In essence, the current situation with the émigré media fits perfectly into the scheme that

Putin’s spin doctors have long offered their audience: the opposition in Russia is simply Western spies and mercenaries who have now fled to their masters and are trying to harm their homeland, which is at war with the West². Why would a good citizen pay any attention to these corrupt media?

The main problem with information produced by the emigrant opposition is that it deliberately “preaches to the choir,” that is, it addresses those who already share the opposition’s views. The audience of all Russian-language opposition resources is one big information bubble of people living in Russia and those who have left it, who are united in their hostility to Putin for a wide range of reasons.

The fact that, amid the defeat of free media and opposition networks, they were able to maintain their audience and even expand it in some segments is an undeniable achievement that should not be dismissed. Obviously, it is important to keep in touch with the opposition-minded part of Russian society through the émigré media, and even if they manage to do so, their mission is already accomplished.

Working with other segments of the Russian audience remains a challenge. To imagine that some Putin supporter accidentally watched one of the programs on the opposition YouTube channel and changed their views is just as strange as assuming that a Muslim who happened to walk into a Catholic church at the end of mass would decide to become a Catholic. Such situations are also possible, but they are the clear exception to the rule. The problem is that a person who is skeptical even critical of the émigré opposition is unlikely to listen to their sermons, no matter how fervent they may be. The arguments they offer to change doubters’ minds can only be useful for conversations with family and friends, but certainly not for changing the minds of Putin’s supporters. Repackaging the same content in new formats while giving the floor to familiar personalities and teams does nothing to broaden the audience, since all of this content is broadcast on channels with obvious political bias and which do not even try to appear neutral or objective.

This situation is all the more unfortunate because polls show that there are far more citizens in Russia who are negative about Putin than there are audiences of all the émigré media. Thus, according to a poll published by the Levada Center on September

1, 16 percent of the Russian population opposed the war³. It would seem that there is room for expansion, especially now, when polls show declining interest in television. For example, according to ROMIR data, federal TV channels have lost an important part of their audience since the war began⁴.

The leaders of opposition groups in exile interpret these facts as complementary to what they are already doing: it is assumed that to attract the attention of a federal audience that has lost interest in federal television, they need to make more informational products similar to or slightly different from what they normally broadcast.

What’s wrong with it? First, if people in Russia are tired of Putin’s war propaganda, this does not mean that they want to listen to any other kind of propaganda. Almost a third of Russians (28 percent) do not follow, or pay very little attention to, news about the war in Ukraine, according to the Levada Center poll mentioned above. With the outbreak of the war, there have been almost no entertainment programs on federal TV channels, which may have caused some of the audience to lose interest in television. Since the management of federal television has already announced the return of entertainment content to the airwaves, part of the audience might return⁵.

Second, the drop in TV viewership did not happen in suddenly but took several months. Moreover, if all the people who stopped watching TV had switched to opposition channels on YouTube, their audience should have grown considerably. However, this does not correspond to the data, particularly the public data on viewership. If we look at the views of all the shows and stories posted on the major opposition resources since the start of the war, we find that both six months ago and now we are talking about several hundred thousand views under each story, with rare peaks of up to 2 million views, typical for the initial period of the war. As the war turned into a routine, the audience tends to stabilize. Thus, the start of the war mobilized the already existing audience of the media resources of Putin’s opponents and consolidated it, but hardly expanded it much.

There is one more point to consider: the overwhelming majority of political activists, journalists, and media outlets that have emigrated share the same

2 <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/07/09/2022/63186b159a794721d42b92c0>

3 <https://www.levada.ru/2022/09/01/konflikt-s-ukrainoj-avgust-2022-goda/?fbclid=IwAR1izVoU5LH6EISByHexMwyp8O6vVDUzONRjucWID-2GmzarMiz5085135HE>

4 <https://romir.ru/studies/kak-izmenilos-mediapotreblenie-rossiyan-c-fevralya-2022>

5 <https://www.m24.ru/news/obshchestvo/02092022/497347>

political stance, which can be provisionally described as radically pro-Western and liberal. In addition, the emigrant media and social networks overrepresent libertarians and other political groups that have no significant influence in Russia.

Thus, Russian opposition media abroad are geared to satisfy the demands of their longstanding audiences, which have never been mainstream in Russia, and won't become mainstream now, during the war or the dictatorship, or even after the fall of Putin. At the same time, many of the ideologies sought by Russians are not represented in the émigré media. At the same time, any deviation from radical oppositional and pro-Ukrainian views is branded by colleagues (or by vigilant Ukrainian observers) as pandering to Putinism. Meanwhile, it is unclear how a person who has only begun to doubt Putin and his policies can immediately switch to radical positions, bypassing all transitional ones. Unfortunately, the opposition media and political groups in exile are not even trying to offer any transitional points of view.

The problems described above are aggravated by the fact that since the beginning of the war, the opposition in exile has not invented any anti-war position to unite Russian citizens, who are not ready to give up their country, flag, or sense of patriotism. The opposition media have been offering their audiences Ukrainian narratives, Ukrainian speakers, Ukrainian news, and Ukrainian or pro-Ukrainian symbols, all uncritically. Therefore, everything that was said about the Ukrainian information policy also applies to the emigrant opposition media policy. Russian opposition media policy does not compensate for the problems that Ukrainian broadcasting has, but reproduces and amplifies them.

It would seem that the goal of opposition and emigrant anti-war propaganda is clear: to make the listener an opponent of the war, not a supporter of Ukraine or a Ukrainian. The goal of anti-Putin opposition propaganda is also clear: to make one an opponent of Putin and his regime, rather than a supporter of Zelensky, Ukraine, and the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Unfortunately, much of the content produced by the Russian opposition media makes an impression that they are trying to convert their audience into Ukrainians and intend to engage in political activity in Ukraine rather than Russia in the future. In many cases, it seems that the content created by emigrants is not intended for Russia at all, but was created to please Ukrainians or the foundations that sponsor the Russian opposition.

Common sense suggests that there are many more Russians who are ready to oppose the war and Putin or at least to stop supporting what is happening than those who are ready to welcome all kinds of punishment for themselves and their country, its humiliation, and the forced dismemberment widely discussed in the Ukrainian and émigré media. One can be disappointed in Putin and his policies, but does one have to become a liberal, admire Ukraine, accept all the values of modern Western civilization, and publicly rejoice in the deaths of Russian soldiers, even if they are following criminal orders, at the same time? This kind of maximalism is advantageous within the emigrant and anti-Putin community in Russia, but it is counterproductive when broadcast to unprepared audiences.

The objectives of the exiled opposition are clear: should the Putin regime collapse, the opposition would capture the public opinion and lead the protests. Part of the problem is that at the beginning of the war the opposition expected the regime to collapse any minute and the tone of their broadcasts was triumphant. This appealed to the audience and it increased for the time being. Six months later, however, it is clear that the collapse has not happened, and many of the forecasts made in the spring were not justified, which discredits both the media and the speakers.

In essence, the information strategy of the opposition media in exile needs to find a solution. All that the existing media (as well as those newly created in the current paradigm) can do is to hold the attention of the audiences they already have, competing with each other. Retaining attention is an important task, but to reach new audiences, new ideas, new broadcast concepts, new faces, and new media are called for.

CHALLENGES TO WESTERN ANTI-WAR PROPAGANDA

It is possible that the Western media even now have more opportunities to influence the opinions of Russians. Their authority in Russia is higher than that of the Ukrainian and émigré media, and their position is clear — they express the opinion of people and governments in the West. Even extreme xenophobes and chauvinists in Russia are interested in the opinion of Western media, which is not the case with the products of the opposition and Ukrainians. This is true for the Russian-language products of DW, BBC, “Voice of America” and other specialized broadcasters, as well as for the publications in influential foreign media, which are closely scrutinized by the Russian elites.

Nevertheless, the Western media also most often broadcast the Ukrainian position, which raises doubts about their objectivity and undermines credibility. Those western media outlets that work or want to work effectively with Russian audiences should transmit to them not from Ukrainian positions, and not even from the positions of Russian political emigration, but from their own.

This is especially true of German media, taking into account the complicated relationship of the Ukrainian elite with the German leadership. Surprisingly, it turns out that the position of the EU in the representation of the Russian-speaking public is what Zelensky and other Ukrainian politicians propose to the EU, as well as the position of politicians of the Baltic States, Poland, and Scandinavia. Yet, the position of Germany and other Western European countries can and should be relayed to the Russian audience more thoroughly and explicitly. Moreover, it should be the West, not Ukrainian politicians who speak to the Russian-speaking audience on behalf of the West.

The Western media has at least one opportunity that the Ukrainian and immigrant media do not have: broadcasting on behalf of the elites and citizens of their countries, they can promise Russian citizens a return to normal life and the family of European nations – after getting rid of Putin’s regime. The heavier the burden of war in Russia, the more important it will be to tell Russians that all their difficulties are due to the criminal regime and that after its fall they will quickly return to normal life. Perhaps we should discuss not only the normalization of visa policy and the lifting of sanctions but also the prospects of a “Marshall Plan” for post-Putin Russia.

It seems that Germany, having overcome Nazi and Soviet dictatorships, can become the country extending a hand to the people of Russia in hard times and thus taking an important place in its post-Putin future.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE CHALLENGES TO ANTI-WAR PROPAGANDA

1. It is possible to fight Putin’s information machine only by targeting different groups of Russians and finding the keys to each of them (see the policy paper “Why does the Kremlin’s propaganda remain effective in wartime?” of the Russian Crisis series).
2. It is necessary to develop and popularize in-between ideological positions that could consolidate people lacking confidence in Putin. Therefore, it is necessary to encourage all forms of criticism of the war and Putin’s regime, which means retreating from pleasant and comfortable positions, and taking controversial ones (for example, right-conservative, extreme leftist, or even nationalist).
3. Putin’s propaganda has been preparing its audience for this war for at least eight years, and it is naive to believe that it can be split and changed in a few months. It requires well-directed and thorough work and a strategy for years to come.
4. It is impossible to work effectively with the Russian audience in the language of Ukrainian propaganda. Ukrainian propaganda, even within Ukrainian society, cannot completely block the impact of Putin’s propaganda, and it is even more strange to expect that it will be able to change anything in Russia. We need to find language and narratives appropriate for the Russian audience and not be afraid if they do not satisfy Ukrainians.
5. The Russian opposition media in exile can retain their existing audience, but judging by the drop in views on the leading YouTube channels compared to the start of the war, one should hardly expect an increase in their attendance (at least, not without additional external reasons).
6. Western media outlets could be more effective in reaching Russian audiences.

NEW APPROACHES PROPOSED

1. **Segmenting the audience.** It seems effective to create niche products that deliberately target different segments of Russian society and explain to them the perniciousness of the current situation in a language they understand. For example, for Russian citizens who are nostalgic for the USSR, you could create products in which elderly speakers lament the fact that Putin is destroying the USSR’s legacy, making it impossible to even theoretically revive it. For nationalists, you should make products that focus on how Putin is destroying the Russian nation, depriving it of its future, and helping Russophobes who are trying to eliminate everything Russian (see the policy paper “Why does the Kremlin’s propaganda remain effective in wartime?” of the Russian Crisis series).

2. **New leaders and new formats.** It is necessary to constantly look for new speakers and new formats. Real and imaginary opposition leaders and opposition journalists have long ago reached the limits of their audiences. It is hardly worth waiting for their audience to suddenly expand after six months of work at their peak capacity.
3. **New anti-war positions.** It is necessary to articulate a set of moral and ideological anti-war and anti-Putin ideological positions, which, would not demand that Russians betray their country, but rather make them feel like true patriots and honest human beings. And having adopted them, the audience should receive information that would support them in these positions and lead them away from Putinism, rather than push them back (examples of positions: “I am against the war because I am a patriot of Russia!”, “I am against the war because I am a Communist-Leninist!”, “I am against the war because you cannot go to war with your fellow Slavs!”, etc.).
4. **Increase the level of empathy in campaign.** If we want to arouse sympathy among people in Russia, to attract them to what we say, we must pity them, and find excuses for their weakness and cowardice, rather than calling them names and castigating them. These people are not going anywhere, we will have to build a new country with them later, and it makes no sense to quarrel with them. Narratives that will help people survive the collapse of Putin’s regime and their normal lives must already be developed and disseminated.
5. **Separation.** It would be helpful to distinguish between pro-Ukrainian and anti-war rhetoric in the media aimed at the Russian audience and to minimize the presence of Ukrainian speakers, especially those expressing harsh opinions about Russia and its citizens in other resources. It is necessary to handle the Russian audience, systematically exposed to chauvinism in recent years, more subtly if the goal is to get some positive response.
6. **Recommendations for the Western Russian-language media.** Western media can significantly expand their audiences in Russia if they address Russians on behalf of their nations and governments rather than transmitting Ukrainian messages. Russians need to see that the West is ready to welcome them back after getting rid of Putin, and it should be done by Europeans themselves, not Ukrainians or the Russian opposition politicians, journalists, and experts. We could recommend creating specialized divisions within the existing Western media in Russian, but with a looser editorial policy to solve the problem of the lack of new voices from various émigré groups. A relatively good example is the creation of the “Current Time” project on the Radio Svoboda platform, which, for all its flaws, looks more attractive than Svoboda itself. Perhaps we should return to the idea of creating a pan-European Russian-language broadcaster that could work around the clock and compete with Russian state TV in all formats (not only the news but also entertainment) while tapping into recent technologies. However, it is crucial to consider the above considerations so as not to repeat the same mistakes.

NB.

The text was last revised on 14 September 2022. The work does not include an analysis of the situation after the start of the partial mobilization and subsequent events.

ABOUT THE SERIES

The Russian Crisis is a series of policy papers focusing on the implications of the serious crises conditioned by the events in and around present-day Russia. While the Russian full-scale invasion of sovereign Ukraine in 2022 has provoked a massive military crisis, it points to even broader challenges. Russia creates crises because it entered a crisis state itself and became the focal point of several global crises. This series provides inputs to understanding the situation within Russia and situates it in a larger political context. The aim of the papers is to chart grounded strategies of crisis management and resolution, providing policymakers with insights on Russian politics and ways for thinking ahead.

The series editor is Greg Yudin. He is a political theorist and sociologist, affiliated with multiple academic institutions in Russia and the United States. He has contributed to the theorization of Russian politics within the current global trends, conducted fieldwork in Russia and beyond, engaged in methodological debates on studying and reading Russian society. He is active as academic researcher, author of commissioned reports and policy papers, and is a contributor to major media in Russia and abroad.

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Fyodor Krasheninnikov is a Russian opposition political analyst, commentator and publicist. He is the author of books, articles, policy briefs, and a regular commentator in the Russian-language media. He specializes in the topics of Russian federal and regional politics, development of modern media and their use in the Russian propaganda. Fyodor was persecuted in Russia and was forced to leave the country in 2020. Since then, he lives in Vilnius, Lithuania. In 2022, the Russian Ministry of Justice recognized Fyodor Krasheninnikov as a «foreign agent.»

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SUMMARY



The main problem with Ukrainian agitation created in Russian is that it is not so much anti-war as pro-Ukrainian. This is understandable, given that it is largely intended for Russian-speaking Ukrainians. Its effectiveness for Russian and Russian-speaking audiences is questionable. It's difficult to , that in regard to the war, an ordinary Russian citizen would trust the propaganda of "enemies" more than that of his or her own side. Certainly, there are those who sympathize with Ukraine and those who consciously want to know what the "enemies" are saying, but there are hardly very many of them, and even fewer of them have changed their original opinion.



The main problem with emigrant opposition information products is that they are knowingly "preaching to the faithful," that is, talking to those who are willing to participate in it. The audience of all Russian-language opposition resources is a big information bubble of people living in Russia and those who have left it, united in their rejection of Putin's policies for a wide range of reasons. However, we shouldn't ignore the success and strength of Russian free media and opposition structures, who have managed to maintain their audience and even expand it in some segments – despite its total defeat in Russia.



Western media have at least one opportunity that Ukrainian and émigré media do not have: broadcasting on behalf of the elites and citizens of their countries, they can promise Russian citizens a return to normal life and to the "Common European Home" after getting rid of Putin's regime. The heavier the war burden in Russia, the more important it will be to tell Russians that all their difficulties are due to the criminal regime and that after its fall the normal life will return back. Perhaps we should discuss not only the normalization of visa policy and the abolishing of sanctions, but also the prospects of a "Marshall Plan" for post-Putin Russia.