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Do 3Bs Need a New Policy towards Russian Émigrés? Debates on the Status and Role of the Russian Émigrés since February 2022

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Abstract: The article examines the debates surrounding the status and role of Russian Émigrés. The full-scale invasion launched by Russia against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 came as a shock to many, including many segments of the Russian population, but the outflux of individuals opposing Putin has been present from the 2014. That said, the invasion transformed this trickle into an outright deluge whereby estimated 700,000 up to 1,200,000 people left Russia. The article gives the historical context, describing the policies towards diaspora communities of the countries in conflict during and after WWII. Then will engage with the dilemmas surrounding the decision either to admit Russian émigrés or close the doors on them. Current and future policies towards Russian émigrés are considered with recommendation to continue giving preference to individual approach in assessing each case.

Keywords: Russia, migration, Baltic states.

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Introduction

The full-scale invasion launched by Russia against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 came as a shock to many, including many segments of the Russian population. Already since 2014, individuals opposing Putin's had been gradually seeping out of the country. However, the invasion transformed this trickle into an outright deluge, with an estimated 200,000 individuals departing the country in the first month after the invasion (Gilchrist, 2022), a figure that reached 419,000 by September 2022. (Rosbalt, 2023) The announcement of 'partial' mobilisation in September that year heralded the commencement of a second wave of emigration. It is estimated that between 24 February 2022 and 24 February 2023 between 700,000 and 1,200,000 people left Russia (Gulina, 2023).

Some of these emigrants started their new lives in the Baltic countries (further 3Bs).[1] Similarly, Belarusian political activists and other emigrants sought sanctuary in the 3Bs, predominantly in Lithuania, over the past few decades, with their estimated count reaching 58,000 (Kuizinaitė, 2023). The influx of these émigrés began to increase even prior to the suppression of protests against the falsified elections of August 2020 and the relocation of the internationally recognised president-elect of Belarus', Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, and her team to Vilnius, Lithuania.

The presence of so many Russian and Belarusian citizens in the Baltic region has sparked some tensions in the 3Bs, leading to some high-profile discussions on the nature and direction of engagement with the Russian (and Belarusian) diaspora. The purpose of this article is to explore the policies directed towards these Russian émigrés. The Belarusian diaspora, though striving to distance themselves from Russians and present Belarus as victim of aggression, will be addressed as well. It is noted that policies devised for one community often extend to the other (Andrukaitytė, 2023).

[1] Around 10,000 individuals across the three states. See, (Official Statistics Portal 2023; Official Statistics Portal Database 2023; Statistics Estonia 2023)

To address this issue, the article will be divided into three sections. The first section will succinctly outline the historical context, describing the policies towards diaspora communities of the countries in conflict during and after WWII. The subsequent section will engage with the dilemmas surrounding the decision either to admit Russian émigrés or close the doors on them. Given the implementation of an air travel ban already in February 2022, the only travel option to Europe for Russian citizens became overland routes. The 3Bs, Finland, and Poland thus emerged as the most important points of entry, and decisions adopted at both the EU and national levels offer insights into the attitudes toward the expanding Russian diaspora. An examination of this issue also affords the opportunity delve into the interplay between the diaspora community as a potential security threat and the states' humanitarian obligations. An analytical focus on the issue of 'partial mobilisation' also allows for a discussion on the potential of the protest in Russia and the possibility of encouraging voice over exit within this paradigm. The third section will examine engagement with the new Russian diaspora. Acknowledging its heterogeneity, this section will investigate the question of its political and legal representation, discuss how to foster its democratic potential, and address the interrelated issue of imperialism and reconciliation. The conclusions of this article will suggest some way forward in these areas.

Countries at War, Communities under Suspicion

The challenge of managing diasporas in warring or adversarial countries is not new. Since the emergence of nationalism, countries in conflict have devised various policies to address nationals hailing from the countries with which they were at war. Various groups fell under scrutiny, deemed unreliable or dangerous during conflict. Nationals or individuals with origins of the opposing belligerent were designated 'enemy aliens' and typically viewed with suspicion as potential spies, saboteurs, and as a 'fifth column.'

The WWII is particularly rich in examples of policies directed towards both the diasporas and ideological affiliates of the belligerents. While the most gruesome examples come from the totalitarian countries that started this war, democracies also succumbed to dubious practices directed at particular communities. At the start of the war with Japan and Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom

enacted policies of internment of citizens from belligerent countries, classifying them as enemy aliens and interning them in specially designed camps (Weik, 2022; Ebel, 2016; Chawkins, 2010; U.S. Department of Justice, 2001; Pistol, 2017).

While these detention camps serve as the harshest examples of the policies towards 'enemy aliens,' the communities designated by this term were subjected to other restrictions as well, including the travel bans, the seizure of private property, curfews, regular searches by the police, and other restrictions.

Such indiscriminate policies negatively affected many refugees who had been persecuted in Nazi Germany: public intellectuals, opponents of the regime who had sought refuge in the West, and ordinary Jews fleeing the prelude to the Holocaust. As the war progressed, these indiscriminate policies were adjusted. The 'enemy aliens' were classified according to their potential threat to security, and low risk individuals released from internment. Some later contributed to the war effort both inside the country (Brinson and Dove, 2021) and as part of the military (Kern, 2004; for the United States, see Schenderlein, 2019).

With time, 'enemy alien' legislation and related policies came to be seen as a significant breach of human rights, extending indiscriminate suffering on each individual within a community for actions over which they had little to no control. Both the United Kingdom and the United States reassessed their policies to these designated 'enemy aliens.' The United States extended official apologies for the treatment of these communities during the war (Chawkins, 2010; Qureshi, 2013).

As conflicts continued, however, some communities fell under greater scrutiny and distrust both from the side of the state and from that of the public at large. The term 'suspect community' had already been introduced in the 1990s to describe the experience of people in Northern Ireland and beyond after the introduction of the British Prevention of Terrorism Act of 1974 (Hillyard, 1993). Since 11 September 2001 attacks, the following War on Terror, and particularly the London attacks of 7 July 2005 perpetrated by second generation Muslims immigrants in the United Kingdom, this term has been extended to Muslim communities in the democratic countries of the West more broadly (Pantazis and Pemberton, 2009). Thus, the War

on Terror reintroduced the security-human rights dichotomy and the discussions on respect for individual as such against viewing them as representatives of their communities. It is often with difficulty that the middle path is tread. The lesson learned from this phenomenon is that of importance of communication in general and 'risk communication' in particular to help reduce tensions within and between communities. (Sheppard et al. 2006; Ylitalo-James, 2020)

The Russian Diaspora in the West

The examples given so far deliberately avoided looking at the Western approaches to the various waves of Russian/Soviet migration. Political dissidents from Russia found refuge in Europe since the 19th century. While Napoleonic Wars shook the Russian state and its victory in them propelled it to the forefront of European high politics, exposure to European ideas led to increased demands for reform and were met with equally staunch resistance from conservative forces confirmed in their belief of superiority of the Russian system due to the victory against Napoleon. These conservatives managed to keep the upper hand throughout almost the entire 19th century, even considering the short interlude of reforms that occurred during the reign of Alexander II. Reform- and later revolution-minded activists that were persecuted by ever more powerful police forces often had to choose between the exile in Siberia and escape to the West. Many, such as Lenin, experienced both.

European attitudes to these Russian émigrés were tolerant or at least not significantly different from the attitudes to other revolutionaries. Russia was seen as a backward country in dire need for reform, and the activities of Russian revolutionaries in the West (i.e., both the European countries and the United States) were confined to talking and were thus more tolerable than those of some other nationalities.[2]

Yet, while this pre-WWI political migration was confined to minor numbers of revolutionaries, the Bolshevik coup and subsequent civil war in Russia brought

[2] E.g., Italians. Similar to the trial of Dreyfus that served as a vivid example of the anti-Semitism in France, the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti served as a similar example of prejudices against Italians in the United States. The high numbers of Italians involved in anarchist movements combined with overall suspicion of Catholics in the Protestant countries often resulted in their prejudiced treatment.

much larger wave of émigrés to the West. It is estimated that more than two million people left Russia after the outbreak of revolution forming the First Wave of Emigration in the 20th century (Raeff 1990). Many of them had not only been affluent before the revolution, but they were also educated and politically active. They tried to create numerous initiatives for political organisation and presented themselves as 'Russia abroad' (Raeff 1990).

In the beginning, the European states did not recognise the Bolshevik regime and deployed a policy of mostly indirect confrontation against the Soviet Union during the Russian Civil War by supporting the White Russian forces. They were thus also tolerant if not directly supportive of the Russian émigrés and their activities. The communities themselves were split by rivalries and disagreements regarding the overall direction of the movement and who should be take the lead (e.g., Kellogg 2005). As WWII approached, these émigrés had already lived in the West for two decades, and they had little connection to the situation in a fast-changing Russia and even less influence over its course. Their situation was understood as such, and they were thus largely ignored by policymakers.

During WWII, the Soviet Union's status as an ally made the question of Russian émigrés different than that of the outlined German, Italian or Japanese. Towards the end of the war, Stalin not only insisted on agreements regarding the future of Europe but regarding displaced persons with their origins in the USSR and the areas under occupation. During the Yalta Conference, Western leaders agreed to repatriate the majority of these displaced people back to their countries of origin (Dobbs 2013; Marrus 2002).

It is estimated that around five million Soviet citizens were in the West at the end of hostilities in Europe. By March 1946, 4.2 million people were sent back to the Soviet Union, and by 1952, only 451,500 of these individuals remained in the West (Mikkonen 2012, 103). By nationality, Ukrainians, Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians were the largest groups among those remaining, with Russians constituting the fifth largest community in terms of size (ibid.).

Tensions between the victors of WWII had already appeared during the last phases of the conflict and soon degenerated to such a degree as to constitute the Cold War. With the start of the Cold War, the third wave of 20th century migration began, and this wave was longest, consisting of trickle of dissidents, exiles, and escapees from the Soviet Union once its borders had been closed off.

Western policies targeted at these émigrés must be considered in the context of the Cold War. As the Cold War was intensifying and it was becoming clear that the confrontation between the superpowers would focus ever more on the attractiveness of one ideology compared to the other, dissidents from the Soviet Union in the West were seen as an asset. By mid-1950s, a number of schemes was devised both to counter the allure of Communism in the West (which at times degenerated to excesses as exemplified by the activities of senator McCarthy and the House Committee on Un-American Activities) and to improve the image of the Western system in the East. The publications and communications of the deserters from the Soviet Union were valuable in both these projects. Projects such as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty that broadcast in a variety of languages for the peoples behind the iron curtain was directed to challenging the Soviet image and improving the Western one. (Puddington 2000) These projects relied strongly on the engagement of the émigrés. Attempts were also made to help these diaspora communities self-organise to undertake a more concerted effort for the removal of the Soviet regime. Yet, all such attempts ended in failure, as the internal rivalries and significant differences in political views, as well as strong personalities associated with those views, all hampered attempts at consolidation (Mikkonen 2012).

The fourth wave of migration began in 1990, when the liberalisation of border regime allowed Soviet citizens access to the Western countries and can be considered economic migration. No specific rules regarding this group applied and no specific policies regarding Russian communities in the West were devised.

Behind the iron curtain and particularly behind Soviet borders, forced migration saw local populations deported from their native lands to Siberia and the Central Asian Steppe, while the emptied cities were repopulated by newcomers, primarily Russians. For example, an estimated 23,000 non-Estonians lived in Estonia in 1945, and Estonians were 97.3% of population. By 1989, the number of non-Estonians

increased to 302,381, and the percentage of Estonians decreased to 61.5% (Katus 1990). This traumatic experience throughout the Soviet Union had a significant impact on the psyche of the newly independent states. Furthermore, the country with second highest number of Russian citizens living in Europe in 2021 was Estonia (Statista 2022a).

The Dilemmas of Engaging with Russian Émigrés since February 2022

The EU introduced various restrictions on Russian citizens already in 2014 after the illegal annexation of Crimea. At the start of the full-scale invasion into Ukraine, European countries declared unequivocal support for Ukraine and condemnation of Russia was followed by serious sanctions. Already in the first days, Russian central bank reserves were frozen, the country was disconnected from the SWIFT payment system, numerous individuals were included into the personal sanction lists, and their access to assets in the West was limited (Ashurst 2023; European Commission 2023). As flights were suspended and embassies closed, it became increasingly difficult for the citizens of Russia to travel to Europe. Indeed, the majority of those who decided to leave after the start of the invasion chose to travel to countries that still allowed air travel (Türkiye, Armenia, and the United Arab Emirates being some of the more popular destinations) and did not introduce restrictive visa regimes.

EU countries in this period also concentrated on accommodating the influx of Ukrainian refugees. The policies towards Russians in Europe mainly focused on individual sanctions and the curtailment of Russian propaganda by restricting the reach of Russian state media, such RT (Russia Today) and Sputnik, which was later extended to other state-owned news media. These first sanctions focused on trade and financial restrictions, the freezing of the assets of Russian officials and main oligarchs, and propaganda control.

Who Can Enter? Humanitarian Concerns against Security Threats

A month after the invasion, the EU started working also on a broader spectrum of restrictions for Russian citizens. On 28 March, the EU Commission issued a recommendation to the members states regarding the so-called golden visa schemes that provide permanent residence permits in a country for investors who invest a certain threshold of funds (European Commission 2022b). All countries have committed to end these programs (Guarascio 2022).

Until summer 2022, there was no great controversy regarding the entry of Russian citizens into the EU. Those entering the Union at the start of the war already typically possessed long-term visas due to their extensive and continuous contacts with the EU. The EU countries also took the necessity of the exodus of the dissident public figures seriously, such as journalists opposing the regime. Special visas on humanitarian grounds and eased procedures for entry were offered to these persons. For example, Germany, France, and the Czech Republic created special programs to support Russians in risk groups or for the relocation of political activists, journalists, academics, and NGO employees. (Gulina 2023, 6)

The 3Bs also participated in this process, with Lithuania issuing residence permits to numerous individuals connected with Russian free media and political organisations, some of which were active in the country already before the current full-scale invasion. Until September 2022, this trend continued and, according to statistics, Lithuania was receiving the most immigrants of all Russia's EU neighbours on average (Statista 2022b). Latvia also served as an important hub for the relocation of the Russian media outlets and their staff, hosting organisations such as TV Rain, Meduza, Novaya Gazeta, and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (Laizans 2023). Estonia was more reserved in this regard.

In summer 2022, the debate on the Russians entering the EU started in earnest. In an interview for *Washington Post*, the Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky urged the West to ban Russian travellers (Khurshudyan 2022). This notion was picked up by other politicians around Europe. Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin mirrored this call with the call for the EU to issue to blanket ban for Russian citizens who come to the EU for the purposes of tourism (YLE News 2022). Similar calls were

echoed in the 3Bs (Kaja Kallas [@kajakallas] 2022) and Poland (Joint statement of the prime ministers of Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania - Poland in the EU - Gov.pl website 2022). The results of this debate was seen on 9 September, 2022, when the EU suspended the agreement on the 'Facilitation of the Issuance of Visas to the Citizens of the European Union and the Russian Federation' and disseminated guidelines for the issuance of such visas (Brzozowski 2022; European Commission 2022a). The guidelines effectively suggested states to extend the review of the visa applications and to consider short-term visas for tourism purposes as non-essential travel.

This issue became even more acute with the announcement of 'partial' mobilisation on 21 September 2022. The announcement saw kilometre-long lines forming at exit points from the Russian Federation. The majority of those fleeing from Russia were men of mobilisation age who were trying to escape the potential draft through the closest border exit. Another policy debate here pitted the German approach of welcoming these 'mobilisation refugees' against that of the 3Bs and Poland, which hastened to close their borders to this new wave.

Over the following year, the debate on the issue of Russians entering the EU was restricted to separate episodes, and it flared up again in September 2023, when following the new EU guidelines on the enforcement of existing sanctions, the 3Bs, Finland, and Poland decided to introduce a ban on cars with Russian license plates from entering their countries (ERR 2023).

Debates regarding the visa bans and other restrictions are enlightening in several dimensions, each of which will be further explored: 1) Do Russian 'mobilisation refugees' in particular and the new Russian diasporas in general pose a security threat? 2) How do these bans correspond with the EU values of upholding human rights and rule of law? 3) Do these restrictions help or hinder Putin's regime?

1) 'Mobilisation Refugees' as a Security Threat

A speech presenting the new EU guidelines regarding the visa issuance to Russian applicants has emphasised that 'It cannot be excluded that Russian citizens trying to circumvent mobilization by getting into the EU, also constitute a threat to public

policy, the internal security or the international relations of a Member State or the Union as a whole' (European Commission 2022c). A communication from the Commission, issued before the mobilisation announcement and thus before the great influx of people, also claimed that "there continues to be a credible risk that persons claiming to travel for tourism purposes could promote propaganda supporting Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, or engage in other subversive activities to the detriment of the EU" (European Commission 2022a, 1).

These considerations were based on the incidents in the EU involving Russian tourists (Kyiv Post 2022) but also on the pressures exerted by the 3Bs and Poland fearing the formation of a fifth column in their countries and the presence of Russian citizens as a pretext for the Russian attacks to 'liberate' their 'compatriots' (Rotomskytė 2022). With the crowds of 'mobilisation refugees' appearing at the doorstep, these fears were reinforced by those similar to the migration wave of 2015 – that Russian security services would use this opportunity to infiltrate the countries by disguising themselves as refugees (Liik 2023).

These fears need to be viewed in consideration of the continuous pressure that the Russian state has exercised in the last two decades, relentlessly using hybrid tools to create insecurity and instability, starting from disinformation and ending with the actual incitement of riots and public discontent. Indeed, Russian influence has been noted in most of the current contentious activities in the countries, from the movements against the increasing rights of women (protest against adoption of Istanbul Convention), LGBTQ+ rights, COVID-19 restrictions, and vaccinations. For example, in May 2023, a document was uncovered revealing Kremlin's strategy to influence the 3Bs by using the pro-Russian forces already present, coordinating their propaganda efforts, and supporting their protest activities (LRT Investigation 2022; Makaraitytė et al. 2023; Makaraitytė and LRT Investigation Team 2023).

In an attempt to mitigate this threat, Lithuania adjusted its legal regulation of migration processes and introduced a questionnaire to the Russian citizens that needs to be filled when applying for Lithuanian visa or residence permit (Migracijos departamentas 2022a, 2022b). A year after its introduction, 2000 decisions were taken by the Lithuanian Migration Authority to refuse to prolong the residence permit or to issue a visa for the citizens of Belarus and Russia based on the results

of this questionnaire (Migris 2023). Additional restrictions were introduced in May 2023 to limit the access of both groups to the property market (Gerdžiūnas 2023).

2) Upholding European Values

While the 3Bs and Poland have been very vocal in their opposition to having Russian émigrés enter their countries since summer of 2022, they must comply with general EU rules and regulations regarding migration. The questionnaires allow for the preservation of the individual approach that is the essence of the European migration regulation and rules. (Thym 2022) Thus the 'blanket ban' was used more as a rhetorical device than an actual state practice.

At the same time, these blanket bans were contrasted to the blanket welcome that was offered by some public figures to the flocks of 'mobilisation refugees' in September-October 2022. German journalist Gereon Asmuth wrote in that respect, "No matter when and why someone makes the decision to refuse the madness of war … it is always the right decision. Therefore, there is only one irrefutable rule: Wherever a fugitive from war service is standing in front of the door: Open it!" (Eder 2022).

Similarly, the open stance of some European countries to the previous waves of migration from Russia and the former Soviet Union have been referenced in this discussion (Borogan and Soldatov 2022; Inozemtsev 2023). Similar to the wave of refugees fleeing the ISIS advance in Syria and Iraq, Eastern European states were presented here as less than charitable to people in need, going against the tradition of welcoming dissidents, and as hampering the effort to deprive Putin of recruits for the war (Borogan and Soldatov 2022).

Another debate regarding the values and sanctions ensued as the ban on cars with Russian license plates was introduced. The measure was meant to be a mechanism for limiting the possibilities of sanction busting by Russia but was taken by Russian communities as an arbitrary measure. The announcement of the ban came at the same time as that on lifting sanction from some prominent Russian oligarchs (Reuters 2023), fuelling even this perception of injustice even more (Снятие

санкций с олигарха на фоне мер против россиян I Фёдор Крашенинников в эфире «Честного слова» 2023).

Those arguing for the wider acceptance of the Russian immigrants suggest the consideration of their economic potential (Zavadskaya 2023) and attitudes, as they are typically self-sufficient and do not create a burden on the receiving state (Inozemtsev 2023). Yet, contrary to the other migrant groups, Russian émigrés are typically not observed through the economic lens, particularly not in the countries of the Eastern Europe, where historical memories and suspicions dominate the economic concerns.

3) Exit or Voice?

Mobilisation was announced just as the new guidelines for the entry of the Russian citizens to the EU were taking effect. This resulted in only a small fraction of these 'mobilisation refugees' reaching Europe. Even though countries like Germany or France were ready to be more welcoming, the absence of direct connections made access to these more welcoming countries more complicated and less affordable. Internally, as mentioned, they brought about a discussion between the proponents of the blanket ban and the blanket welcome. It must be emphasised that both sides present their arguments in view of the desire of defeating Putin's regime. They differ in their assessment of what would facilitate this defeat.

To assess these arguments, a detour to explain the potential background for such a discussion may be helpful. Since its publication in 1970, economist Albert Hirschman's *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States* (1972) became very influential not only in the author's primary sphere of research – economics – but even more so in political science. His approach has been used to explain the success of the states in dealing with social movements as well as that of the citizens winning in their demands against the state. It has also been widely used to explain the democratic transitions, including the fall of the Berlin Wall to which the author himself applied his theory (Hirschman 1993). The broad application of the theory also includes discussion of the migration flows and events such as the Brexit referendum. (Lele 2016; Stewart 2018).

In this work, Hirschman explores the responses that members of organisations, citizens of a state or consumers of a product have to the deteriorating quality of

provided services or products. In this, the default answer is to remain loyal, out of habit, fear of change or pressure. Yet, there are two 'active' options available. 'Exit' implies withdrawal, leaving the organization, switching to a different product or emigrating from a state. 'Voice' is the expression of dissatisfaction by writing complaints, going to demonstrations and otherwise protesting.

The theory itself has undergone numerous elaborations and refinements since publication, however, crude versions of it have been periodically resurrected in the public debates. In this crude version, the people have two main ways of dealing with dissatisfaction in the system: exit and voice. The choice between the two depends on the costs of these options. If exit is easy and voice is penalised, exit would be chosen, if no exit is available, voice would remain the only option, as voicing of dissatisfaction by numerous people would then result in a change in firm/organisation/state attitudes and actions.

These notions are reproduced in the discussion of Russian citizens coming to Europe in general and particularly in the case of 'mobilisation refugees.' In a flashy, much discussed tweet, Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gabrielius Landsbergis declared that 'Lithuania will not be granting asylum to those who are simply running from responsibility. Russians should stay and fight. Against Putin' (Gabrielius Landsbergis [@GLandsbergis] 2022). The background of dichotomy of exit against voice is clearly visible in this statement. The purpose of closing the borders is presented as a method to undermine Putin's regime with the expectation that the rising costs of exit would force Russians to voice their dissatisfaction through mass protests and, in the best-case scenario, the overthrow of the regime. This suggestion is additionally flavoured with the moral imperative presented by President Zelensky that Russian citizens should be inconvenienced as much as possible in order for them to feel that there is actually a war going on and, if they really oppose the war, to then voice their opposition visibly to the government.

However justified, this expectation is unrealistic. The level of repression in Russia that was slowly increasing ever since Putin took power, since 2022 achieved qualitatively new levels. The costs of 'voice' are thus extremely high. As long as any

exit remains, and as exit to the third countries is still possible (it is estimated that only 6-8% those who left went to the EU (Inozemtsev 2023, 16)), the probability of opposition being voiced is negligible. In Russia itself, the notion of 'internal emigration' has been widely used to discuss experiences both in Soviet times and under Putin's regime those who have no possibility to leave but do not agree with its policies choose this option. This situation is emphasised by those who advocate the welcome policy. According to Borogan and Soldatov, for example, "Putin's exiles are crucial to winning the war – and to building a better Russia" (Borogan and Soldatov 2022). The short-term effect of this exodus is to limit pool of mobilisation and potentially show the regime that the policy of mobilisation – or even the war itself – is unpopular.

As such, exit could be considered as a type of protest as well. The queues at the borders serve as visual reminders for the regime of how unpopular this policy has been and could thus contribute to the reluctance to announce a new wave of mobilisation regardless of the demands of more hawkish voices and severe manpower shortages at the front.

What Approach for the Newly Formed Russian Diaspora?

The Heterogeneity of the Russian Émigré Community

The question of what to do with the large numbers of 'mobilisation refugees' intrinsically relates to the question of what approach should be adopted to the newly formed Russian diaspora as such. The first sub-question here centres on whether there should be a division between the old and new Russian communities or if they should be treated as one. For example, Vladislav Inozemtsev suggested that the 'old' Russian communities in Europe now primarily consist of the people of the third wave of emigration or, in the 3Bs, those who remained in the countries after re-independence, are often sympathetic to Kremlin propaganda, and acts as a part of the 'Russian World.' The new arrivals, many of whom were forced out for political reasons, would contribute to a process in which "the current mood inside the Russian communities in Europe may start to change" (Inozemtsev 2023, 21). This suggests treating both communities as a unified whole, though it may often be difficult to do so as, primarily, their legal status in the countries is different. The

newly arrived communities – while they could be more positively disposed to European countries and their values – are more legally vulnerable than their co-nationals that have lived in these countries for decades.

Additionally problematic are deep divisions within these groups. Even though it is possible to claim that many Russians in Latvia, Estonia, or Germany consider themselves a part of 'Russian World,' there are also many who are fully integrated into their host societies. Some choose to assimilate; some keep ties with Russia and preserve a Russian nationalist identity. Similarly, among those arriving there are those who want to remain a part of the Russian media sphere, even if only opposition media sphere, who want to preserve connections with Russia, and wish to return to Russia in the case of the current regime's collapse. At the same time, there are those who do not hope for any such developments, who consider the regime and its actions to have doomed the country to an eternal pariah status and thus want to disassociate from it as much as possible.

In addition, the divisions that existed when people were in Russia have not disappeared and are reflected in the attitudes and discussions in the diaspora. Thus, the political divides that escaping political leaders have brought with them are reproduced also in the political opposition abroad, and these divisions are further enhanced by lack of platforms for the common discussion. There are many congresses, meetings, and conferences organised, yet few platforms offer a common forum for representation and discussion with most such discussions happening online through the channels of *Youtube* or *Telegram*. In physical meetings, Navalny's influential team is often conspicuous by its absence (Seddon 2023).

Additional divisions reflect generational divides that mirror those in the West. The younger generation activists are steeped in anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist, feminist, and LGBTQ+ discourses similar to their counterparts in the West (Domańska 2023, 5). They also tend to stay away from the political opposition in exile, not perceiving it as 'representatives of their interests, values, or visions' (ibid.) and seeing themselves as having more in common with their Western counterparts than with the 'old' opposition. It is likely that numbers of such individuals will grow as

Russia continues to crack down on LGBTQ+ communities and as the current cohorts of liberally minded youth graduating high schools see little prospects for themselves in an ever more conservative and restrictive regime.

These cleavages indicate how difficult it may be to devise a common strategy for dealing with different individuals separately or with the Russian émigré community together. The individual approach to visa and residence permit issuance is thus the correct approach, as it preserves the human rights and dignity of individuals as much as possible. The question of the representation of this diverse and heterogeneous community should also be considered.

The Question of Political and Legal Representation

As already mentioned in the section dealing with the exit and voice, Russian émigrés are often viewed through the lens of their potential role in the demise of Putin's regime. As was discussed in the section on history, this attitude follows the relation to dissidents during the Cold War era and is also reflected in the support of media organisations and other instruments of the so-called 'information war.' Even if not necessarily helpful in the actual demise of the regime, these groups are viewed as useful in supporting democratic values that could be valuable if the regime falls.

As the opposition figures were leaving Russia or were forced out throughout the years of Putin's rule, they established a number of political organisations abroad. These include the Free Russia Forum and the Free Russia Foundation, and since the start of the full scale invasion, an Anti-War Committee of Russia and the Russian Action Committee were also established (Free Russia Forum 2019; Free Russia Foundation n.d.; Russian Action Committee 2023; Russian Anti-War Committee n.d.). These organisations, as well as other individual initiatives, have resulted in several congresses, conferences, and forums held in various European countries, many of them in the 3Bs. For example, the Free Russia Forum organises its regular conference in Vilnius. It has also organised its last two anti-war conferences in Riga (24-25 March 2023) and Tallinn (1-2 October 2023) (Free Russia Forum 2023b, 2023a). Aleksei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation is also based in Vilnius, Lithuania.

While all these initiatives are often accused of producing no more than empty words with no influence on the real politics either within Russia or abroad, they do raise a

number of important issues that require a solution. First is the question of representation. Now, the Russian political opposition abroad – with its various organisations and efforts – is a fragmented field of different actors. As it was already mentioned, this reflects the diversity of the émigré community, the political field, and society as a whole, yet it also makes it difficult to reach results for either the improvement of plight of the émigrés or to affect change in Russia itself.

In May 2022, Gary Kasparov proposed the creation an official political representation for Russians abroad, issuing them a document that would certify their status as Russian émigrés and their political positions as anti-war, pro-Ukrainian territorial integrity, and pro-democratic Russia. This proposal was soon termed the 'Good Russian' passport and was largely derided in the Russian information sphere (Rudina 2022). The idea was quickly killed by an onslaught of vehement attacks, with the primary arguments against it being the lack of proper authority to issue such documents and a distrust of opposition figures who were acting like judges of the behaviour and ideas. At the same time, it is visible that considerations similar to the checklist of a 'Good Russian' trickled into the current legislation, such as the Lithuanian questionnaire for those applying for visas and residence permits.

The question of the legitimate authority became one of the fundamental issues in this discussion. As all of the organisations so far had been created on voluntary basis, united like-minded individuals, and are not supported by those who hold somewhat different views and possibly harbour grudges against particular personalities, it is highly unlikely that any common platform can be created. The question of the necessity of such a platform also remains. The community is divided into those who think that a unified approach and a common solution are necessary and those who think that this unity is only important if a concrete action is in mind but do not see just representation as a reason for such action. Those supporting this later approach are in favour of an individual perspective and doubt the need to create any common representation or indeed acknowledge of the existence of a separate community of the exiled Russians.

The discussion regarding the 'Good Russian' passport and other initiatives took place inside the Russian opposition media sphere, yet they reflect discussions that have a wider impact. While Russian émigrés in Europe get their residence permits, their official legal status is still linked with Russian citizenship. This requires at least some connection with Russian state institutions when the document expiration date approaches, when documents are lost, etc.

In September 2023, Belarusian authorities announced that they would no longer issue such documents in the representations abroad, demanding that all the citizens of Belarus travel to Minsk for the renewal (Karmanau 2023). It is expected that the Russian authorities will follow suit. The incident of hijacking of the Ryanair flight from Athens to Vilnius on which Belarusian opposition activists were flying in 2021 is still fresh in the minds of any regime opponents (Reevel 2021). Given the lengths that the regime chose to go in that case, it seems likely that the road to Belarus' to change the passport would be the same as the one to prison. Similarly, the Jamal Khashoggi case (BBC 2018) made not only Saudi – but all dissidents of authoritarian regimes – rather wary to engage with their state authorities even abroad.

The authorities in the West can help mitigate these fears. In this regard, Lithuania, for example, decided to issue special passports for Belarusians (Associated Press 2023), and a similar approach could be taken regarding Russians. It is possible to prepare for such eventuality, however, by the establishment of mechanisms for issuing such documents.

These practicalities aside, Western institutions, particularly the EU, could also help organise the Russian political representation abroad. The opposition field is large and varied but also small enough as to contain a myriad of rivalries and personality clashes that limit the possibilities of dialogue. This dialogue, however, is important when considering a potential democratic Russian state. It is thus important to create a forum where these different political forces would not only choose to collaborate but be forced to agree to work together on the achievement of at least a few common goals. As democracy is about compromise, it is not helpful for the development of a democratic spirit to have communities entrenched in exclusive social media bubbles and networks of dialogue. The same can be said about any country, but in each Western democracies, there are various levels of representation where the politicians are supposed to come to compromises and refine their ideas

for the future. The European Parliament, for example, could be instrumental for creating such a forum for Russian émigrés. Any party or organisation could participate in such an institution and be elected to it by the members of the community, thus allowing it to reflect on the heterogeneous composition of it.

Yet, the creation of such a forum for dialogue was attempted, e.g., the Parliament organised a meeting for the opposition in June 2023 in Brussels (Seddon 2023), they were criticised by some as being led by self-appointed representatives, without any popular mandate. Unless a system of voting for the representatives can be enacted, similar critiques will plague all such future initiatives.

Fostering Democratic Potential

For these policies to make sense, some belief in the future of a democratic Russia is necessary. Some Baltic politicians, like the Lithuanian MEP Andrius Kubilius, are at the forefront of advocating for such developments in the country (Kubilius 2023). However, in the 3Bs at large, this is not a very widespread belief, as there is a tendency to look at Russia as a rigid and unchanging menace (Pundziūtė-Gallois 2023) the rulers of which change colours, but not their imperialist expansionist, and thus threatening to neighbours, essence.

In opposition communities as well, there is an equal measure of scepticism regarding the possibility of Russia's transformation. This also reflects the experience of previous waves of emigration, the first one of which lived 'without unpacking the suitcases' (Liik 2023), hoping for a collapse of the Bolshevik regime, and the third much less optimistic about the prospects of change.

While some political activists still believe in their ability to affect change in Russia, there is little historical evidence that such influence could be possible, or clear pathways for it to happen. The Russian opposition, as well as its Western counterparts, are thus reconciled to wait for the change in the regime, which could happen at some point in time, though the current situation is unpredictable. Indeed, as analyst Michael Kofman once jibed, "the science of predicting regime change seems to lag significantly behind astrology" (Kofman 2015), and the collapse of

seemingly well-entrenched regimes often comes rather unexpectedly (see, also, (Krasheninnikov and Milov 2023).

In such circumstances, Western policymakers should accept that as they themselves have little influence over the events inside Russia (expectations regarding the possibility of sanctions to topple the regime acts as a good example here (Neilan 2022)), the Russian opposition could only work to foster its own democratic potential rather than effect a regime change in the Russia itself.

In this regard, some criticism towards the Russian opposition rests in that it is "more interested in addressing Western peers and institutions than in engaging and supporting average emigrants" (Schmies 2023, 14). In this, they often accept the notion that the best vehicle for change in Russia would be the victory of Ukraine in the war. On the other hand, other oppositional forces are accused of catering to the prejudices and attitudes of Russians still inside the country, as well as those outside of Russia who still believe that one "cannot wish for the defeat of one's own country" (Erpyleva 2023), thus indirectly supporting aggression. Some marginal, although vocal, activists even argue that ordinary Russians are victims of Putin's regime as much as Ukrainians are and should thus be treated as such (see, in particular, statements of Mikhail Svetov of the Libertarian party of Russia, e.g. (РОССИЯ СОГЛАСНА НА РЕПАРАЦИИ 2023)). While the blame for war should be put on the shoulders of Putin's regime, culpability also rests Western governments that turned a blind eye to its policies and benefited from its corrupting practices for years (Massaro and Rausing 2017).

Such declarations have decidedly had an impact on the views of potential change in Russia for the West in general but are taken more sensitively in the Baltic countries, which consider the fate of Ukraine as their own, at least according to the perspective of Russian imperialist thinkers (Dixon 2022; LETA 2023; Lucas 2023). It is, however, a tricky question which harkens back to the consequences of the German 'guilt clause'[3] at the end of WWI. It is important to find a sensible way out of this

[3] Devised as a sensible solution to the question of legality of reparations demanded from defeated Germany, this clause is seen as one of the major grievances that alienated German society from the Versailles Treaty and the dispositions it imposed, which was a factor leading to WWII. For a new and impressively detailed take on this, see (Cohrs 2022).

potential impasse in discussions together with the Russian opposition. The discussion of whether the all of Russian society – including those opposing the regime – or only the closest circle to Putin are responsible for the war will continue, but a nuanced approach would be helpful, as Russian passport holders who rejected the regime should be given credit for their actions, and at the same time, the activities of some individuals in the West, epitomised by Gerhard Schroeder, who facilitated and profited from the Russian regime and its actions, and should consequently be more strictly addressed.

Imperialism and the Question of Reconciliation

Baltic scepticism regarding Russian émigrés is closely linked to historical experiences and the presence of already large Russian communities within Estonia and Latvia. These communities were viewed with distrust since the beginning of independence, considering that many of these Russophones chose to remain in Russian media sphere and, by extension, the media sphere of the 'Russian World ' (Kuczyńska-Zonik 2017; Radin 2017; Thornton and Karagiannis, 2016). Since the start of the war, these communities came under even more scrutiny and suspicion. Interestingly, however, most measures that would qualify for the treatment of these groups as 'suspect communities' were directed at the new arrivals instead. Indeed, while the local communities were already known at least to a certain degree, with the new arrivals, it is suggested, 'We do not know who these people really are. … They might be anti-Putin, they might be undercover FSB' (Liik, 2023), a concern that reflects strongly the local historical experience as well, where émigré communities had been strongly infiltrated by the Russian secret services. In 3Bs, for Latvia and Estonia, for example, engaging with Russian émigrés became an extension of policies already in place in relation to those Russians who did not emigrate after the collapse of Soviet Union.

At the same time, even if such a direct threat is not always justifiable, Baltic societies are extremely sensitive to any outward expressions of imperialism and 'cultural superiority' that they see genetically characteristic of all Russians (Kubilius, 2023). This may be rather an unfair and unjustified attitude, but the situation would hardly

improve if, as sometimes suggested (Liik, 2023), these Russian émigrés were simply accepted in Europe and provided with a platform for their internal discussions without the need to either engage with their host nations nor to alter in any way their views[4]. Indeed, other voices clearly emphasise that "There cannot be a vision of Russia's democratic future without Russians becoming aware that their country is an imperialist aggressor and that their goal must be to overcome its imperialist legacy" (Schmies, 2023, p. 3). That also includes the understanding of attitudes, behaviours, and sensibilities in the Baltic countries.

While Mr. Kubilius calls these attitudes "our 'Russian' psychological complexes" (Kubilius 2023), such complexes take a long time and effort on all sides to overcome. The example of Lithuanian and Polish relations could be illustrative here. During fifty years under Soviet regime, the question of Polish intensions towards Vilnius was not discussed in the countries' public sphere. Yet, after the collapse of the Soviet regime, the approach to future Polish foreign policy was strongly influenced by the émigré thinkers and writers, particularly, Jerzy Giedroyc (1906-2000), who advocated Polish peaceful coexistence with its neighbours and giving up its pre-WWII conceptualisations and claims on Vilnius, Lviv, and Grodno. His ULB idea, which suggested that without independent and democratic Lithuania, Ukraine, and Belarus there cannot be a free and democratic Poland (Snyder 2003, 225–31), became a guiding principle of the Polish foreign policy and contributed significantly to the establishment of respectful and more or less amicable relationship between Lithuania and Poland (Janužytė ,2016).

Development of similar ideas within the Russian émigré community could also work for the benefit of a peaceful coexistence with Russia's neighbours in the future. There is a long road to overcome such suspicions and mistrust, however the Lithuanian-Polish case is illustrative in that such reconciliation can be achieved at least to some degree. This requires providing the Russian opposition with the space and time to think through its country's future and its relationship with others, but it is nonetheless necessary to establish spaces for this dialogue.

[4] Catherin Belton, for example, describes influence of White Russian émigrés of the first wave on the attitudes and positions of Putin's regime, who were eager to promote interests of a 'Russian empire they still believed in no matter who had taken the reins of power' in it. (Belton 2020, 327).

Similarly, the case of Belarusian community the tensions with Lithuanian society regarding the so-called *Litvinism* theory of history need to be further discussed and some political solutions decided upon. The theory, which argues that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is a Belarusian state, is seen by some as a threat to Lithuanian security and by others as a part of a Belarusian attempt to forge a national identity. Those viewing this theory and its proponents as a threat see it as a similarly dangerous idea as that of a vision of Ukraine presented in Putin's article of 2021 (Putin 2021), which is largely seen as an ideological justification of the war. Of particular concern is theorisation that implies Belarusian territorial claim on Vilnius (LRT Aktualijų studija 2023).

As the question of *Litvinism* creates a rift between the Lithuanian host community and the Belarusians in exile, it has been suggested that the most radical versions of the theory were actually promoted and implanted by the Russian and Belarusian secret services (Augūnas 2023). As such a use of competing nationalist claims to particular territories has long been a trademark of the divide and conquer politics of Russian empire (Snyder 2003), this is not an implausible suggestion. To deal with the tensions created, it is important to expose these connections to the potential agitators, while at the same time cooperating in a spirit of mutual respect with the Belarusian opposition.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Countries of the EU have long hosted émigrés fleeing conflicts and repressive regimes in various parts of the world. The current Russian aggression on Ukraine is different in that it brought about the largest interstate war in Europe since 1945 and in that the Russian regime frames its fight as battle with the Western world at large in its aggression against Ukraine. Within the flood of Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war, a smaller, but still substantial influx of Russians fleeing Putin's ever more repressive regime has knocked on European doors. What to do with these émigrés has led to some confusion. While the harshest measures of the past wars, such as

internment were never advocated, the approach of different countries varied in their openness.

The 3Bs also reacted differently to the influx of first the Russian opponents of war. Lithuania was supportive of the Russian opposition figures, Latvia agreed to be a hub for the exiled media projects, and Estonia was sceptical to these endeavours from the beginning. Later, their opinions converged and the policies towards the 'mobilisation refugees' became quite uniform. This latest influx was seen as a security threat and was dealt with by closing border posts and limiting access to the countries. The harsh rhetoric was combined with an adherence to EU rules and an individual approach towards refugees.

Current and future policies towards Russian émigrés should consider the diversity of those fleeing Russia and continue giving preference to individual approach in assessing each case. This approach would allow those who pose a genuine threat to a country's security to be separated from those who are simply aiming to leave the stifling atmosphere of ever increasingly authoritarian regime. In addition, an effort to curtail the supporters of Putin's regime and those who benefit from it should be increased. Collectively punishment of ordinary Russians with the inability to open bank accounts while allowing relatives of the people connected with Russian oligarchs or administration to thrive in European countries owning vast amounts of property and sending their children to private schools is hardily justified.

Currently, the threat to Baltic countries comes from the potential 'hybrid' actions of Russia, which focus on fostering conditions of instability and a feeling of insecurity within these countries. The best approach to mitigate with these threats is transparency. Baltic journalists do a formidable job in exposing Russian connections to the variety of nefarious activities in the region, and their colleagues, exiled Russian investigative journalists, can also help in this endeavour and should be supported in this.

Attempts to instrumentalise the community should be avoided. It is quite unlikely that the émigrés can do much to alter the conditions within Russia and even less that they can affect any change to the regime. Some platform for political representation could be created under the auspices of the European Parliament. This development would be especially important if the countries decide not to

recognise the results of the Russian presidential elections in March 2024. Such a representation could also help in solving some legal issues, especially if Russia follows the Belarusian path by ceasing to issue documents at its embassies and consulates.

The Russian opposition community should be encouraged to review its country's tradition of imperialism and rethink its future both inside in the country and in its relationship with its neighbours. It is hardly enough to say that the Russian émigrés bring with them the potential of economic growth. Given efforts expended in fighting disinformation and revisionist ideas denigrating the value of the independence, history, or culture of the Baltic countries, they could be excused for viewing them through the lens of the adage *timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*. Diminishing these fears, particularly in the current circumstances cannot be but a long process. Yet, there are examples that this can be achieved, and with the help of émigré communities, the Polish example of rethinking territorial policies during the Cold War led by Jerzy Giedroyc and his Journal *Kultura* can be an inspirational example for the Russian case.

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