

Russian Youth: Their Attitude to the Ruling Elite and Political Processes

by Denis Volkov

ABSTRACT

Young Russians are different from older generations. They are confident Internet users and thus have access to independent media and are exposed to free information and a variety of opinions. They show greater disillusionment with authorities, a greater degree of Westernisation of their tastes and more openness to the world. These differences are well observed in the results of the long-term sociological surveys undertaken by the Levada-Center, an independent polling centre in Moscow. Amidst the ongoing conflict between Russia and the West, Russian youth finds itself pressured between the Russian authorities on the one side, and sanctions from Western countries aimed at isolating Russia from the outside world.

Russia | Youth | Public opinion

keywords

Russian Youth: Their Attitude to the Ruling Elite and Political Processes

by Denis Volkov*

1. Digital gap and freedom of information

Many researchers on Russian youth note that the most obvious difference between young Russians under 35 years of age and the older generations concerns the use of the Internet and channels of news consumption.¹ According to survey data, over the past decade, the use of television as a source of news in Russia has decreased by a quarter: from 90 to 65 per cent of Russians over 18 years of age.² On the contrary, consumption of news on the Internet has quadrupled (up to 40 per cent). This change is primarily due to young people who have mastered the Internet faster than older generations. Young Russians receive news mainly from the Internet: up to 70 per cent, compared to the older generations who predominantly use TV for these purposes. Young people in Russia are half as likely as older people to watch the news on TV and four times more likely to use social networks.

In focus groups, young respondents from large cities often admit that they hardly watch TV. Some do not have a TV set at home. Outside the biggest cities young people still continue to watch TV, but still less often than the older generations. Young respondents explain that television is uncomfortable to watch, and there

¹ Vadim Radayev, "Millennials Compared to Previous Generations: An Empirical Analysis" [in Russian], in *Sociological Studies*, No. 3 (2018), p. 15-33, <http://socis.isras.ru/article/7095>; Lev Gudkov et al., "Generation Z: Young People of the Putin Era" [in Russian], in *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniya* [The Russian Public Opinion Herald], No. 1-2 (2020), p. 21-121, <https://www.levada.ru/cp/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/vom1-2020.pdf>.

² Denis Volkov et al., "Russian Media Landscape – 2021" [in Russian], in *Levada-Center Analytical Reports*, 5 August 2021, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=26213>.

* Denis Volkov is Director of the Levada-Center in Moscow.

Paper produced in the framework of the project "L'impegno selettivo dell'Ue con la Russia: come sostenere la società civile e migliorare i contatti tra le persone (people-to people)". This paper has benefited from the financial support of the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation and of the Policy Planning Unit of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation pursuant to art. 23-bis of Presidential Decree 18/1967. The views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation or the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

are suspicions that TV channels cover what is happening one-sidedly, imposing a point of view that is beneficial to the authorities. For the young, television is “not cool”, “TV is for the elderly”. In general, young Russians trust news on the Internet and social networks much more than is true for the older generation, who are just beginning to master the global web and treat it with distrust.

The rapid spread of social media in Russia, especially YouTube and Instagram, has contributed to the emergence of popular video blogs (vlogs) and blogger (vlogger) influencers over the past few years. Today, more than a third of Russian citizens regularly watch vlogs. No wonder that the majority of the audience of these resources are young people who access them 5–6 times more often than the older generation. The growing popularity of platforms for creating visual content on the Internet has allowed these platforms to compete for viewers with federal TV channels.

In turn, this attitude on the part of young people has allowed new independent politicians, activists and journalists to gain national recognition by millions of viewers. The new public figures are able to address audiences directly, bypassing the filters of state-controlled TV channels.

As a result, the picture formed by Russian television and by the Russian Internet has differed more and more. Young people and older people are increasingly using different sources of information, and their understanding and assessment of what is happening often diverge.

Thus, the older generation continues to admire President Vladimir Putin, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu or well-known hosts on federal television channels such as Vladimir Solovyov and Dmitry Kiselev. All these figures enjoy great confidence, especially among older Russians. At the same time, young Russians in recent years have acquired new heroes such as vlogger Yuri Dud, who currently has ten million subscribers on YouTube, opposition politician Alexei Navalny, who has 6.5 million subscribers, or a young communist politician from Saratov, Nikolai Bondarenko, who has 1.7 million YouTube subscribers. These new public figures gained recognition through the social networks and attract primarily a young audience.

However, it would be wrong to say that all Russian youth are in opposition to the authorities. President Putin remains the most popular politician among young people, although this support is two times lower than in the older generation. Besides, the majority of young Russians are much more interested in non-political stories and the heroes of non-politics. One indicator of fame and attractiveness can be the number of followers on these figures' Instagram accounts. The undoubted leaders among them are socialite Olga Buzova, who has 23 million followers on Instagram, fighter Khabib Nurmagomedov (33 million), socialite Nastya Ivleeva (18 million) and others. This is a reflection of the main interests of young people: music, cinema, sports and entertainment.

It is also worth noting that the primary sources of information that younger Russians use on the Internet are not the high-quality professional media, but news supplied by Yandex (news aggregator on the front page of a popular Russian search engine). In recent years Yandex was under criticism for giving in to governmental pressure to censor the news that is allowed on its frontpage.³ Russian authorities also tried for many years to curb the influence of the independent media on the Internet by putting many media and journalists into the register of foreign agents and by blocking Internet resources in Russia altogether. The latter process has only been exacerbated by the current conflict in Ukraine.⁴ In March 2022, after the leadership of Meta (Facebook and Instagram's parent company) decided not to block publications calling for the death of Russians, it was recognised as a terrorist organisation in Russia, and Facebook and Instagram were blocked altogether. After this was done the number of Russian users of these social networks began to decline.⁵ So even on the Internet the exposure of younger Russians to independent free media is limited by the efforts of the Russian authorities to curb the influence of the independent media, but also by the lack of interest on the part of many young Russians in political issues.

2. Political attitudes of Russian youth

Young people who are interested in politics are in the minority in their age group. Compared with the older generation, young people are half as likely to follow political news and discuss political issues with friends, and they participate in elections three times less often.⁶ Interest in politics usually awakens after the age of 30, when a person begins to live on their own and finds that they must solve everyday problems for themselves. However, among those young people who are still interested in politics, the ideas and assessments of what is happening have increasingly differed from the views of older Russians.

Only a few years ago young Russians were very loyal to the authorities, which is why they were often called "Putin's generation". But by 2018–19, a long decline in living standards and an increase in the retirement age led to rise of public discontent, disillusionment with the authorities and a willingness to protest. With younger Russians these changes took place faster, and disappointment in the authorities turned out to be stronger than among the older generations, apparently under the influence of free media and the independent politicians-video bloggers that we discussed earlier.

³ Denis Volkov et al., "Russian Media Landscape – 2021", cit.

⁴ Svetlana Reiter, "Toxic Assets", in *Meduza*, 6 May 2022, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2022/05/06/toxic-assets>.

⁵ Reporters Without Borders, "Russia", in *2022 World Press Freedom Index. A New Era of Polarisation*, 2022, <https://rsf.org/en/country/russia>.

⁶ Levada-Center, "Internet, Social Networks, VPN", in *Levada-Center Press Releases*, 22 April 2022, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=28029>.

Differences in the political views of young people and older generations first manifested themselves in 2018 in relation to Telegram blocking and criminal prosecutions for reposts in social networks, which Russian youth tended to condemn. By contrast, older Russians saw these bans as manifestations of state concern for the morality, morality and safety of their citizens. Today, history repeats itself: the current blocking of Instagram and Facebook is not supported primarily by young Russians.⁷ It is also reflected in attitudes towards the dispersal of the 2019 protests in Moscow, which were held in support of unregistered candidates for the elections to the Moscow City Duma. Opinion polls and focus groups in the regions then showed that younger Russians across the country were closely watching what was happening in the capital. In contrast with older generations, young Russians were much more sympathetic towards the protesters.

Again in 2020, the negative attitude towards the constitutional amendments that gave President Putin the right to be re-elected as president for two more terms was concentrated in the younger generation of Russians.⁸ On the contrary, it was the continued support for the regime among older people that provided the authorities with the desired result in the constitutional vote. The same year, young Russians were much more sympathetic towards the protesters in the Russian Far East⁹ and Belarus,¹⁰ than were the older ones; young people not only supported Navalny more often, but were also ready to believe that the Russian authorities were behind his poisoning.¹¹ In 2021, rallies in support of Navalny were also attended primarily by young people aged 20–35.¹²

In 2022, it was among young people from the largest Russian cities that disagreement with the “special military operation” in Ukraine was concentrated.¹³ Thus, young Russians today show unconditional support for the Russian “special military operation” in Ukraine two times less often than older ones (however,

⁷ Denis Volkov, “Disappointment without Consequences: Why Voters Are Not Interested in Duma Elections” [in Russian], in *Forbes*, 19 August 2021, <https://www.forbes.ru/obshchestvo/437461-razocharovanie-bez-posledstviy-pochemu-izbirateli-ne-zhdut-vyborov-v-dumu>.

⁸ Levada-Center, “Internet, Social Networks and Blocking”, in *Levada-Center Press Releases*, 27 May 2022, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=28181>.

⁹ Lev Gudkov, “Who Voted for Amendments to the Constitution: Final Poll” [in Russian], in *Levada-Center Press Releases*, 7 August 2020, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=23347>.

¹⁰ Denis Volkov, “Servant of the People: How Sergei Furgal Became One of the Presidential Candidates Suitable for Russians” [in Russian], in *Forbes*, 4 August 2020, <https://www.forbes.ru/obshchestvo/406349-sluga-naroda-kak-sergey-furgal-popal-v-chislo-podhodyashchih-dlya-rossiyan>.

¹¹ Denis Volkov, “Belarusian Mirror: Why the Events in Minsk Caused a Sharp Reaction in Russia” [in Russian], in *Forbes*, 7 September 2020, <https://www.forbes.ru/obshchestvo/408391-belorusskoe-zerkalo-pochemu-sobytiya-v-minske-vyzvali-ostruyu-reakciyu-v-rossii>.

¹² Levada-Center, “Navalny’s Poisoning”, in *Levada-Center Press Releases*, 1 February 2021, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=24383>.

¹³ Aleksandra Arkhipova, Alexei Zakharov and Irina Kozlova, “Protest Mobilisation – 2021: Who Went to Protest and Why” [in Russian], in *Liberal Mission Foundation Expertises*, 7 September 2021, <https://liberal.ru/?p=31685>.

the overall support among young Russians is still high).¹⁴ Photographs from the few anti-war rallies in Russian cities, which invariably end in crackdowns, show a disproportionately high number of young faces. People from this social group made up a significant part of the Russians who fled abroad with the outbreak of hostilities.¹⁵

It is necessary to highlight that for all the noticeable opposition of young Russians towards the authorities, loyalists still quantitatively prevailed among Russian youth all this time. In addition,¹⁶ the violent crackdown on rallies in 2021–22, the removal of independent candidates from participation in the elections in 2021, the persecution of civil activists and the blocking of websites¹⁷ and social networks had a strongly depressing effect on young Russians. Young participants in focus groups said that they often feel powerless: “we can’t say anything”, “you have to sit, you have to be silent”, “you know that you can’t do anything”. Many have learned that participating in protest rallies can result in a heavy fine, administrative arrest or criminal prosecution. As one young respondent put it: for an open expression of protest “now mean[s] either a fine or jail”.¹⁸ Perhaps the same feeling of insecurity and powerlessness drove many young Russians to emigrate in the immediate aftermath of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in early 2022.¹⁹

3. Thoughts about leaving Russia

Young people in Russia were well known for their willingness to go and live abroad well before the current conflict. In recent years young Russians were several times more likely than older generations to wish to live abroad.²⁰ Among young respondents, residents of the capital and the largest Russian cities are most actively interested in moving to another country.

¹⁴ Denis Volkov, “Can You Trust Russia’s Public Support for a ‘Military Operation’ in Ukraine?”, in *Riddle*, 12 April 2022, <https://ridl.io/?p=14653>.

¹⁵ Levada-Center, “The Conflict with Ukraine”, in *Levada-Center Press Releases*, 11 April 2022, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=27929>.

¹⁶ OK Russians, *Research: Anti-war Wave* [in Russian], March 2022, <https://research-march.okrussians.org>. See also Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD), *Russian Federation: Political Protests and Dissidence in the Context of the Ukraine Invasion*, Vienna, Austrian Red Cross/ACCORD, May 2022, https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2073690/ACCORD-2022-05-Russian_Federation_Protesters_and_Dissidents.pdf.

¹⁷ RosKomSvoboda, *More than 3,000 Websites Subjected to Military Censorship* [in Russian], 5 May 2022, <https://roskomsvoboda.org/post/voennaya-cenzura-3000-saytov>.

¹⁸ Andrei Kolesnikov and Denis Volkov, “Will a New Generation of Russians Modernize Their Country?”, in *Carnegie Moscow Commentaries*, 4 February 2022, <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/86355>.

¹⁹ According to some estimates, several hundred thousand people have left Russia since the beginning of conflict, and there were disproportionately many young people among them. See “RAEC Predicted the Departure of Up to 100 Thousand IT Specialists from Russia in April”, in *Interfax*, 22 March 2022, <https://www.interfax.ru/digital/830581>.

²⁰ Levada-Center, “Emigration Attitudes” [in Russian], in *Levada-Center Press Releases*, 6 April 2022, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=27902>.

However, it would be wrong to automatically turn all those thinking about life abroad into potential emigrants. Over the past three decades of regular sociological measurements, the number of people actually preparing to go abroad did not exceed 1 per cent of the country's population (at the beginning of observations, their number was closer to zero, in recent years it has been closer to 1 per cent; but among the youngest Russians it is consistently above 5 per cent). In other words, the desire to live abroad speaks not so much of the inevitability of departure, but of a person's fundamental openness to such an opportunity. Departure is considered as one of the possible life trajectories, which is not rejected in principle. Therefore, these sentiments should instead be interpreted as an indicator of the general openness of Russian society – primarily young Russians – to the bigger world.

Young Russians see Western countries as the main direction of their possible departure. In 2016, in answer to the open-ended question, young respondents named Germany, France, other EU countries or the United States as the most attractive destinations. The same countries were named as an attractive place for temporary work. And all that was in spite of sharp confrontation between Russia and the West, mutual reproaches and sanctions, and the conviction of the majority of the population that Russia should in no case succumb to outside pressure.

Young respondents are sure that in the West people live in abundance, have access to high-quality medicine and education, and are protected from arbitrariness. This image of a beautiful, well-fed and calm life is attractive to many young Russians. Of course, this happy image is in many ways just a mirror image of what Russian citizens do not find in their own country. Accordingly, respondents invariably cite "better living conditions abroad", "an unstable economic situation within their own country" and "the desire to provide children with a decent future" in the West as the main motives for a possible change of residence.²¹

For younger Russians, an important motive for thinking about emigration is their conviction that in the West there are more chances to build a successful career. Another motive that young Russians often voice is their concern about the political situation inside Russia and their confidence that in the West the rights of the ordinary people are observed better than in their own country.

A sympathetic attitude towards those who are going abroad is characteristic of many young people.²² Young respondents believed that "the most competitive people do not stay in Russia, but move to some other countries"; "there are more places where you can find a profession. In Russia it's very difficult to go to a good university or find a good job, because every good place is already taken"; "the more kilometres from here [the city of residence], the better – in a westerly direction". In

²¹ Ibid.

²² Andrei Kolesnikov and Denis Volkov, "Will a New Generation of Russians Modernize Their Country?", cit.

general, attitudes to those going abroad were positive. However, for a significant part of respondents leaving for the West seemed risky and not many were ready to undertake such a path themselves. This correlates well with the data of the cited quantitative surveys: alongside fairly common dreams of living abroad, there are invariably low rates of actual emigration.

The current wave of emigration from Russia, triggered by the start of Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine, also includes a significant number of the young Russian urban middle class.²³ Many of those who left did not agree with Russia's actions in Ukraine, were afraid of persecution for their views, were afraid of general military mobilisation or considered themselves superfluous among the majority of Russians who support the Russian political regime and the actions of the Russian military. It is worth emphasising that those who went abroad were those who could afford it financially – who had a sufficient amount of savings or whose work is not related to staying in the office (such as most IT specialists). The ability to quickly travel abroad was a privilege that a limited number of young Russians could afford.

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has not become an occasion for all young Russians to think about leaving. According to polls, the desire to leave the country amid the conflict has declined, including among the youngest. Two years ago, about half of Russians under 25 dreamed of moving abroad, but in March 2022 – only a quarter.²⁴ At the same time, there are still significantly more people among young Russians who want to leave than among representatives of the older generations.

It is worth noting that similar trends were observed in 2014, when at the height of the confrontation between Russia and the West, immediately after the annexation of Crimea to Russia and the start of the war in Eastern Ukraine, the views of young and old Russians on the issue of leaving converged for some time. The mobilisation of public opinion that has taken place has practically erased the differences that existed in society on many issues, including regarding attitudes towards America and Europe, and a possible departure abroad.

4. Attitude towards the West

The general rather positive attitude of young Russians towards the West is now being tested for strength against the backdrop of Western sanctions and attempts by the United States and European countries to isolate Russia. But even now Russian youth have a much more positive attitude towards the West than older

²³ The data in this study was obtained from a social media survey, which is not a representative survey method. However, to study a narrow hard-to-reach audience and to obtain an approximate composition of the studied audience, this method seems justified. See OK Russians, *Research: Anti-war Wave*, cit.

²⁴ Levada-Center, "Emigration Attitudes", cit.

generations. Thus, back in November 2021, about two-thirds of young Russians under 35 had a good attitude towards the United States and the European Union – three times better than Russians over 65 years old. Even now up to a quarter of young people have maintained a positive attitude towards Western countries (almost five times higher compared to the older age group).

As mentioned earlier, many young Russians are certain that in the West people live prosperously, protected from the arbitrariness of the authorities. When young people say in focus groups that they would like to live “like in the West”, “like in Europe”, they basically mean, first of all, material wealth and social security. The coveted image of a wealthy West is also a reflection of what young Russians do not find in their own country. In material well-being, legal protection and technological development, Russia seems to young respondents to be lagging behind the West. Only Moscow and, to a lesser extent, the largest Russian cities seem to them up to Western standards, but most of the country is not.

For young Russians, Europe and the United States are the source of fashion trends in clothing, music and cinema. For many of them, Western popular culture has become an integral part of their everyday experience. They are very familiar with Hollywood and HBO, and they watch Western TV series much more willingly than their parents do.²⁵ About a third of Russians under the age of 35 are fond of foreign pop music, hip-hop or techno, whereas the older generation prefers Soviet pop music and Russian folk songs.²⁶ Western culture has become an integral part of the identity of the younger generation in Russia.

However, more detailed conversations about Western countries in focus groups usually revealed very superficial and clichéd ideas that young Russians have about life in the West, about the socio-political structure and culture of Western countries. Moreover, interest in Western culture and lifestyle does not automatically translate into support for Western policy towards Russia. Distrust of the motives of European and US governments often was reflected in the words of a significant number of young participants in focus groups, especially outside the major cities. Every time international relations were discussed, there were always young people who said that “we need to be tougher” with America and Europe, because “they don’t understand otherwise”.

In 2014–15, during the first Russo-Ukrainian conflict and the confrontation between Russia and the West, most young Russians showed just as strong anti-Western sentiments as older generations. A significant part of young Russians then turned out to be just as inclined to patriotic mobilisation as the rest of the population (we observe similar sentiments today). But if the representatives of the

²⁵ Levada-Center, “Foreign Series” [in Russian], in *Levada-Center Press Releases*, 24 July 2019, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=21027>.

²⁶ Levada-Center, “Musical Preferences” [in Russian], in *Levada-Center Press Releases*, 18 February 2019, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=19866>.

older generations after 2014 for a long time retained a negative attitude towards the United States and Europe, young Russians began to show positive attitudes towards the West after just a couple of years.

However, even with their positive attitudes towards the United States and Europe in 2016–21, most young people believed that Russia should position itself as a “great power” and did not regret taking Crimea from Ukraine. Many young people welcomed improved relations between Russia and the West, but were not ready to apologise for their country’s actions or seek compromise with Western countries. Along with calls for cooperation with Europe and America, focus groups of young people often revealed opinions that Russia should remain an “independent”, “separate territory”, free from international structures and obligations.

This isolationist attitude is not due only to the effect of the narrative of state TV. At least in part, it is rooted in the opinion widely spread among young Russians that in the West “no one is waiting for us”; “they do not like us.” In the eyes of young people, rapprochement between Russia and the West is hindered by a sense of the backwardness and weakness of their own country. Many believe that if relations on an equal footing are not possible, it is better to stay apart.

5. Between two fires

Russian youth’s views often differ from those of the generation of their parents and grandparents. Young people in Russia have long mastered the Internet, they watch less TV, which means they are potentially less vulnerable to state propaganda and can be more independent in their judgment about what is happening. For the last three or four years, young people have been noticeably more critical of the Russian authorities and quite actively expressed their protest (though not all young people shared these sentiments). Young people in Russia are much more open to the bigger world, are interested in Western popular culture and generally have a much friendlier attitude towards the Western countries. Even in the context of acute geopolitical conflicts (as in 2014 and today), young Russians are friendlier to the West than older generations are.

In other words, in recent years, the views of young Russians on politics, relations with other countries and ideas about the West have increasingly come into conflict with the views of the older generation. At the same time, a large number of older Russians condemn the tastes and ideas of the younger generation. Ordinary older people in focus groups and Russian statesmen in their speeches increasingly say about their children and young people in general: “they are not like us”, they are “ill-mannered”, “mercantile”, “spiritual”, “unpatriotic”, “naive”, and therefore susceptible to the propaganda of the hostile West; they “do not understand life”, “have not matured yet”. After these complaints lamentations usually follow: “a little more and we will lose our youth”. Which means that they should be “reprimanded”, “re-educated” and returned to the “right track” as soon as possible, “before it is too

late”.

The solution is often seen to be re-establishing patriotic education, ideological pumping, the return of political information lessons to schools, the harsh dispersal of protests and the blocking of social networks. The broad support for such measures among the representatives of the older generation of Russians suggests that it is not only about Russian elites trying to retain power, but also about the anxiety of the wider public in this generational conflict.

With the beginning of the current conflict between Russia and Western countries that support Ukraine, Russian youth (at least its most Westernised part) found itself between two fires. On the one side there is pressure from Russian authorities, which has only intensified against the backdrop of foreign policy confrontation. On the other side there are Western sanctions aimed at isolating Russia from the outside world. The implications of these sanctions have yet to be explored, but it is already clear that young Russians will be among those who will suffer most.

The withdrawal of some Western brands from Russia, the inability to use Mastercard and Visa to travel abroad and shop online, and the cancellation of international educational projects will be the most painful, primarily for that part of the population that is most Westernised and most sympathetic towards the West – young Russians from the major cities. Particularly affected by these financial constraints will be those who fled abroad at the start of the conflict. For the majority of the country’s population, especially for older Russians who have never been abroad and who are suspicious of the West, these sanctions are likely to be less painful. Time will tell if this will lead to a reassessment of young Russians’ attitudes toward the West.

Updated 24 May 2022

References

Aleksandra Arkhipova, Alexei Zakharov and Irina Kozlova, "Protest Mobilisation – 2021: Who Went to Protest and Why" [in Russian], in *Liberal Mission Foundation Expertises*, 7 September 2021, <https://liberal.ru/?p=31685>

Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD), *Russian Federation: Political Protests and Dissidence in the Context of the Ukraine Invasion*, Vienna, Austrian Red Cross/ACCORD, May 2022, https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2073690/ACCORD-2022-05-Russian_Federation_Protesters_and_Dissidents.pdf

Lev Gudkov, "Who Voted for Amendments to the Constitution: Final Poll" [in Russian], in *Levada-Center Press Releases*, 7 August 2020, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=23347>

Lev Gudkov et al., "Generation Z: Young People of the Putin Era" [in Russian], in *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniya* [The Russian Public Opinion Herald], No. 1-2 (2020), p. 21-121, <https://www.levada.ru/cp/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/vom1-2020.pdf>

Andrei Kolesnikov and Denis Volkov, "Will a New Generation of Russians Modernize Their Country?", in *Carnegie Moscow Commentaries*, 4 February 2022, <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/86355>

Levada-Center, "The Conflict with Ukraine", in *Levada-Center Press Releases*, 11 April 2022, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=27929>

Levada-Center, "Emigration Attitudes" [in Russian], in *Levada-Center Press Releases*, 6 April 2022, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=27902>

Levada-Center, "Foreign Series" [in Russian], in *Levada-Center Press Releases*, 24 July 2019, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=21027>

Levada-Center, "Internet, Social Networks and Blocking", in *Levada-Center Press Releases*, 27 May 2022, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=28181>

Levada-Center, "Internet, Social Networks, VPN", in *Levada-Center Press Releases*, 22 April 2022, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=28029>

Levada-Center, "Musical Preferences" [in Russian], in *Levada-Center Press Releases*, 18 February 2019, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=19866>

Levada-Center, "Navalny's Poisoning", in *Levada-Center Press Releases*, 1 February 2021, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=24383>

OK Russians, *Research: Anti-war Wave* [in Russian], March 2022, <https://research-march.okrussians.org>

Vadim Radayev, "Millennials Compared to Previous Generations: An Empirical Analysis" [in Russian], in *Sociological Studies*, No. 3 (2018), p. 15-33, <http://socis.isras.ru/article/7095>

Svetlana Reiter, "Toxic Assets", in *Meduza*, 6 May 2022, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2022/05/06/toxic-assets>

Reporters Without Borders, "Russia", in *2022 World Press Freedom Index. A New Era of Polarisation*, 2022, <https://rsf.org/en/country/russia>

RosKomSvoboda, *More than 3,000 Websites Subjected to Military Censorship* [in Russian], 5 May 2022, <https://roskomsvoboda.org/post/voennaya-cenzura-3000-saytov>

Denis Volkov, "Belarusian Mirror: Why the Events in Minsk Caused a Sharp Reaction in Russia" [in Russian], in *Forbes*, 7 September 2020, <https://www.forbes.ru/obshchestvo/408391-belorusskoe-zerkalo-pochemu-sobytiya-v-minske-vyzvali-ostruyu-reakciyu-v-rossii>

Denis Volkov, "Can You Trust Russia's Public Support for a 'Military Operation' in Ukraine?", in *Riddle*, 12 April 2022, <https://ridl.io/?p=14653>

Denis Volkov, "Disappointment without Consequences: Why Voters Are Not Interested in Duma Elections" [in Russian], in *Forbes*, 19 August 2021, <https://www.forbes.ru/obshchestvo/437461-razocharovanie-bez-posledstviy-pochemu-izbirateli-ne-zhdut-vyborov-v-dumu>

Denis Volkov, "Servant of the People: How Sergei Furgal Became One of the Presidential Candidates Suitable for Russians" [in Russian], in *Forbes*, 4 August 2020, <https://www.forbes.ru/obshchestvo/406349-sluga-naroda-kak-sergey-furgal-popal-v-chislo-podhodyashchih-dlya-rossiyan>

Denis Volkov et al., "Russian Media Landscape – 2021" [in Russian], in *Levada-Center Analytical Reports*, 5 August 2021, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=26213>

Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) is a private, independent non-profit think tank, founded in 1965 on the initiative of Altiero Spinelli. IAI seeks to promote awareness of international politics and to contribute to the advancement of European integration and multilateral cooperation. Its focus embraces topics of strategic relevance such as European integration, security and defence, international economics and global governance, energy, climate and Italian foreign policy; as well as the dynamics of cooperation and conflict in key geographical regions such as the Mediterranean and Middle East, Asia, Eurasia, Africa and the Americas. IAI publishes an English-language quarterly (*The International Spectator*), an online webzine (*AffarInternazionali*), three book series (*Global Politics and Security*, *Quaderni IAI* and *IAI Research Studies*) and some papers' series related to IAI research projects (*Documenti IAI*, *IAI Papers*, etc.).

Via dei Montecatini, 17 - I-00186 Rome, Italy

T +39 06 6976831

iai@iai.it

www.iai.it

Latest IAI PAPERS

Director: Riccardo Alcaro (r.alcaro@iai.it)

- 22 | 14 Denis Volkov, *Russian Youth: Their Attitude to the Ruling Elite and Political Processes*
- 22 | 13 Dario Cristiani, *An Overview of the Current State of US-Italian Political-Security Relations*
- 22 | 12 Adriana Castagnoli, *The US–Italy Economic Relations in a Divided World*
- 22 | 11 Pier Paolo Raimondi, *Eastern Mediterranean Energy Resources between Energy Security and Energy Transition: A Regional Perspective*
- 22 | 10 Marcello Di Filippo, *The EU's Engagement with Latin America: The Case of Colombia*
- 22 | 09 Leo Goretti, *The Sporting Sanctions against Russia: Debunking the Myth of Sport's Neutrality*
- 22 | 08 Bernardo Venturi, *The EU's Diplomatic Engagement in the Sahel*
- 22 | 07 Massimo Deandreis, Alessandro Panaro and Olimpia Ferrara, *Maritime Scenario in the Mediterranean: Analysis of the Competitiveness and Investments of the Major Logistics Players*
- 22 | 06 Fabrizio Coticchia and Andrea Ruggeri, *An International Peacekeeper. The Evolution of Italian Foreign and Defence Policy*
- 22 | 05 Daniele Fattibene and Alice Fill, *Putting Development at the Centre of G20 Policy Agenda: Lessons for the T20*

Legislation as a Tool for Expanding the Power of the State and Limiting Political and Civil Rights in Modern Russia

by Olga Romanova

ABSTRACT

The whole world is now witnessing what Russian lawmaking of previous years has led to. The aggression against Ukraine is a direct consequence of the suppression of any dissent in Russia, formalised by the parliament as laws. Russian legislators – who got into parliament as a result of not only electoral fraud, but also laws that place insuperable obstacles in front of not only the opposition, but also any sane citizens with dignity who seek election to the State Duma – easily stamp out any Kremlin legislative initiative. It is they who make it possible not only to pass repressive laws that suppress civil society in Russia, but also to make decisions that put the whole world on the brink of a large-scale war and a real nuclear catastrophe. Russian legislators bear direct responsibility for unleashing this war.

Russia | Human rights | NGOs | Mass media

keywords

Legislation as a Tool for Expanding the Power of the State and Limiting Political and Civil Rights in Modern Russia

by Olga Romanova*

1. Brief history of lawmaking as a tool for expanding the power in post-soviet Russia

Legislative activity in Russia is quite intensive, and we can observe a steady upward trend. Whereas the State Duma in place from 1995 until 2000 passed 876 legislative acts, the 7th State Duma (2016–2021) passed more than 2,500 federal laws. Indeed, such intensity and the nature of the adopted legislative acts themselves secured the State Duma of the Russian Federation the sobriquet “the mad printer”. It is significant that the most important laws are passed mostly without discussion and public discourse. This principle underlying the work of the Putin’s Duma was clearly formulated back in 2003 by its then chairman Boris Gryzlov: “Parliament is not a place for discussions”.¹

If we speak specifically about the 20-year period of the Russian parliament’s work “under Putin” – more precisely, the 21 years under Putin and their impact on civil society – it becomes quite obvious that the most important laws in this sense were adopted over the past ten years. In Putin’s first decade, the formation of a modern civil society in Russia was taking place. During these years, independent

¹ Russian State Duma, *Transcript of the Meeting No. 1 (715)* [in Russian], 29 December 2003, <http://transcript.duma.gov.ru/node/1386/>. See also Alexey Levchenko, “Not a Place for Discussions” [in Russian], in *Gazeta.ru*, 15 November 2007, <https://archive.ph/20120730205351/www.gazeta.ru/politics/elections2007/articles/2311346.shtml>.

* Olga Romanova is a Russian journalist and a director of the civil rights organisation Russia Behind Bars.

Paper produced in the framework of the project “L’impegno selettivo dell’Ue con la Russia: come sostenere la società civile e migliorare i contatti tra le persone (people-to people)”. This paper has benefited from the financial support of the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation and of the Policy Planning Unit of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation pursuant to art. 23-bis of Presidential Decree 18/1967. The views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation or the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

media already existed and were developing in Russia, although in the middle of the 2000s a significant attack on freedom of speech began. Oppositional or partly oppositional political parties appeared and even took part in the elections, such as the Union of Right Forces or the Parnassus party, created by Boris Nemtsov and former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov. Non-governmental organisations and charitable foundations were being created, and began to take part in public life. An environmental movement as well as animal rights activism appeared, and Public Monitoring Commissions began to work in places of deprivation of liberty. Mass rallies (for example, in defence of the NTV channel) and major political speeches, including those of a radical nature (supporters of national Bolshevism, led by the writer Eduard Limonov, were especially distinguished here) were not uncommon.

Public activism, however, was not popular until around 2010. This period is considered to be the time of "Putin's glamour": high prices for oil and gas, coupled with a favourable foreign policy environment, made it possible to raise household incomes, the government's rating was high, and Russians were curious about the world and new opportunities.

It is generally recognised that the events of 2010 represent the beginning of mass social activity. The well-known Russian political scientist Ekaterina Schulman notes:

It is believed that the catalyst point, after which quantity turned into quality, after which the growth of social ties and the growth of civil interaction skills acquired a qualitatively new character, was 2010 – the year of great fires in Siberia and Central Russia. It was in that year that citizens realised that they could help those who were in trouble, that they could complement and in many ways replace inefficient state structures, they felt the joy of joint action, which is actually what brings people to activities of non-profit organizations.²

It is characteristic that during this period the authorities and structures of civil society tried to interact with each other, and often quite successfully. Thanks to this, during the period of the "Medvedev thaw" (the years of Dmitry Medvedev's presidency, 2008–2012), much changed for the better in Russian legislation. As Schulman notes,

Helping the seriously ill, cancer patients pain relief, guardianship and trusteeship reforms, reorganization of orphanages – all this is done with the help of those public organizations that can and know how to impose their agenda (speaking in terms of lobbying) on state structures, through such structures as public councils at ministries, expert councils, working

² Ekaterina Shulman, "Parallel to the State: The Birth of Civil Society from Fire and Water" [in Russian], lecture 22 in course *Return of the State. Political History of Russia 2000-2012*, 6 June 2020, <https://openuni.io/course/6-course-5/lesson/22>.

groups under the relevant ministers and deputy prime ministers.³

In parallel with this, however, other processes also took place. Back in the mid-2000s, the State Duma began to adopt minor amendments to the basic law (1996) on non-profit organisations, which limited the participation of foreign individuals in non-profit organisations (NPOs), and later foreign NPOs. These amendments gave the Ministry of Justice additional rights regarding the registration of new organisations, but this did not cause much public concern, and especially as the Ministry of Justice did not abuse this right.

At that time the law on fighting against extremism, adopted back in 2002, also did not cause much concern. This law introduced into the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation a whole conglomeration of criminal articles aimed at anti-extremist activities: Articles 280 "Public calls for extremist activity", 282.1, "Establishment of an extremist organization" and 282.2 "Organising activities of an extremist organization". That is to say, back in 2002 Russian legislation included the concept of thought crimes as extremist crimes, according to which a citizen and an organisation can be prosecuted for appeals, for statements and for disseminating information. However, this did not make a big impression on the active part of society for quite a long time. According to judicial and criminal statistics, real imprisonment and other restrictions under Articles 280–282 of the Criminal Code until 2012 affected mostly nationalists.

We can name the exact date in Russian history when everything changed dramatically. It was 24 September 2011. At the party convention of United Russia, it was announced that Vladimir Putin would again go to the presidential elections, and Dmitry Medvedev would head the party list in the Duma elections – because Putin and Medvedev had "agreed" on this ahead of time. This frank public announcement shocked the citizens, and they began to sign up en masse as election observers.

Electoral fraud became so obvious that on the day of the parliamentary elections, 4 December 2011, the first major protest took place in Moscow. The large-scale protests against electoral fraud in 2011–2012 made a strong impression on the current government and, apparently, on Vladimir Putin personally. Over the next ten years, parliament passed several dozen repressive laws designed to completely suppress civil and political activity in Russia.

2. Foreign Agents Law

The concept of the "foreign agent" originally appeared in 2012 in the law "On non-profit organisations" and referred to NPOs that: a) receive foreign funding (money

³ Ibid.

or property from foreign states, international or foreign organisations, foreign citizens, stateless persons, etc.); or b) participate in political activities, including in the interests of foreign sources.

According to the law, foreign agents must register as such with the Ministry of Justice and indicate their status in all publications in the media and on the Internet. Those who do not obey will face fines and forced liquidation. In addition, foreign agents must file special reports, the rules of which are often changed retroactively so that it is physically impossible to comply with them – for this you need to have a time machine or a full-time diviner.

It is quite easy to shut down an organisation recognised as a foreign agent by a court; worldwide fame and recognition did not save the oldest Russian human rights organisation Memorial, founded by Andrei Sakharov, from liquidation. For this, not only are formal and far-fetched reasons sufficient – as practice shows, it can be done without a reason. The author of this report is the head of the Russia Behind Bars human rights foundation, which was included in the list of foreign agents back in 2016. I testify that the lawyers of the organisation in the past two years have not been able to prove the illegality of a single fine imposed on the organisation in courts, despite the fact that we often still manage to win in courts related to the protection of the rights of citizens, although it is becoming more and more difficult to do this every day. At the same time, the amount of the fines each time endangers the very existence of the organisation.

In 2017, in response by the requirement of the US Department of Justice for Russia Today and Sputnik (Russian state-controlled media) to register as foreign agents, the Duma passed its own law introducing the concept of media outlet as foreign agent. According to the new version of Article 6 of the media law, the Ministry of Justice can recognise any foreign media that receives funding or property from “foreign authorities” or citizens, whether directly or through Russian legal entities, as a foreign agent. Such foreign media agents are equated in their duties with foreign NPOs. The register of recognised foreign media/foreign agents is maintained by the Ministry of Justice. By February 2022, there were 115 such foreign agents on the register. Thus, as of now, the term “foreign agent” is applied not only to non-profit organisations, but also to the media, as well as to individuals.

In 2018, the State Duma adopted amendments to this law, which provide for the recognition of an individual as a foreign agent if the individual distributes materials to an unlimited number of people and receives foreign funding. The amendments to the second reading made it possible to include in this category those who distribute any messages and media materials of foreign agents or those who participate in the creation of these materials and at the same time receive funding from abroad. Thus, journalists who work in media already recognised as foreign agents in Russia could be recognised as individual foreign agents (by 2019 these included Voice of America, Radio Liberty, Current Time, Tataro-Bashkir Service of Radio Liberty, Siberia.Realii, Idel.Realii, North.Realii, Factograph, Kavkaz.Realii and Crimea.Realii).

The right to selectively determine the people who will be included in the list of "agents" was vested in the Ministry of Justice and the Foreign Ministry. According to the amendments, an individual can be recognised not just as a foreign agent, but as a foreign mass media acting as a foreign agent, and within a month this individual is obliged to establish a Russian legal entity and notify the authorities about it. The risk zone included journalists working in media recognised as foreign agents, citizens working in companies with foreign funding, or scientists who received foreign grants. However, the actual reach extended well beyond this zone, as the practice of law enforcement has shown.

On 28 December 2020, the Russian Ministry of Justice published the first list of individuals recognised as media foreign agents, and number one on this list was the oldest Russian human rights activist Lev Ponomarev (aged 81), who had never worked in the media. A day after that Vladimir Putin signed a law "establishing additional measures to counter threats to national security", which provides for the possibility of recognising as foreign agents public associations that operate without forming a legal entity. The first such organisation was the "Voice" movement, which is engaged in election monitoring. The movement "For Human Rights" and the Committee against Torture were also included in the register. Despite the negative perception of the foreign agent legislation on the part of both the Russian and the international public, attempts at legal resistance have not yet been successful.

Meanwhile, many Russian human rights organisations and charitable foundations have been forced to stop their work due being assigned this status. Also, a number of well-known Russian public figures, having received the status of foreign agent, have been forced to leave the country. Among them are writer Viktor Shenderovich, lawyer Ivan Pavlov, and Pyotr Verzilov and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova from Pussy Riot. The leading opposition media in Russia, for example the TV Rain channel, were recognised as foreign agents. On the sixth day of the war with Ukraine, TV Rain was simply turned off, as was the Echo of Moscow radio station.

3. Undesirable Organisations Law

In 2015, the term "undesirable organisation" was introduced into Russian legislation. It was understood as a foreign or international organisation that poses a threat to the defence capability or security of the state, or to public order, or to the health of the population. In order to protect the foundations of the constitutional order, morality, and the rights and legitimate interests of others, after being recognised as undesirable, a ban and restrictions would be imposed on the activities of any such organisation.

The law on undesirable organisations was passed very quickly, and as a result, many well-known and respected foreign non-governmental organisations were

forced to leave Russia. As of today there are 55 organisations on the list, including all organisations connected in one way or another with Mikhail Khodorkovsky.⁴

In December 2021 under the threat of blocking, the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media – Roskomnadzor forced a number of Russian media to remove news based on investigations by the Russian publication Proekt (recognised as an undesirable organisation). The investigations concerned real estate and other property, which (according to the publication) is owned or used by high-ranking Russian officials and their families.

4. Freedom of assembly and protest laws

Freedom of assembly is enshrined in the Constitution of the Russian Federation (Article 31). In 2004, the Law "On meetings, rallies, demonstrations, marches and pickets" was adopted. Russian laws prohibit holding mass actions unless they have been agreed upon with the authorities. At the same time, the deadlines for agreement are inconvenient: it is allowed to notify the authorities about an upcoming rally no later than ten days before the action and three days before picketing. Without approval from the government only single pickets are allowed, and even then not necessarily. But even an action agreed upon with the authorities is not safe. It is almost impossible to predict the behaviour of police officers. For example, the agreed-upon march and rally on 6 May 2012 ended in harsh arrests and initiation of a criminal case, the investigation of which lasted for many years. Conversely, the uncoordinated mass rally in support of the arrested governor Sergei Furgal in Khabarovsk in June 2020 and the March of Mothers in support of the defendants in the "New Greatness" case in August 2018 did not have a single detention.

When an action is not officially agreed upon, the law prohibits the dissemination of information about it. The "organisation" of uncoordinated public events, which is sometimes understood simply as the dissemination of information about them in social networks, leads to significant fines and arrests. More often, in connection with actions, protocols are drawn up on violation of the procedure for holding a public event under Article 20.2 of the Code of Administrative Offenses.

Over the past ten years, this article has been repeatedly edited, introducing new prohibitions and adding greater punitive measures. During this time, the number of parts in the article has grown from three to ten, the minimum fine for a participant has grown from 1 to 10 thousand rubles, and punishment has appeared in the form of compulsory work and arrests for participating in an uncoordinated action. The most severe punishment is provided for a repeated violation under this

⁴ For a current list of organisations, see Wikipedia, *List of Undesirable Organisations* [in Russian], https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Список_нежелательных_организаций.

article: a fine of 150 to 300 thousand rubles (up to 3,000 euros, which is a huge and unbearable amount for the average Russian), compulsory work (from 40 to 200 hours) or arrest (5 to 30 days).

In 2014, the new article Article 212.1 was introduced into the Criminal Code. Its introduction makes possible, for participation in more than three uncoordinated actions within six months or for other repeated violations of the rules for holding a public event, a penalty of up to 5 years in prison. This article was first applied in December 2015: activist Ildar Dadin was sentenced to three years in prison. In September 2019, activist Konstantin Kotov was sentenced to four years in prison for five peaceful actions. In 2017 and 2020, the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation raised the question of the constitutionality of such harsh liability for participation in peaceful actions, but both times the article was not recognised as contrary to the Constitution.

5. Anti-extremism laws as laws prohibiting the freedom of conscience and free expression of the will

In Russia, the legal definition of what actions are considered extremist is contained in Article 1 of the Federal Law "On counteracting extremist activity" applied on 25 July 2002. This law has been repeatedly criticised, including by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. The vagueness of the wording was noted, allowing one to interpret anything as extremism. However, no clarifications were made.

In 2017, the Ministry of Justice recognised Jehovah's Witnesses as extremists, and the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation confirmed their extremism. As a result, hundreds of adherents received serious criminal terms in Russia as extremists. All of them were recognised as prisoners of conscience by the Memorial Human Rights Center, which was later given the status of foreign agent and liquidated in March 2022.

In May 2021, State Duma deputies from the Commission for Investigating the Facts of Interference by Foreign States in Russia's Internal Affairs submitted to the parliament a law banning individuals involved in the activities of extremist organisations from running in elections for the State Duma. Moreover, the ban on running also applied to those who collaborated with the organisation even before it was recognised as extremist. Within a month, the law was adopted and signed by Vladimir Putin. This made it possible to prevent everyone who was somehow connected with the organisations of Alexei Navalny from participating in the 2021 parliamentary elections. All these organisations were also later recognised as extremist and liquidated.

6. "Gay Propaganda" Law

Russia abolished the criminal punishment for sodomy in 1993 (it never applied to women). But ten years later, Putin's parliament made repeated attempts to legally ban the so-called "gay agenda". In 2013, the State Duma passed a law supplementing the Code of Administrative Violations with an article establishing liability for "propaganda on non-traditional sexual relations among minors".⁵ Many foreign public men's and international organisations condemned these bans, calling them discriminatory. In 2017, the European Court of Human Rights found Russian laws on homosexual propaganda to be a violation of the right to freedom of expression, pointing to the vague definitions in the legislation and the arbitrary nature of their application.

In the period 2013–2014, the State Duma also discussed or adopted other laws related to LGBT people. In just two days after signing the law banning propaganda on non-traditional relationships, Vladimir Putin signed a law banning the adoption, guardianship and trusteeship of children by individuals who are in a relationship with a person of the same sex. The law was passed to protect children from the "artificial imposition of non-traditional sexual behaviour".

In 2020, Vladimir Putin personally met with the working group on the preparation of amendments to the Constitution. During the meeting he noted that it would be correct to formalise the concept of marriage exclusively as the union of a man and a woman. This is exactly how it was included in the new Constitution, which also reset the counter to zero for Putin's presidential terms.

7. Law on Educational Activities

The bill legislating educational activities was submitted to the State Duma at the end of 2020 and, despite strong public resistance, it was adopted and entered into force on 1 June 2021. The law very broadly interprets the concept of "educational activity", as the activity of all subjects who in one way or another transmit educational and disciplinary information to other people. In particular, it targets YouTube bloggers who publish educational and popular science content, publicists, Instagram bloggers, writers, publishers, journalists, TV presenters, and more. Their activities now fall under the control of officials. The explanatory note states that the law "is meant to protect Russian citizens, primarily schoolchildren and students, from anti-Russian propaganda presented under the guise of educational activities".

To legally engage in educational activities, companies and citizens must meet certain criteria: they must be of legal age; take part in the implementation of

⁵ Wikipedia, *Russian Gay Propaganda Law*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_gay_propaganda_law.

socially significant initiatives; carry out educational or public awareness activities for at least two years; and they must not have restrictions on educational work (for example, a criminal record). Naturally, educational organisations must not be included in the register of non-profit organisations recognised as a foreign agent; they must not have debts on taxes, fees and other obligatory payments; and the organisations should report on their activities on the Internet.

Educational activities can only be carried out on the basis of a contract. The contract must be concluded with an educational / scientific organisation or a cultural institution (depending on the scope of educational work). Simply put, the law requires permission to run a knitting class, a drawing workshop or tax webinars. If companies or individuals do not meet these criteria, they will not be able to enter into a contract to conduct educational work and, accordingly, will not be able to engage in it.

The law hit first of all such organisations as the Sakharov Center – those who were engaged in civic education, education on legal awareness and the protection of human rights.

8. Laws of the wartime

On 5 March 2022, both chambers of the Russian parliament adopted a law, which was signed by Vladimir Putin, introducing criminal liability for disseminating false information about the Russian Armed Forces, statements that discredit them, and calls for sanctions on Russia. The law now adds to the Criminal Code a new article 207.3 “Public dissemination of deliberately false information about the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation”. For such actions, the document provides for a fine of up to 1.5 million rubles (about 15 thousand euros) or up to three years in prison. A job title, mercenary motives or motives of political, racial and other hostility can become aggravating factors. In this case, the amount of the fine can increase to 5 million (50 thousand euros), and the term of imprisonment can be five to ten years. Further, if the spread of “fake news” has led to serious consequences, the prison term will be from ten to 15 years.

In addition, the Criminal Code introduces liability for “public actions aimed at discrediting the use of the Russian Armed Forces in order to protect the interests of Russia and its citizens, maintain international peace and security” (Article 280.3). Sanctions are also provided for public calls against the use of the army for these purposes.

Overall, any information that the authorities may not like may be recognised as false or discrediting the use of the Russian armed forces, including calls to stop the war.

The law actually introduces strict military censorship. On the day of its adoption, many independent media, which had not yet been closed at the request of the prosecutor's office and not blocked by Roskomnadzor, shut down. Some of the independent media, such as Novaya Gazeta, publicly refused to publish materials about the war.

Bloggers or people managing accounts on social networks are also under the threat of reprisals. Since the law applies not only to journalists and bloggers, but to all Russian citizens, many were forced to close their social media accounts.

Particular attention should be given to the sobering fact that the law was adopted unanimously by the State Duma.

Conclusion

Thus, it can be stated that repressions against the active part of civil society in Russia have intensified over the past 20 years and have now reached their climax. The suppression of civil activity has led to the closure of many public and human rights organisations in Russia, an increase in the number of political prisoners and an increase in emigration from Russia – and has completely eliminated freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, expression of will and freedom of assembly. Any protest actions, including the expression of thoughts and beliefs, are severely prosecuted, and a legislative framework has been laid down for these persecutions. The participants in these repressions against Russian citizens will be able to employ that historically well-used excuse: "I did everything according to the law".

Updated 13 June 2022

Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) is a private, independent non-profit think tank, founded in 1965 on the initiative of Altiero Spinelli. IAI seeks to promote awareness of international politics and to contribute to the advancement of European integration and multilateral cooperation. Its focus embraces topics of strategic relevance such as European integration, security and defence, international economics and global governance, energy, climate and Italian foreign policy; as well as the dynamics of cooperation and conflict in key geographical regions such as the Mediterranean and Middle East, Asia, Eurasia, Africa and the Americas. IAI publishes an English-language quarterly (*The International Spectator*), an online webzine (*AffarInternazionali*), three book series (*Global Politics and Security*, *Quaderni IAI* and *IAI Research Studies*) and some papers' series related to IAI research projects (*Documenti IAI*, *IAI Papers*, etc.).

Via dei Montecatini, 17 - I-00186 Rome, Italy

T +39 06 6976831

iai@iai.it

www.iai.it

Latest IAI PAPERS

Director: Riccardo Alcaro (r.alcaro@iai.it)

- 22 | 16 Olga Romanova, *Legislation as a Tool for Expanding the Power of the State and Limiting Political and Civil Rights in Modern Russia*
- 22 | 15 Nathalie Tocci, *Why Ukraine (and Moldova) Must Become EU Candidates*
- 22 | 14 Denis Volkov, *Russian Youth: Their Attitude to the Ruling Elite and Political Processes*
- 22 | 13 Dario Cristiani, *An Overview of the Current State of US-Italian Political-Security Relations*
- 22 | 12 Adriana Castagnoli, *The US-Italy Economic Relations in a Divided World*
- 22 | 11 Pier Paolo Raimondi, *Eastern Mediterranean Energy Resources between Energy Security and Energy Transition: A Regional Perspective*
- 22 | 10 Marcello Di Filippo, *The EU's Engagement with Latin America: The Case of Colombia*
- 22 | 09 Leo Goretti, *The Sporting Sanctions against Russia: Debunking the Myth of Sport's Neutrality*
- 22 | 08 Bernardo Venturi, *The EU's Diplomatic Engagement in the Sahel*
- 22 | 07 Massimo Deandreis, Alessandro Panaro and Olimpia Ferrara, *Maritime Scenario in the Mediterranean: Analysis of the Competitiveness and Investments of the Major Logistics Players*

Gender Issues in Russia

by Marina Pisklakova-Parker

ABSTRACT

Gender inequality in the Russian Federation has been growing in the past few years due to the lack of a clear state policy addressing the problem and a rise in propaganda of so-called “traditional values”, which are patriarchal attitudes towards role division for women and men. This has resulted in the increased vulnerability of women, including the growth of violence against women, discrimination at work and lack of opportunities in politics. As the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated, this patriarchal role division has made women even more vulnerable, doubling their load of household work and increasing domestic violence. Women’s organisations are at the forefront of providing services to victims of violence, educating the public and advocating for change. The recent so-called “special operation” in Ukraine has also demonstrated that women in Russia are actively protesting, organising themselves to help the Ukrainian people and building resistance.

Russia | Women | Coronavirus | NGOs | Domestic policy

keywords

Gender Issues in Russia

by Marina Pisklakova-Parker*

1. Women in Russia

Article 19 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation states that: 1. Everyone is equal before the law and the court; 2. The state guarantees the equality of human and civil rights and freedoms regardless of *gender*, race, nationality, language, origin, property and official status, place of residence, attitude to religion, beliefs, membership in public associations, as well as other circumstances.¹

In the past few years, gender equality in Russia has been declining according to the Global Gender Gap Index ranking published by the World Economic Forum, where Russia moved down from 75th to 81st place.²

What is more, according to the scorecard published by the “Women, Business and Law” Project of the World Bank, Russia scores 73.1 out of 100, which is lower than the average regional score of 84.1 observed across Europe and Central Asia.³

Gender discrimination in Russia is officially recognised to a certain extent in such areas as the labour market, political participation and career advancement, but it is denied in the family area, in situations of violence against women and in the reproductive sphere.

¹ Russian Government website: *Constitution of the Russian Federation*, <http://archive.government.ru/eng/gov/base/54.html>. Emphasis added.

² World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*, December 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality>.

³ World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law Economy Snapshots: Russian Federation*, March 2022, <https://wbl.worldbank.org/content/dam/documents/wbl/2022/snapshots/Russian-federation.pdf>.

* Marina Pisklakova-Parker is a Chief of Global Partnerships at Every Woman Coalition and founder of ANNA Center.

Paper produced in the framework of the project “The EU’s selective engagement with Russia”. This paper has benefited from the financial support of the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation and of the Policy Planning Unit of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation pursuant to art. 23-bis of Presidential Decree 18/1967. The views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation or the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

Some of the main problems for women in Russia are the following:

- Wages: Women's wages are 28 per cent less than those of men for the same type of employment;⁴
- Safety: According to statistics from the national helpline of the ANNA Center, domestic violence is on the rise especially since it has been decriminalised, in addition to sexualised violence and sexual harassment;⁵
- The feminisation of poverty: Single mothers are still one of the poorest population groups, and are not socially and financially protected; single women take maternity leave; women with young children are reluctant to work; and women often do not receive career promotion due to a biased attitude to motherhood as an unstable labour force;⁶
- Gender stereotypes and sexism: Women are forced to reckon with the "norm" and "special women's duty" dictated by society instead of focusing on their actual tendencies and talents.⁷

However, gender discrimination cannot exist merely in selective areas, as it is a systemic characteristic of the gender order. In modern Russian society, both ordinary citizens and those who make decisions at the state level are subject to the influence of the most common (traditional) gender stereotypes, which leads to contradictions in social policy. The patriarchal renaissance observed in Russia and the consolidation of existing gender stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes in the public mind has a significant impact on the persistence and indeed growth of gender inequality.

At the same time, gender stereotypes and practices are promoted by the Orthodox church and by the state in the form of public calls for the preservation of so-called traditional family values, which in essence are the household rules (*domostroy*) formulated in the 15th century. This is an attempt to replace the achievements in equality gained during the Soviet period with rigid rules that were created 500 years ago, thereby increasing the vulnerability of women. The approach is visible in different areas from family life to labour rights, to reproductive health, to the political participation of women. Sometimes discrimination is explained by motives of "care for women".

For example, as of 2021, women are again allowed to work as train drivers in the subway. In the Moscow Metro, women have been driving electric trains since 1936, but in the early 1980s, a ban was introduced on hiring new female employees in

⁴ "Study: Women in Russia Earn 28% Less than Men with the Same Qualifications" [in Russian], in *Tass*, 14 May 2020, <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/8468883>.

⁵ ANNA Center, *Half-Year Results: Almost 30,000 Applications* [in Russian], 7 July 2021, <https://anna-center.ru/tpost/725d55y1f1-itogi-polugodiya-pochti-30-tisyach-obras>.

⁶ NAFI Research Centre, *Stereotypes about Women and Their Consequences. On the Path to Equal Opportunities in the Digital Economy*, May 2020, <https://nafi.ru/en/projects/sotsialnoe-razvitiye/stereotipy-v-otnoshenii-zhenshchin-i-ikh-posledstviya>.

⁷ Ibid.

this specialty. This was explained by the protection of women's health against high loads and adverse labour factors.

Gender stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes/traditions play the most important role in maintaining and perpetuating gender inequality in all spheres, especially in the family. Gender stereotypes not only produce gender inequality, but also support it, reinforce and justify it. They form gender asymmetry within family relations – as such, the family constitutes an institutional basis for the reproduction of gender relations in society. The presence of gender discrimination in the family is evidenced by the fact that women still invest more time, emotional and other types of resources in unpaid housework, childcare and maintaining family ties than men do. It is in the family sphere that the idea of equality between men and women has the most difficulty in penetrating.

The research results show that a fairly large proportion of the Russian population is committed to traditional gender stereotypes. According to a study conducted by the NAFI analytical centre in May–June 2019 with the support of Google and the Council of the Eurasian Women's Forum:

- 71 per cent of Russians share the opinion that the main purpose of a woman is to be a mother and a good housewife.
- 89 per cent of women believe that a man should provide for his family, and only 45 per cent agree with the statement that a woman should provide for herself.
- Although 55 per cent of married Russians note that the most responsible decisions in their families are made jointly by husband and wife, in 29 per cent of families these decisions are made only by a man, and in just 15 per cent by a woman.
- 32 per cent of Russians believe that a woman should choose between a career and a family, and this point of view is more common among those who have children.⁸

One area where women remain most vulnerable is in the family. This is based on persistent gender stereotypes, the influence of which was especially evident during the period of Covid-19 lockdown in Russia from March to May 2020. The results of the all-Russian study "Gender Aspects of the Socio-Demographic Dynamics of Modern Russia" conducted in April 2020 by the Institute for Socio-Economic Problems of Population of the Federal Research Sociological Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences (ISEPN FNISTs RAS) show that almost two-thirds of the respondents (64 per cent) share the opinion that the family is the main area of women's self-realisation.⁹

⁸ Marina Pisklakova-Parker and Olga Efanova, "The Influence of Gender Stereotypes on the Growth of Gender Inequality and Domestic Violence in Russia in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic", in *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 11 (November 2021), p. 32, <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss11/4>.

⁹ Ibid., p. 33. The survey was conducted at the end of April 2020. The sample size was 600 people aged 18 years and older. Residents of 73 constituent entities of the Russian Federation were surveyed.

Table 1 | The opinions of men and women regarding the main role of women (%)

Do you personally agree with the statement that women should give a priority to taking care of their families, not their careers?	Men	Women	Total
Yes	70.5	58.4	64.0
No	29.5	41.6	36.0

Source: Marina Pisklakova-Parker and Olga Efanova, "The Influence of Gender Stereotypes on the Growth of Gender Inequality and Domestic Violence in Russia in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic", cit., p. 34.

As the data in the table above demonstrate, this gender stereotype is more deeply accepted by men than by women: among men this stereotype is shared by more than two-thirds of the respondents, while the share of its supporters is slightly more than half among female respondents. Thus, it is clear that men are more likely to identify themselves with the role of a breadwinner compared with women, who do not see themselves as only homemakers, which is most likely due to modern conditions in which women perform both functions.

Further, the results of the all-Russian survey "Assessment of the Socio-Demographic Consequences of the Pandemic" with 2,400 respondents conducted in 2021 by the ISEPN FNISTs RAS show that 36.5 per cent of respondents believe that the family budget should be formed by men and women equally, 33.6 per cent think this should be done by men, and 26.7 per cent of respondents note that the formation of the family budget should depend on which of the spouses has a more successful career.

The data obtained show that mothers spend more time on all household chores under consideration than all other members of the family. In addition, they devote more time to caring for children (93.2 per cent) and cooking (90.6 per cent). Fathers are more likely to help children in their studies (21.1 per cent) and take care of older family members (14.5 per cent). Daughters and sons also take care of older family members (9.3 and 4.5 per cent respectively).¹⁰

During the pandemic, according to the participants of the study, mothers also spend more time on household chores than other family members: they devote more time to caring for children (85.1 per cent), cooking (83.3 per cent) and cleaning the house (82.2 per cent). Fathers most often help children with their studies (20.8 per cent), take care of older family members (12.8 per cent) and cook (10.4 per cent). During the pandemic, daughters and sons take care of older family members the most (7.6 and 3.5 per cent, respectively).

¹⁰ The survey was conducted in October 2021. The sample size was 2,400 people aged 18 years and older. Residents of 73 constituent entities of the Russian Federation were surveyed.

Most respondents (86.8 per cent) indicated that the distribution of household chores in their family during the pandemic has not changed; however, in general, 82.3 per cent of them are satisfied with this distribution (42.6 per cent are quite satisfied, 39.6 per cent are rather satisfied). Among those respondents in whose households there was a change in the distribution of household duties (13.2 per cent), men began to devote more time to household chores (61.9 per cent). In total, 63.6 per cent of respondents would not like to change the current distribution of responsibilities (38.2 per cent would rather not, 25.4 per cent would definitely not).

The situation concerning discrimination against women within the family, which is based on existing gender stereotypes, is a reflection of broader systemic discrimination within the society, as reflected also in women's political participation.

2. Political participation of women

Currently, women make up 16 per cent of the State Duma in Russia. The main issue is not with the number of women but rather with gender-sensitivity levels of men and women in power because this is what defines policies and legislation mainstreamed in Russia. Unfortunately, "gender" is considered to be a taboo word, alongside the strengthening of a "traditional values" discourse centred around God and traditional family values (marriage of a man and a woman) in the Constitution. It is important to remember that in general the level of gender awareness in Russia is still quite low, which is reflected in politics and evident through statistics.

According to the recent Levada-Center survey of 2022,¹¹ 66 per cent of respondents agree that women should be able to hold the highest political positions in the state equally to men. This represents an increase compared to results of a similar survey conducted in 2017 (31 per cent). At the same time, 76 per cent of respondents in 2022 generally approved of women's political participation, which is up from 37 per cent in 2017. Another interesting fact is that women support female politicians more than men do – 45 per cent versus 27 per cent.

Table 2 | Do you approve of women's participation in politics? (%)

	Total	Male	Female
Definitely yes	37	27	45
Rather yes	39	40	38
Rather not	13	18	9
Definitely not	9	12	6
Difficult to answer	3	4	2

¹¹ Levada-Center, "Gender Equality, Participation of Women in Political Life" [in Russian], in *Levada-Center Press Releases*, 8 March 2022, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=27698>.

Table 3 | Do you think that in modern Russia women have more or fewer rights and opportunities than men? (%)

	Total	Male	Female
More rights and opportunities	10	11	9
The same	68	72	64
Fewer than men	20	15	25
Find it difficult to answer	2	2	2

Source: Levada-Center, "Gender Equality, Participation of Women in Political Life", cit.

As is visible from the data above, the change is mainly happening among women. They want to see a change in politics by bringing in more women, hoping that this will allow for more rights and opportunities as well as more safety and security.

3. Domestic violence against women during and after the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic that broke out in 2020 has affected the whole world and all aspects of society. At the same time, the manifestations of the pandemic have affected different groups of the population in different ways. For example, income inequality has affected opportunities to live in isolation, and access to quality food and medicines. The pandemic has exacerbated and thereby highlighted the problems of gender inequality in the world. A United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) technical brief notes that the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing gender inequalities for women, worsening their already precarious situation around the world. Women have become one of the most vulnerable groups due to a combination of various factors. For instance, most medical personnel are women.¹² In Russia, more than 71 per cent of doctors and over 95 per cent of nursing staff (according to the Ministry of Health) are women. This means that it is women who are often the first to meet infected people.¹³

Another significant negative consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, especially the self-isolation/lockdown regime which manifested gender discrimination in the family, should be recognised as the increase in domestic violence. According to the results of the all-Russian survey "Gender Aspects of the Socio-Demographic Dynamics of Modern Russia" conducted in April 2020 by the ISEPN FNISTS RAS, almost a fifth (16.8 per cent) of respondents noted an increase in cases of domestic

¹² United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), *COVID-19: A Gender Lens. Protecting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and Promoting Gender Equality*, New York, UNFPA, March 2020, <https://www.unfpa.org/node/23972>.

¹³ "The Ministry of Health Told How Many Women Work as Doctors in Public Medical Institutions" [in Russian], in *Tass*, 5 October 2021, <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/12578787>.

violence, mainly (62.3 per cent of all cases of domestic violence known to the respondents) against women.¹⁴

Understanding the cycle and patterns of domestic violence allowed us to predict not only a further increase in numbers of domestic violence cases but also an increase in severe violence in a short period of time due to the following facts: (a) While in lockdown or self-isolation, women and children are likely to be spending concentrated periods of time with perpetrators, escalating the threat of domestic violence; (b) violence feeds on isolation, which makes it much easier for a perpetrator to execute his control, and (c) in a forced lockdown and isolation the cycle of violence will be shrinking in time quite rapidly, that will make each following episode more severe – and emotional, mental and financial abuse could turn physical.

During the lockdown starting in March of 2020, it became quickly evident that an increase in domestic violence against women was inevitable. It is a recognised factor that domestic violence thrives on isolation, and lockdown became an ideal situation for perpetrators of violence – in combination with a lack of an adequate state response system comprising legislation, definition of domestic violence, restraining and protective orders, and sufficient shelters. The Russian Human Rights Commissioner Tatiana Moskalkova publicly stated that since 10 April 2020 the number of domestic violence cases had more than doubled from 6,054 to about 13,000 per month.¹⁵

Contrastingly, the Ministry of Interior released a statement on 14 May 2020 that the number of domestic crimes had decreased by 9 per cent compared to the same period in 2019. Women's organisations explain this discrepancy by the lack of an effective system of response to domestic violence.¹⁶

During the lockdown, the law enforcement agencies focused their efforts mostly on control over compliance with stay-at-home orders and they abandoned their other duties; some shelters were placed under quarantine, and the court system was not functioning. In the situation of decriminalisation of domestic violence and lack of law aimed at protecting victims, there are no legal provisions for establishing a state system of response to domestic violence (including civil remedies like protection orders, etc.). As a result, victims of domestic violence were left totally unprotected.

¹⁴ The survey was conducted at the end of April 2020. The sample size was 600 people aged 18 years and older. Residents of 73 constituent entities of the Russian Federation were surveyed.

¹⁵ "Tatyana Moskalkova: Domestic Violence Has Increased During Self-Isolation" [in Russian], in *RIA Novosti*, 5 May 2020, <https://ria.ru/20200505/1570953246.html>; "Russian Ombudswoman Says Domestic Violence Surges Amid Coronavirus Restrictions", in *RFE/RL*, 5 May 2020, <https://www.rferl.org/a/30593947.html>.

¹⁶ Alina Adyrkhaeva, "Patriarchy vs Coronavirus: Pandemic as a Chance to Close the Gender Gap" [in Russian], in *RBC Trends*, 5 March 2021, <https://trends.rbc.ru/trends/social/5ed8d6e39a79478c64bfa534>.

State response to domestic violence cases was also interrupted due to quarantine. There were reports of women forced to flee their homes under quarantine because of domestic violence but they had no place to go because state shelters require documents that are hard to obtain and some shelters were closed.

On 2 April 2020, seven leading Russian NGOs working with victims of domestic violence (ANNA Center, Zona Prava, the Consortium of Women's Non-governmental Organisations, Russia Legal Initiative, You Are Not Alone Network, the Sisters Centre and the Kitezh Centre) appealed to the Russian government for the maintenance of shelters and other forms of state regulations.¹⁷ However, the government has not provided any response to the call.

In July 2020 the same group of women's organisations wrote a joint report on the situation of domestic violence under the lockdown. In the report, NGOs provided evidence of increased demand from survivors for NGO services during the lockdown. For example, the number of calls to the ANNA Center National Helpline grew by 74 per cent from March to May 2020, and 69.5 per cent of women who called the helpline reported a rapid escalation of violence during the lockdown.

The insufficiency in response to domestic violence during the lockdown was predictable based on well-known factors like the decriminalisation of physical assault in intimate relationships in 2017. In the fall of 2016, a member of the upper chamber of the Parliament, Elena Mizulina, wrote a proposal suggesting the decriminalisation of violence in private relationships. The initiative was supported by other members of both chambers of the Parliament and went to a vote in January 2017. It became law in February 2017 after being signed by the President. Decriminalisation not only became dangerous to the safety of thousands of Russian women suffering from domestic violence, but this decision has sent a message that the state doesn't consider familial battery a criminal offense and a violation of women's human rights. Decriminalisation was a signal that domestic abuse is not a serious issue, and inevitably it gives perpetrators a greater sense of impunity. This reverse in the legislation came in combination with a number of other factors in the current situation in Russia: (a) the conservative wave against gender equality at the state level; (b) promotion of conservative religious views both by some ultra-conservative groups like "Parental Movement" and by certain state officials; (c) the defence of domestic violence as a part of "traditional values" on the part of ultra-conservative groups and as well as some state officials; and (d) increasing pressure on civil society (Foreign Agent law).

Cycles of domestic violence that were launched during the lockdown continue to be reproduced without state intervention at legislative and service levels. In 2021 the number of calls to the National Helpline of the ANNA Center reached 58,180,

¹⁷ Valeria Mishina, Maria Litvinova and Yana Rozhdestvenskaya, "Domestic Violence Becomes Contagious" [in Russian], in *Kommersant*, 2 April 2020, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4310901>.

and after the first quarter of 2021, the total was already 29,149.¹⁸

It is possible to forecast further growth in violence against women in Russia, especially domestic violence, due to several factors:

- The wave of violence launched during the Covid-19 lockdowns will continue to unfold because it is the nature of cycles of violence to reproduce themselves if not interrupted, which requires an external system of support for survivors;
- Expansion of conservative anti-women's rights propaganda through the "traditional values" concept;
- Lack of a system of response to different forms of violence against women and girls in Russia, including the absence of a law defining domestic violence, problems in addressing harmful practices, etc.;
- The current war in Ukraine not only has affected women but will lead to an increase in violence in the future.

The feminist movement in Russia has been changing through the past decades due to different external and internal factors contributing to its development. The movement countering violence against women began as part of the women's movement in the early 1990s with the first Crisis Centres for women in Moscow (ANNA Center and Centre Sisters), Saint-Petersburg (Women's Crisis Centre, and a shelter for women), Irkutsk (Crisis Centre for women), Nizhny Tagil (Centre Lana) and Yekaterinburg (Centre Yekaterina). The first joint action of those organisations was a 1995 report about violence against women in Russia delivered to the Special Rapporteur on violence against women at the Beijing Conference.

In the latest decade of development of the women's movement, starting in 2012–13, activists and NGOs have continued to employ the ideas and methods of struggle characterised by the previous years of activism but have taken them further thanks to technological progress and new methods of disseminating information, for example actively using social networks. Feminist organisations create crisis centres, provide legal services, establish private shelters and disseminate women's human rights information.

Now the movement against violence against women also exists in the form of the informal National Network of about 150 state and non-governmental organisations coordinated by the ANNA Center, which was listed under the Foreign Agent law in 2016.¹⁹ There are also regional networks in some regions of Russia that are part of the National Network. Currently, women's NGOs are the main resource of support for survivors of domestic violence, but it is hard to predict how many organisations will be able to stay in action under the current circumstances.

¹⁸ ANNA Center, *Results of 2021: Almost 60,000 Applications* [in Russian], 10 January 2022, <https://anna-center.ru/tpost/i057ki9ri1-itogi-2021-goda-pochti-60-tisyach-obrasov>; ANNA Center, *The Founder of ANNA Center Received an International Award* [in Russian], 6 December 2021, <https://anna-center.ru/tpost/xzvz3tztz1-osnovatel'nitsa-tsentra-anna-poluchila-me>.

¹⁹ ANNA Center website: *National Network* [in Russian], <https://anna-center.ru/nacionalnaya-set>.

The latest development demonstrates that the women's movement in Russia is taking a strong position against the special military operation in Ukraine; one of the most vivid examples is Feminist Anti-war Resistance (FAS), which is a growing movement of activists.²⁰

Conclusion

In the past several years the challenges for women in the Russian Federation have increased due to a number of factors:

- Lack of state policy to address gender inequality. In 2017 the government adopted a concept of social development in the interest of women.²¹ But this has been realised only partially and does not have a clear plan and budget associated with it.
- Growing propaganda of "traditional values" that focus on women's main role as mothers and a duty to have children.
- Growing pressure on women's organisations through "Foreign Agent" legislation.

On the other hand, the women's movement in Russia is growing in solidarity, becoming more professional and organising itself in better resistance to the increasing pressure.

Updated 28 June 2022

²⁰ Paul Goble, "Feminist Anti-War Resistance (FAS) Leads in Organizing Russian Protests Against Putin's War – OpEd", in *Eurasia Review*, 29 April 2022, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/?p=294175>.

²¹ Russian Government, Order No. 410-r of 8 March 2017: *National Action Strategy for Women 2017-2022*, <http://static.government.ru/media/files/njlkIvH7WCvOIYRmcucV4jdNihEmTOUe.pdf>.

References

Alina Adyrkhaeva, "Patriarchy vs Coronavirus: Pandemic as a Chance to Close the Gender Gap" [in Russian], in *RBC Trends*, 5 March 2021, <https://trends.rbc.ru/trends/social/5ed8d6e39a79478c64bfa534>

ANNA Center, *The Founder of ANNA Center Received an International Award* [in Russian], 6 December 2021, <https://anna-center.ru/tpost/xzvz3tztz1-osnovatelnitsa-tsentra-anna-poluchila-me>

ANNA Center, *Half-Year Results: Almost 30,000 Applications* [in Russian], 7 July 2021, <https://anna-center.ru/tpost/725d55y1f1-itogi-polugodiya-pochti-30-tisyach-obras>

ANNA Center, *Results of 2021: Almost 60,000 Applications* [in Russian], 10 January 2022, <https://anna-center.ru/tpost/i057ki9ri1-itogi-2021-goda-pochti-60-tisyach-obras>

Paul Goble, "Feminist Anti-War Resistance (FAS) Leads in Organizing Russian Protests Against Putin's War – OpEd", in *Eurasia Review*, 29 April 2022, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/?p=294175>

Levada-Center, "Gender Equality, Participation of Women in Political Life" [in Russian], in *Levada-Center Press Releases*, 8 March 2022, <https://www.levada.ru/?p=27698>

Valeria Mishina, Maria Litvinova and Yana Rozhdestvenskaya, "Domestic Violence Becomes Contagious" [in Russian], in *Kommersant*, 2 April 2020, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4310901>

NAFI Research Centre, *Stereotypes about Women and Their Consequences. On the Path to Equal Opportunities in the Digital Economy*, May 2020, <https://nafi.ru/en/projects/sotsialnoe-razvitie/stereotipy-v-otnoshenii-zhenshchin-i-ikh-posledstviya>

Marina Pisklakova-Parker and Olga Efanova, "The Influence of Gender Stereotypes on the Growth of Gender Inequality and Domestic Violence in Russia in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic", in *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 11 (November 2021), p. 31-41, <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss11/4>

Russian Government, Order No. 410-r of 8 March 2017: *National Action Strategy for Women 2017-2022*, <http://static.government.ru/media/files/njlkIvH7WCvOIYRmcucV4jdNihEmTOUe.pdf>

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), *COVID-19: A Gender Lens. Protecting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and Promoting Gender Equality*, New York, UNFPA, March 2020, <https://www.unfpa.org/node/23972>

World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law Economy Snapshots: Russian Federation*, March 2022, <https://wbl.worldbank.org/content/dam/documents/wbl/2022/snapshots/Russian-federation.pdf>

World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*, December 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality>

Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) is a private, independent non-profit think tank, founded in 1965 on the initiative of Altiero Spinelli. IAI seeks to promote awareness of international politics and to contribute to the advancement of European integration and multilateral cooperation. Its focus embraces topics of strategic relevance such as European integration, security and defence, international economics and global governance, energy, climate and Italian foreign policy; as well as the dynamics of cooperation and conflict in key geographical regions such as the Mediterranean and Middle East, Asia, Eurasia, Africa and the Americas. IAI publishes an English-language quarterly (*The International Spectator*), an online webzine (*AffarInternazionali*), three book series (*Global Politics and Security*, *Quaderni IAI* and *IAI Research Studies*) and some papers' series related to IAI research projects (*Documenti IAI*, *IAI Papers*, etc.).

Via dei Montecatini, 17 - I-00186 Rome, Italy

T +39 06 6976831

iai@iai.it

www.iai.it

Latest IAI PAPERS

Director: Riccardo Alcaro (r.alcaro@iai.it)

- 22 | 19 Marina Pisklakova-Parker, *Gender Issues in Russia*
- 22 | 18 Isak Runarsson, *Can the West Afford to Let the World Go Hungry? Overcoming Challenges to Establishing a Humanitarian Corridor in the Black Sea*
- 22 | 17 Marco Giuli, *The Geopolitics of Clean Hydrogen – Opportunities and Challenges for Italy*
- 22 | 16 Olga Romanova, *Legislation as a Tool for Expanding the Power of the State and Limiting Political and Civil Rights in Modern Russia*
- 22 | 15 Nathalie Tocci, *Why Ukraine (and Moldova) Must Become EU Candidates*
- 22 | 14 Denis Volkov, *Russian Youth: Their Attitude to the Ruling Elite and Political Processes*
- 22 | 13 Dario Cristiani, *An Overview of the Current State of US-Italian Political-Security Relations*
- 22 | 12 Adriana Castagnoli, *The US–Italy Economic Relations in a Divided World*
- 22 | 11 Pier Paolo Raimondi, *Eastern Mediterranean Energy Resources between Energy Security and Energy Transition: A Regional Perspective*
- 22 | 10 Marcello Di Filippo, *The EU's Engagement with Latin America: The Case of Colombia*

The Russian Economy Is Muddling Through the Sanctions War

by Oleg Buklemishev

ABSTRACT

The transatlantic campaign of sanctions against Russia after its aggression of Ukraine is unprecedented in scale and scope, involving not only dozens of democratic states but also many non-state actors. It imposes considerable barriers and additional cost to the functioning of the Russian economy, which is bound to undertake deep restructuring with far-reaching consequences for production and consumption processes. The current appreciation of the rouble and inflationary slowdown are not signs of improvement but rather the direct effects of the stabilisation measures undertaken and, in fact, bode ill for further economic development. Numerous problems have started to surface this summer and optimistic assessments on the basis of initial resilience of the Russian economy look premature. Russia currently lacks a strategic plan of economic restructuring under the new environment. The future course of events will depend on whether the private sector leads this restructuring with minimal losses or the government imposes its normative prospective, tilting the result farther from economic equilibrium.

Russia | Economy | Sanctions

keywords

The Russian Economy Is Muddling Through the Sanctions War

by Oleg Buklemishev*

1. The novelty of the Russia sanctions

The recent trend in global sanctions policy is represented by the expansion of so-called "smart sanctions", which are asymmetric in nature and more targeted than, say, the usual trade sanctions. Perhaps the Russian case in this context is different as for the first time we are not dealing with episodic and pinpointed manifestations of assorted restrictive measures, but a total sanctions war. This time, from the very beginning the initiators of sanctions – basically the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom and a bunch of their allies in East Asia - implicitly allowed the admissibility and almost desirability of "collateral damage", that is, a downgrading of the living standards of the general population, in the target country. Moreover, they are joined in their efforts by a wide coalition consisting of private corporates, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and individuals. The actions of this coalition are independent and not in any way controlled by government; and for instance could remain in place even if governments decide to slow or reverse their course.

Such overwhelming sanctions by design now apply to almost all Russian resident citizens and businesses, regardless of their direct or indirect involvement in the military assault on Ukraine, launched on 24 February of this year, or its origins in a wide sense of the word. It is increasingly clear that for a significant part of the representatives of the Russian elites and the middle class, this date marks a gradual but irreversible loss of the life standard to which they have become more or less accustomed in recent years. If anything can come as a surprise today, it is how stoically such a prospect is being perceived (or simply not realised so far).

* Oleg Buklemishev is Director of the Economic Policy Research Center, Moscow State University.

Paper produced in the framework of the project "The EU's selective engagement with Russia". This paper has benefited from the financial support of the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation and of the Policy Planning Unit of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation pursuant to art. 23-bis of Presidential Decree 18/1967. The views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation or the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

Both materially and psychologically, this loss is not the only one which matters as an effect of sanctions from the medium to long term. The “structural transformation” of the economy¹ as the Bank of Russia has elegantly termed it (or, simply put, the upcoming economic degradation under conditions of self-isolation), will certainly lead to the qualitative simplification of technologic and production processes, and a resulting plunge in systemic efficiency. The Russian economy has just recovered after the pandemic but the urgent tasks of restoration of the normal investment process and the sustainable growth of real incomes of the population are still unfulfilled. Unfortunately, instead of getting closer to normality the year 2022 has brought to the agenda the new critical challenges which exclude that these prospects may materialise any time soon.

Moreover, at the macro level the fundamental model of the Russian economy’s functioning is compromised in all of its component parts. This model currently presumes massive extraction of raw materials (mostly hydrocarbon resources), their export and accumulation of reserves in the form of hard currency, which are then redistributed and spent on lacking necessities. This model is now faltering. First, on the demand side, the main direction of oil and gas deliveries to the West is already losing importance as the existing pipelines and other traditional routes of exports are blocked. Future EU embargoes threaten to further undermine this export avenue. Second, the extraction itself is to become more difficult as key technologies and partnerships are no longer available and Russia cannot effectively develop new oil and gas fields. These deficiencies will be at best only partly compensated through the so-called “parallel imports” (alternative channels of delivery of goods non-authorised by the producing foreign company). Third, the standard foreign exchange funds in the form of main reserve currencies can no longer be stored normally due to sanctions, and should be specially manipulated in order avoid an asset freeze. Fourth, the redistribution shall be also altered because of the blockade on imports, as availability of many production and consumption items is put under question. In other words, in the medium term the Russian economy will have to find alternative modes and sources for its development.

2. Is the Russian economy super-resilient?

To be fair, the short-term results of the Russian economy during the spring were not as bad as initially expected. News of foreign companies’ withdrawals and interruption of the production processes due to the lack of materials and components which were previously imported (especially in car production) looked sporadic, and the majority of industries continued to operate more or less normally. The rate of unemployment in this period was, in fact, lower than a year ago. After an outburst at the beginning of the year, inflation has calmed down and allowed

¹ “Russia to Enter Structural Transformation Period in Q2, Early Q3, Says Central Bank Chief”, in TASS, 18 April 2022, <https://tass.com/economy/1439031>.

the Central Bank of Russia to reverse the initial crisis hike of its key rate: from the 20 per cent level it was symbolically returned in three steps to exactly the pre-24 February level (8 per cent).² Along with the parallel significant strengthening of the rouble to levels unseen lately, this inspired official confidence in the limited consequences of sanctions pressure. Many experts appear to share this view.

Tellingly, most internal observers perceive the inertia of the economic system, which became apparent in the spring months, as evidence that things are not really all that scary. However, it seems that the optimistic revision of the earlier forecasts is somewhat premature. The rate of industrial interruptions will accelerate as the stocks of necessary import components run down and various bottlenecks become evident in different spheres and regions. In addition to industry, several segments in the service sectors such as advertising, movies and finance will suffer dramatic losses as well. Reduced foreign and domestic demand will sooner rather than later require adjustments in the form of job losses and wage cuts. Suppressed inflation indicates the same fall of demand along with limited monetary and fiscal expansion and renewed strengthening of the rouble.

After slowing from 17.8 per cent in April to 15.9 per cent in June,³ annual inflation will almost certainly rebound as material shortages grow, late public sector wages and pensions indexation becomes effective (they have been since of 1 July), the federal budget experiences loss of domestic revenues and under pressure of increased military expenditures turns to a deficit, and the rouble starts falling again. The Bank of Russia, having essentially abandoned its previous policy of inflation targeting, misleads market expectations and runs the risk of coming under intense political pressure from the government when it faces the need to raise its rate again in coming months to fight inflation. Indeed, the recent rouble "renaissance" attests more to the import crunch and degradation of the balance-of-payment adjustment capabilities under sanctions and severe capital controls which were introduced by the Central Bank rather than to a fundamental strength of the Russian currency. In any event, one can hardly believe in the strong currency of a country which is, in fact, in a state of war and recently has seen half of its official foreign currency reserves frozen. Even the moderate official estimate of a fall in the real disposable incomes of Russians at 6.8 per cent⁴ is an omen of future difficulties with domestic demand.

The current crisis represents an entirely new kind of shock, which is not a temporary set-back to be financed and somehow lived through but a permanent change. Its real consequences are not so easy to predict because precedents for a shock of such magnitude cannot be easily found. In other words, a smoother curve of decay

² Bank of Russia website: *Key Rate*, http://www.cbr.ru/eng/hd_base/keyrate.

³ Trading Economics: *Russia Inflation Rate*, <https://tradingeconomics.com/russia/inflation-cpi>.

⁴ "Russia Forecasts 7.8% GDP Contraction in 2022; Unemployment Rate at 6.7%", in *Business Standard*, 18 May 2022, https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/russia-forecasts-7-8-gdp-contraction-in-2022-unemployment-rate-at-6-7-122051800198_1.html.

is not at all tantamount to reducing its quantitative depth and, most importantly, qualitative substance. It is not a secret that “complex” industries requiring a lot of foreign components and technologies will be hurt the most, damaging national competencies and the human capital involved. The short-term resilience of the Russian economy probably should not surprise anyone also because, in spite of rapid expansion of the state in the recent years, Russia has preserved significant segments of the competitive market environment and smart private sector managers who can work effectively in stressful situations.

3. Government policy matters

Of course, the mode of the Russian government’s reaction to sanctions is currently very important. When the economy misfunctions, a lot depends on the public policies adopted to promote resilience and economic restructuring. In reality, so far no signs indicate that a profound policy change is taking place. On the contrary, continuation of key policies from before the crisis, such as the “budget rule”,⁵ is being promoted even though the situation has changed dramatically, and orderly execution of the budget according to fixed rules and accumulation of the dollar – and euro – denominated National Wealth Fund is hardly possible any longer. Import substitution in its extreme form and resetting the trade and logistics infrastructure towards Asia and China are also set as top priorities, but no major corresponding project has been announced or financed yet. Public officials seem to hope that the problems will somehow fix by themselves, and no urgent action will be necessary.

This stalemate is partly due to the fact that the current policymaking process is inherently polycentric and extremely complex from a managerial point of view. This process should involve strong coordination efforts and an imposition of discipline on a large number of officials and public corporates’ managers, who usually do not experience competitive pressure to perform and have not got used to taking on serious personal responsibility (actually their usual incentives were exactly the opposite – just to wait for direct and unambiguous instructions). This is in fact probably the main challenge for the government in the coming period.

4. Two scenarios

Theoretically, two extreme scenarios of future Russia’s economic transformation are possible. The first is relatively spontaneous, as the economy – and above all its private sector – adapts to the new physical and price parameters environment,

⁵ Set of formulas according to which the budget is being formed and executed – the limit of expenditures, deficit financing, accumulation of the oil and gas revenues, their conversion into hard currency, etc.

resulting in a new (and relatively worsened) state of equilibrium. The main characteristics of such an equilibrium are still unclear, but production (and managerial) factors in it should be combined differently. Complexity will be rejected by such an economy, so that a significant part of the best factors of production (including qualified labour) will remain unused, which probably is the main problem of the new equilibrium from a political and economic point of view. Of course, this scenario in its extreme form is unrealistic as the forces of inertia and political influence will prevent more or less free redistribution of resources in the economy to an ideal equilibrium from the market point of view.

Therefore, it is worth analysing the second scenario of transformation, which is built for the most part not on market signals, but on the basis of a largely conservative normative perspective dictated by the ideology of the ruling elites. As they broadly speaking consider themselves at war, and the outside world (with rare exceptions) is represented as outright or potential enemies, the economic policy – from corporate governance to capital regulations – will also reflect this view. For instance, publication of several items of standard economic statistics (e.g., foreign trade and federal budget) has already been stopped to conceal the real state of the economy.

The ruling elites are increasingly ready to give up market economy mechanisms to pursue their priorities by relatively simple administrative means; for instance, public procedures of procurement are no longer applicable in many spheres. According to this view, re-allocation of resources to achieve strategic purposes can be provided not only from public coffers or with the help of positive policy incentives, but also by direct orders in the course of outright military-oriented mobilisation of the economy. On the contrary, market-based solutions will be allowed only to a limited extent, provided that they do not contradict state prescriptions. The second scenario in its full-fledged form is certainly also unattainable. The future reality seems to lie somewhere in between the two scenarios, but it is likely to be much closer to the second one rather than to a purely market equilibrium.

In the longer run, the success of the transformation and the economic efficiency of such transformation will depend on the amount of resources mobilised in a non-market way, and what limitations on market-oriented behaviour are introduced by the government (for example, bans on a free release of unemployed labour⁶). It also remains to be seen whether alternative sources for certain supplies (technologies, equipment, components), such as China, could be reliable, as Russia is a second mover in a sanctions game. Initial indications show that so far the Chinese authorities and businesses are quite cautious in replacing Western sources of materials and technologies to avoid the extra-territorial reach of US secondary sanctions as well as other potential measures by the US and EU to retaliate against any attempt at softening the impact of their own restrictions on Russia. In turn,

⁶ Usually private enterprises under the pressure from the federal or regional government cannot freely dispose the redundant labour force which might remain formally employed.

the majority of Russian corporations are not yet accustomed to working with the Asian markets and will need time for re-orientation and accumulation of expertise.

Conclusion

The Russian economy faces enormous challenges in the forthcoming months. Its trajectory will depend on how successfully the transformation process is managed at the micro level by the corporations and at the macro level by the government. Market incentives will play at best a limited role in this process, and political considerations and sanctions uncertainties will prevail. In the meantime, economic degradation and overall loss of efficiency are imminent and can be prevented only to a minor extent. The future model of the Russian economy's functioning is unclear and its prospective competitive advantages have yet to be determined.

Updated 28 July 2022

Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) is a private, independent non-profit think tank, founded in 1965 on the initiative of Altiero Spinelli. IAI seeks to promote awareness of international politics and to contribute to the advancement of European integration and multilateral cooperation. Its focus embraces topics of strategic relevance such as European integration, security and defence, international economics and global governance, energy, climate and Italian foreign policy; as well as the dynamics of cooperation and conflict in key geographical regions such as the Mediterranean and Middle East, Asia, Eurasia, Africa and the Americas. IAI publishes an English-language quarterly (*The International Spectator*), an online webzine (*AffarInternazionali*), three book series (*Global Politics and Security*, *Quaderni IAI* and *IAI Research Studies*) and some papers' series related to IAI research projects (*Documenti IAI*, *IAI Papers*, etc.).

Via dei Montecatini, 17 - I-00186 Rome, Italy

T +39 06 6976831

iai@iai.it

www.iai.it

Latest IAI PAPERS

Director: Riccardo Alcaro (r.alcaro@iai.it)

- 22 | 20 Oleg Buklemishev, *The Russian Economy Is Muddling Through the Sanctions War*
- 22 | 19 Marina Pisklakova-Parker, *Gender Issues in Russia*
- 22 | 18 Isak Runarsson, *Can the West Afford to Let the World Go Hungry? Overcoming Challenges to Establishing a Humanitarian Corridor in the Black Sea*
- 22 | 17 Marco Giuli, *The Geopolitics of Clean Hydrogen – Opportunities and Challenges for Italy*
- 22 | 16 Olga Romanova, *Legislation as a Tool for Expanding the Power of the State and Limiting Political and Civil Rights in Modern Russia*
- 22 | 15 Nathalie Tocci, *Why Ukraine (and Moldova) Must Become EU Candidates*
- 22 | 14 Denis Volkov, *Russian Youth: Their Attitude to the Ruling Elite and Political Processes*
- 22 | 13 Dario Cristiani, *An Overview of the Current State of US-Italian Political-Security Relations*
- 22 | 12 Adriana Castagnoli, *The US–Italy Economic Relations in a Divided World*
- 22 | 11 Pier Paolo Raimondi, *Eastern Mediterranean Energy Resources between Energy Security and Energy Transition: A Regional Perspective*

Russia's Climate Action and Geopolitics of Energy Transition: The Uncertain and Unsettling Outlook following Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

by Kamila Godzinska and Maria Pastukhova

ABSTRACT

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has profoundly altered the outlook for Russia's energy transition and created uncertainties on the global path towards net zero. In response to global economic shifts, Russia had begun taking steps towards decarbonisation, albeit without plans to depart from its hydrocarbon-based economic model in any substantial way. The new political, trade and financial environment induced by Russia's act of aggression has damaged its potential to maintain the once-emerging momentum. Russia's actions and the Western response are also reconfiguring global energy relations, with profound economic and geopolitical consequences that may, unless managed, undermine international cooperation on the energy transition and slow down progress on climate change mitigation.

Russia | Energy | Climate change | Economy | Sanctions

keywords

Russia's Climate Action and Geopolitics of Energy Transition: The Uncertain and Unsettling Outlook following Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

by Kamila Godzinska and Maria Pastukhova*

Introduction

The scale and depth of the multiple crises the world is grappling with as this paper is being written is unprecedented. The global quest for energy transition has been driving global geopolitics for over a decade now. Yet the ongoing energy crisis, coupled with the exacerbated impacts of climate change and the spill-overs that both have on food, health, financial sectors and the broader economy, induce fundamental shifts in global geopolitics, reshaping international relations and relations beyond the state-to-state level for years to come.

Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine, which induced a human tragedy of enormous proportions and pushed the existing multilateral order close to a breaking point, is one of the main drivers of these geopolitical shifts. The role of Russia, which prior to the war was among the world's top three oil producers, the second exporter of gas, one of the key exporters of critical minerals, the biggest country by landmass, the 11th biggest economy and the fourth largest emitter of greenhouse gas (GhG) emissions – will change considerably due to these shifts and will affect the broader geopolitics of energy transition in its turn.

After taking stock of Russia's climate and energy policy and politics prior to the war, this paper will attempt to assess how the war in Ukraine has affected the paradigms emerging in recent times, and to provide an outlook for key trends that will define both Russia's climate and energy relations and the broader geopolitics of climate and energy for the coming years.

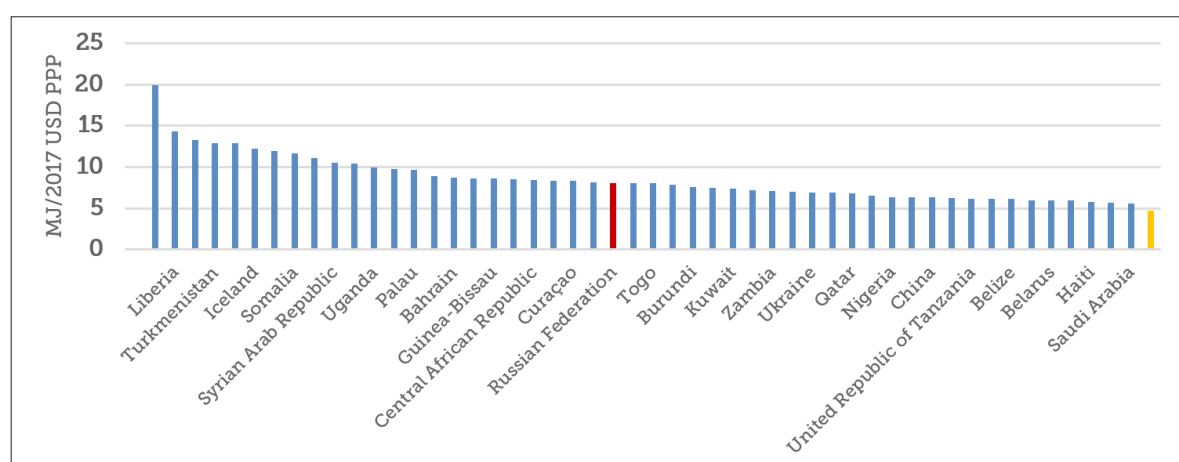
* Kamila Godzinska and Maria Pastukhova are respectively Researcher and Senior Policy Advisor at the Climate Neutral Energy Systems Programme at E3G.

Paper produced in the framework of the project "The EU's selective engagement with Russia". This paper has benefited from the financial support of the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation and of the Policy Planning Unit of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation pursuant to art. 23-bis of Presidential Decree 18/1967. The views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation or the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

1. Russia's pre-war climate and energy agenda: A stock-take

Russia had long been deemed a laggard on climate action. Though the political rhetoric has shifted away from outright denial of the risks of climate change¹ over the course of the past two decades, little progress has been made when it comes to the country's climate ambitions or on-the-ground mitigation efforts. While the energy sector is responsible for over three quarters of Russia's GhG emissions, the Russian economy remains one of the most energy-intensive globally.

Figure 1 | Top 50 most energy intensive economies, 2019 (MJ/2017 US dollars PPP)



Source: International Energy Agency (IEA), *Energy Intensity Data Set (SDG 7.3.1)*, last updated 30 March 2022, <https://www.iea.org/data-and-statistics/data-product/sdg7-database#energy-intensity>.

In 2019 it was using ca. 22.4 terajoules (TJ) of energy per US dollars of GDP (over three times the world average²) – a ratio that has not changed since the late 2000s. The government's goal of reducing the energy intensity of the Russian economy by 40 per cent between 2007 and 2020³ has been missed by far, with overall reductions by 2020 amounting to just 3.5 per cent. Space heating remains one of the most inefficient sectors, consuming twice as much energy as in countries with a comparable climate (e.g., Canada).⁴

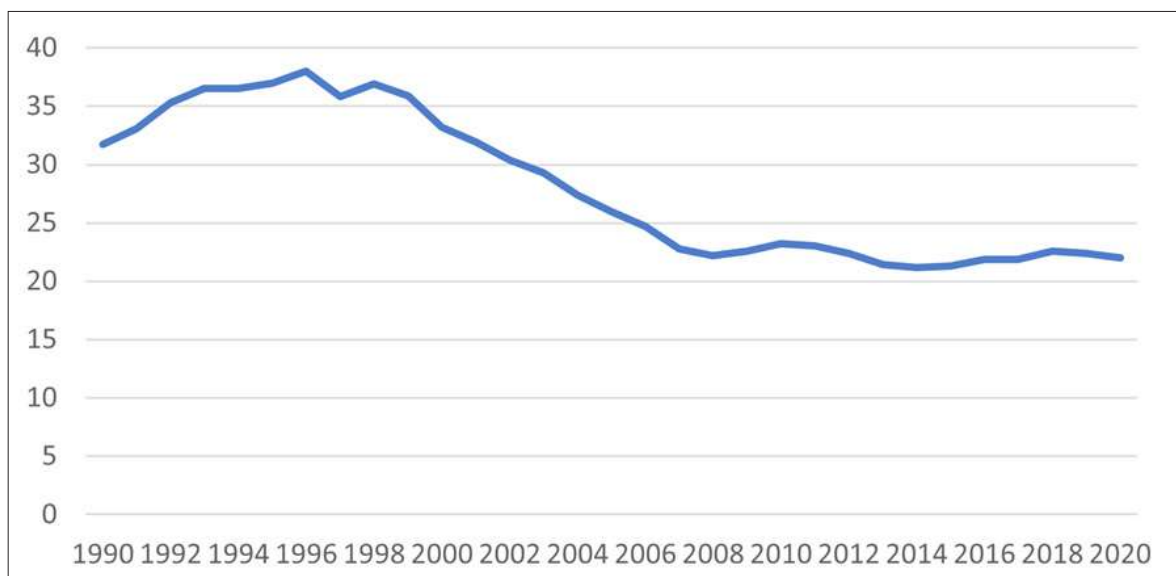
¹ One of the most prominent (and most widely known) examples of such rhetoric is Vladimir Putin's statement that global warming might be good for some parts of Russia as "Russians will spend less money on fur coats". "What the Russian Leadership Said about Climate Change. Dossier" (in Russian), in TASS, 17 November 2015, <https://tass.ru/info/2444358>.

² International Energy Agency (IEA), *Total Energy Supply (TES) by GDP, Russian Federation 1990-2020*, <https://www.iea.org/data-and-statistics/data-tools/energy-statistics-data-browser?country=RUSSIA&fuel=Energy%20supply&indicator=TESbyGDP>.

³ Nathalie Trudeau and Isabel Murray, "Development of Energy Efficiency Indicators in Russia", in *IEA Working Papers*, January 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5kgk7w8v4dhl-en>.

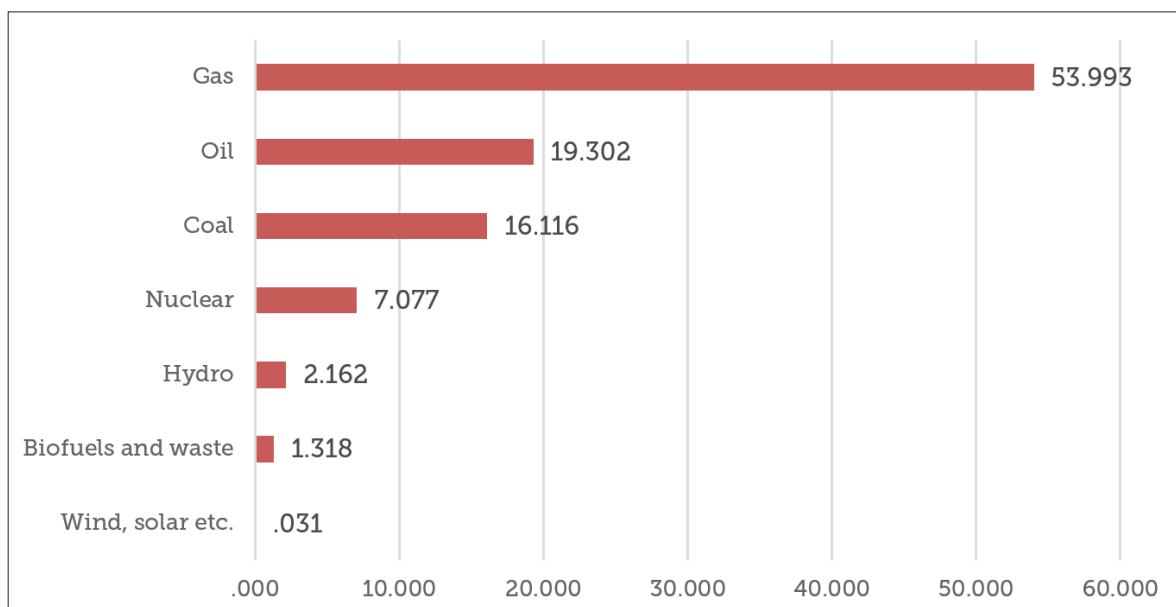
⁴ International Finance Corporation and World Bank, *Energy Efficiency in Russia: Untapped Reserves*, Washington, World Bank, 2014, <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/20675>.

Figure 2 | Russia's total energy supply by GDP, 1990–2020 (GJ/thousand 2015 US dollars)



Source: IEA Data and Statistics, <https://www.iea.org/countries/russia>.

Figure 3 | Russia's energy mix, 2019 (TPS by source, %)

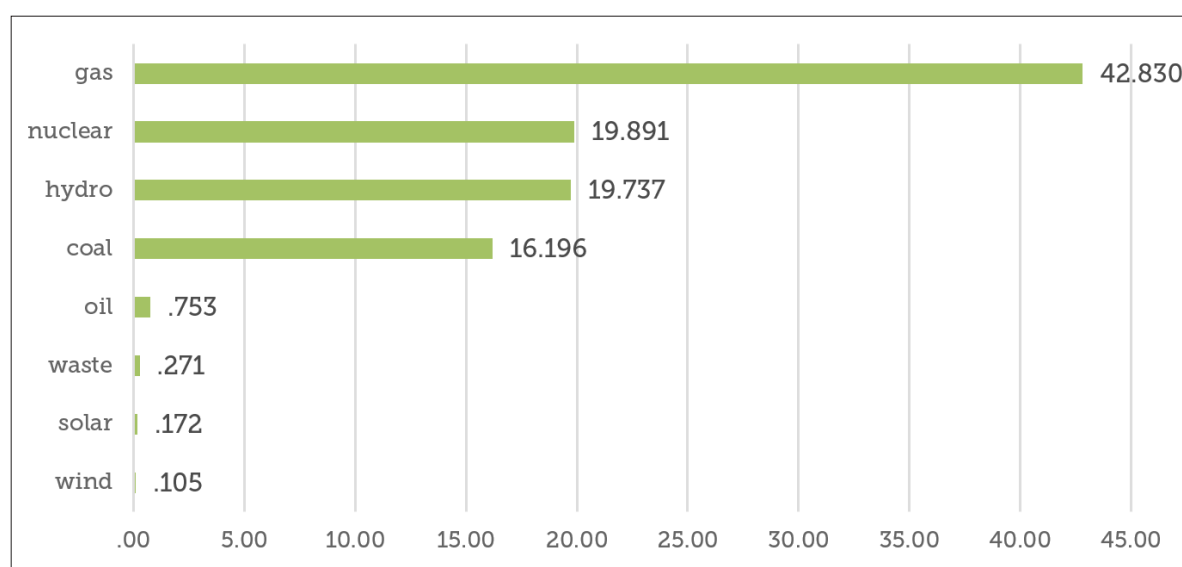


Source: IEA Data and Statistics, 2022 (online database).

Transitioning the fossil-fuel-dominated (see Figure 3) energy mix towards renewable energy has not been considered a priority, beyond using renewables to

secure energy access in isolated areas (see the 2019 Energy Strategy⁵). In the power sector, the modest target of reaching at least a 2.5 per cent renewables⁶ share in the power mix by 2020 was under-delivered, with renewables accounting for circa 0.5 per cent of power generation and 1.5 per cent of the overall installed power generation capacity (see Figure 4).⁷

Figure 4 | Russia's electricity mix 2019 by source (%)



Source: IEA Data and Statistics, 2022 (online database).

The regulatory framework for promoting renewables on the domestic market has advanced since the introduction of renewables to the amended Federal law "On Electric Power".⁸ However, the proposed support mechanisms did not deliver due to a lack of incentives for investors, regulatory hurdles including very strict local content requirements, insufficient support for private consumers to invest in microgeneration (e.g., rooftop solar PV), and most importantly, further expansion of fossil fuel production being the strategic priority of the Russian government.

⁵ Russian Government, *Decree No. 1523-r of 9 June 2020* [in Russian], <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202006110003>.

⁶ Including solar, wind and mini-hydropower facilities.

⁷ Anna Geroeva, "Renewable Energy in Russia: Slow Growth" [in Russian], in *Vedomosti*, 29 April 2022, https://www.vedomosti.ru/ecology/science_and_technology/articles/2022/04/29/920410-vie-v-rossii-medlennii-rost.

⁸ For a more details regarding the evolution of Russia's regulatory framework for renewable energy, see Tatiana A. Lanshina et al., "The Slow Expansion of Renewable Energy in Russia: Competitiveness and Regulation Issues", in *Energy Policy*, Vol. 120 (September 2018), p. 600-609; Denis Chukanov et al., "Renewable Energy and Decentralized Power Generation in Russia", in *SWP Comments*, No. 45 (November 2017), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/renewable-energy-and-decentralized-power-generation-in-russia>.

Climate ambition has been lacking even though Russia has been a signatory of both the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement. Russia's nationally determined contribution (NDC), for the first time submitted in 2020, set a target for the reduction of GhG emissions to 70 per cent of the 1990 level by 2030⁹ – an extremely unambitious target, allowing Russia to further increase its emissions in the coming years. Socio-economic changes due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent far-reaching economic restructuring from a centrally planned system to a market economy had brought an approximate 40 per cent reduction in Russia's GhG emissions between 1990 and 2000. The emissions have been on a rise since then but have yet to reach the mark of 70 per cent below the 1990 level.¹⁰

The last two years represented a dramatic change of direction in official climate and energy policy, driven mostly by external factors. Among the key drivers were policy decisions that would lead to shrinking demand for fossil fuels in Russia's main export market – the EU (most importantly, the 2021 Fit for 55 package), as well as the proposed Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) that would, once adopted, affect the competitiveness of Russian heavy industry exports to the EU.¹¹ Changes in the global investment landscape have provided a further major push. The rise of the ESG (Environmental, social and governance) agenda as the "new normal" for major international investors, efforts to establish standards for sustainable finance within taxonomies in the EU, China, South Korea and other parts of the world, as well as the ongoing alignment of major financing institutions with the goals of the Paris Agreement have spurred changes within the Russian investment landscape as well. Along with the slow yet steady rise of the circulation of "green bonds" by Russian banks, the adoption of Russia's green taxonomy¹² in late 2021 has been one of the key developments, aimed at providing a legal framework for national and international investors to accelerate the country's decarbonisation.¹³ The adopted framework turned out to be more ambitious than its prototype, the EU taxonomy,¹⁴ as it includes a science-based threshold for

⁹ Russia, *Nationally Determined Contribution* [in Russian], submitted on 11 November 2020, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/NDC_RF_ru.pdf.

¹⁰ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), *Report on the Technical Review of the Fourth Biennial Report of the Russian Federation*, 2 September 2020, <https://unfccc.int/documents/249900>.

¹¹ For detailed analysis of changes in the Russian debate on energy transition sparked by the EU Green Deal and the proposed CBAM, see Yana Zabanova, "Navigating Uncharted Waters. Russia's Evolving Reactions to the CBAM and the European Green Deal", in *Heinrich Böll Stiftung E-papers*, November 2021, <https://www.boell.de/en/node/70825>.

¹² Russian Government, *Decree No. 1587 of 21 September 2021: "On Approval of Criteria for Sustainable (Including Green) Development Projects in the Russian Federation and Requirements for the Verification System for Sustainable (Including Green) Development Projects in the Russian Federation"* [in Russian], <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202109240043>.

¹³ Climate Bonds Initiative, *Russian Federation Adopts Green Taxonomy. Matches 100g CO₂ Gas-Power Threshold in EU Parliament's Approved Act*, 10 November 2021, <https://www.climatebonds.net/node/188715>.

¹⁴ European Commission Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, *EU Taxonomy: Complementary Climate Delegated Act to Accelerate Decarbonisation*, last updated 11 July 2022, <https://europa.eu/!g4pwqb>.

fossil gas-based electricity generation (100g CO₂e/kWh), which has been lifted from the original EU Taxonomy Regulation by the recently adopted EU Taxonomy Complementary Climate Delegated Act.

While some measures were introduced earlier in relation to adaptation,¹⁵ forest management and reducing environmental damage,¹⁶ the first step towards putting controls on GhG emissions was the submission of the bill "On Limiting Greenhouse Gas Emissions"¹⁷ to the Duma in February 2021. The law committed companies to begin reporting their GhG emissions from 2023 and encouraged the implementation of projects that reduce emissions in exchange for tradeable carbon units. However, unlike the original version, discarded in the process, the final bill, adopted in July 2021,¹⁸ does not impose emissions quotas or penalties on large polluters.

Finally, one of the arguably most significant policy developments came in October 2021, when Russia announced its target to reach net zero emissions by 2060,¹⁹ and presented its updated strategy for low carbon development.²⁰ The strategy examined impacts on climate and the economy under two scenarios – "basic" and "intensive" – and committed to pursuing the latter. The "intensive" scenario would see net emissions reduced to 630 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent in 2050, from 1.58 billion tonnes in 2019. While delivering positive outcomes for the climate, the "intensive" scenario is set to deliver twice the level of annual economic growth by 2050 compared with the "basic". It identified financial regulation, taxation and budgetary policies as key drivers of change in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 2060.²¹ Expanding renewables, improving energy efficiency – including smart demand-side management and digitalisation²² – and secondary use of materials in industry were noted in the strategy.²³ The significance of this strategy lies not so much in the fact that Russia committed to net-zero, which is at this point pure rhetoric with few checks in place (as is the case for most countries in the "net-zero"

¹⁵ Russian Government, *Decree No. 3183-r of 25 December 2019* [in Russian], <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202001040016>.

¹⁶ Polina Bakunovich, "Russia Introduces Project Ecology", in *Climate Scorecard*, 13 September 2018, <https://www.climatescorecard.org/?p=18224>.

¹⁷ CMS, "New Bill Limits Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Another Step in the Decarbonisation of the Russian Economy", in *CMS eAlerts*, 2 April 2021, <https://www.cms-lawnow.com/ealerts/2021/04/new-bill-limits-greenhouse-gas-emissions-in-the-decarbonisation-of-the-russian-economy>.

¹⁸ Russia, *Federal Law No. 296-FZ of 2 July 2021: On Limiting Greenhouse Gas Emissions* [in Russian], <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202107020031>.

¹⁹ "Russia Drafts New, More Ambitious Decarbonisation Strategy: Kommersant Newspaper", in *Reuters*, 6 October 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/russia-carbon-idAFL1N2R20BO>.

²⁰ Russian Government, *Decree No. 3052-r of 29 October 2021* [in Russian], <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/000120211010022>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² International Finance Corporation and World Bank, *Energy Efficiency in Russia*, cit.

²³ Mircon, *A New Energy Strategy to the Year 2035 Has Been Approved in Russia* [in Russian], 12 June 2020, <https://www.mircond.com/news/utverzhdjena-novaya-energeticheskuyu-strategiyu-rossiyskoy-federatsii-na-period-do-2035-goda/>.

club). It lies instead in the fact that with this document, Russian political elites, who for a long time separated the issues of climate and environment from energy, for the first time acknowledged the linkages between climate, energy and economic development.

Despite this largely positive policy and narrative shift, the new Russian energy and climate policy had two major caveats. One is the unwavering prioritisation of hydrocarbons as the main source of revenue – both in the medium and the long term. This reflects the significance of fossil fuels in Russia's economy, comprising an estimated 10 per cent to 25 per cent of GDP,²⁴ and around 45 per cent²⁵ of the federal budget; and a perception of the global transition towards renewables-based economies as a threat to Russia's fossil fuel rents.²⁶ Although Russia's leadership has started to recognise the climate and geopolitical pressures the country faces, its assessments of the future of shrinking oil and gas markets and Russia's ability to maintain a position therein remain optimistic.²⁷

The other major "feature" of the Russian approach to decarbonisation is the massive reliance on nature-based solutions as the central means of delivering on climate ambition and reducing the emissions intensity of the Russian economy – an approach to climate change mitigation that is internationally recognised as insufficient.²⁸ Among other targets, the 2050 decarbonisation strategy foresees the absorption of 1.2 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent by carbon sinks (largely in forest areas) by 2050, equivalent to two thirds of the country's carbon emissions. This is extremely implausible, given that to reach this benchmark, the forest absorption capacity needs to grow by 120 per cent, whereas Russia's forest area shrank by 10 per cent over the last two decades, and the rate of deforestation continues to grow.²⁹

All in all, in recent years, Russia has started to find its way of adjusting and ultimately profiting from the structural shifts taking place in the global economy towards a new resource and technology base, albeit not as quickly as it should have. With oil, gas and coal exports largely under state ownership, the Russian government also had both the needed budget revenue for supporting decarbonisation at home, and establishing energy partnerships with key industrialised countries. These

²⁴ Yvetta Gerasimchuk and Yuliia Oharenko, "Case Study: Russia", in *Beyond Fossil Fuels: Fiscal Transition in BRICS*, Winnipeg, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), November 2019, <https://www.iisd.org/node/14626>.

²⁵ IEA, *Energy Fact Sheet: Why Does Russian Oil and Gas Matter?*, 21 March 2022, <https://www.iea.org/articles/energy-fact-sheet-why-does-russian-oil-and-gas-matter>.

²⁶ This perception, prevalent throughout the 2010s, persevered until now and is part of the global energy narrative portrayed in Russia's energy security strategy 2035. Tatiana Mitrova and Yuriy Melnikov, "Energy Transition in Russia", in *Energy Transitions*, Vol. 3, No. 1-2 (December 2019), p. 73-80, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41825-019-00016-8>.

²⁷ Jean-François Mercure et al., "Reframing Incentives for Climate Policy Action", in *Nature Energy*, Vol. 6, No. 12 (December 2021), p. 1133-1143, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41560-021-00934-2>.

²⁸ Tatiana Lanshina, "Decarbonization Discourse in Russia: A Stocktaking Paper", in *Heinrich Böll Stiftung E-papers*, November 2021, <https://www.boell.de/en/node/70817>.

²⁹ Global Forest Watch website: *Russia*, <https://www.globalforestwatch.org/dashboards/country/RUS>.

partnerships, as well as cooperation with international energy companies (many of them oil and gas majors as well), could in turn be instrumentalised to access the latest technology, boost the domestic transition efforts and maintain stable political and trade relationships. The 24 February 2022 invasion of Ukraine radically changed the outlook both for Russia's climate ambition and energy transition and for the geopolitics of energy in the region and globally.

2. Russia's invasion of Ukraine: Its energy transition and climate ambition in a new world

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has dramatically shifted the socio-economic and political environment within the country, and the nature and outlook for its trade and broader international relations. Since the beginning of the invasion, Russia has faced a historically unprecedented number of sanctions – over 6,900 – by the world's leading economies, including the EU, the US, the UK, Japan and Australia.³⁰ Under pressure from their shareholders and consumers, over 1,000 foreign companies and investors followed suit in a wave of "voluntary" sanctions by exiting the Russian market completely or significantly restricting their operations.³¹ Russia's key trading partners have drastically shifted their approach towards the country, some breaking with decades-long political doctrines. Germany, a country that had maintained a strong relationship with Russia since the latter part of the Cold War, sticking to its famous "Wandel durch Handel"³² paradigm, abandoned this approach after the war on Ukraine began. EU countries have taken a collective decision to break away from their decades-long dependency on Russian fossil fuels, most notably gas. The new strategy involved phasing out Russian gas supplies from the European energy mix by 2027 by accelerating and scaling up the EU's decarbonisation plans envisaged under the Fit for 55 package, while looking for alternative suppliers for the interim period.

While significant uncertainty remains, and new developments may take place in the coming months and years, the new political, trade and financial environment induced by Russia's act of aggression has already considerably damaged its potential to maintain the once-emerging momentum on climate and energy transition, as well as the competitiveness of its economy in a decarbonising world. The key four obstacles include budgetary restrictions due to the loss of Russia's largest

³⁰ Correctiv, *Sanctions Tracker: Live Monitoring of All Sanctions against Russia*, last updated 6 September 2022, <https://correctiv.org/en/?p=107538>.

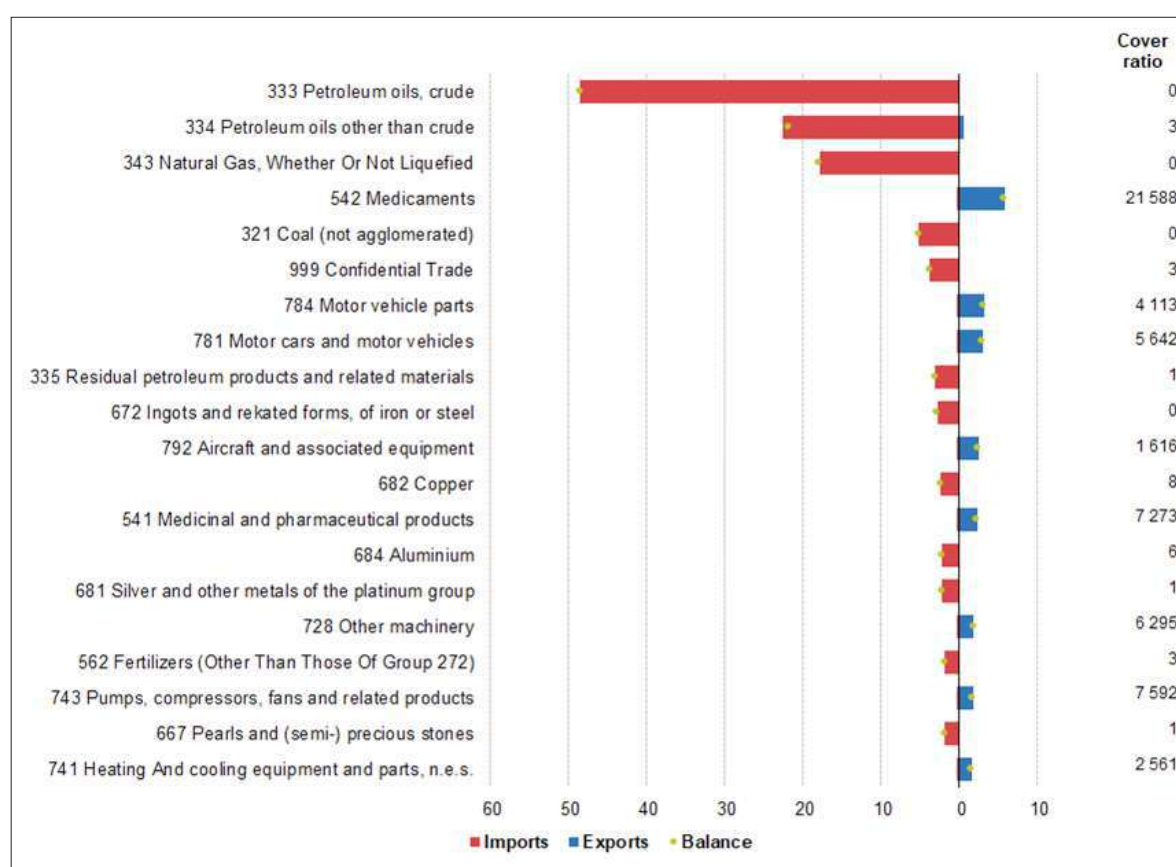
³¹ Chief Executive Leadership Institute, "Over 1,000 Companies Have Curtailed Operations in Russia—But Some Remain", in *Yale SOM News*, last updated 6 September 2022, <https://som.yale.edu/story/2022/over-1000-companies-have-curtailed-operations-russia-some-remain>.

³² Coined to guide Germany's relations with the Soviet Union, the concept of "Wandel durch Handel" (transformation via trade) implies that an authoritarian regime could be opened up politically and socially as long as it has economic impetus to do so (e.g., by trading with liberalised markets). Jörg Lau, "Wandel Durch Handel", in *Internationale Politik*, No. 5 (September/Oktober 2021), p. 15, <https://internationalepolitik.de/de/node/35702>.

commodity export market (Europe); a lack of/restricted access to international investments; a lack of/restricted access to cutting-edge technologies; and a loss of the (external) political drivers for accelerating the transition at home.

Though still unclear to what extent, Russia will be losing its resource base to enable the transition over the next months and years. Over the last decade and until the war began, the EU remained Russia's largest export market, despite its shrinking share. In 2019, trade with the EU accounted for 38.7 per cent of Russia's total exports and 36.2 per cent of imports.³³ In 2021 fossil fuels, most of all crude oil and petroleum products, accounted for over 80 per cent of overall Russian exports to the EU, other top products being coal, gas, iron and steel and copper.³⁴

Figure 5 | Most traded goods between EU and Russia, 2021 (billion euro)



Note: While the trade balance provides information on the absolute value of trading positions, the cover ratio provides a relative measure that is based on the ratio (expressed in percentage terms) between the value of exports and the value of imports; if exports are higher than imports the cover ratio will be above 100.

Source: Eurostat, *Russia-EU – International Trade in Goods Statistics*, cit.

³³ Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) website: *Russia*, <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/rus>.

³⁴ Eurostat, *Russia-EU – International Trade in Goods Statistics* (data extracted in February 2022), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Russia-EU_-_international_trade_in_goods_statistics#EU-Russia_most_traded_goods.

With the EU's embargo on Russia's seaborne crude planned for December, and petroleum for February, combined with a voluntary ban on pipeline crude imports by Germany and Poland, Russian oil exports to the EU will be effectively cut by 90 per cent by early 2023.³⁵ Russian (pipeline) gas exports to the European market have been systematically reduced by Gazprom even before the beginning of the war, and in the first half of 2022 they fell by 25 per cent y-o-y relative to the previous year and are projected to fall by 80 per cent by 2025.³⁶ The embargo on Russian coal imports is in force starting August 10, and an embargo on one of the further key Russian export commodities – steel – has been introduced in March. While some of these commodities (e.g., oil or coal) may be partly rerouted to other markets, particularly in Asia and the Pacific, this will come at a cost (associated with insurance, logistics, discounts to ensure competitiveness against other suppliers). Some commodities will not find alternative markets for a while – e.g., if phased out, Russian gas exports to the EU will not be able to find new offtakes for the next five to ten years due to a lack of infrastructure. The IEA's Gas Market Report, Q3-2022, includes a grim outlook for Russia's gas industry. Compared to last year's forecast for the period 2022–2025, Russia's gas sector will suffer a cumulative production loss of 480–550 billion cubic metres by 2025, equivalent to three-to-four times Russia's exports to the EU. Lack of financing and access to key technologies will significantly slow and eventually curtail the development of Arctic LNG, while the abandonment of Nord Stream 2 will leave two new gas fields – Kharasavey and Bovanenkovo – without offtake agreements.³⁷ This dynamic, combined with the reprioritisation of budgetary spending towards containing the recession,³⁸ financing war actions as well as the country's extensive state and repressive apparatuses, leads to a practically absent budgetary space for delivering the support needed to implement the 2050 decarbonisation strategy. Sberbank has assessed the cumulative investment needs to implement the 2050 strategy at 1 trillion US dollars until 2050, with half going to the energy sector alone. Russia's public finance will not be able to deliver any significant part of this sum in the current environment, and attracting private investments from the traditional source – international majors – does not appear feasible anymore.

Amidst the exodus of foreign companies in the weeks and months after 24 February, several major investors in the energy sector have left Russia as well, making further

³⁵ Ben Cahill, "European Union Imposes Partial Ban on Russian Oil", in *CSIS Critical Questions*, 8 June 2022, <https://www.csis.org/node/65679>.

³⁶ IEA, *Gas Market Report, Q3-2022*, July 2022, p. 85, <https://www.iea.org/reports/gas-market-report-q3-2022>. Gas supply has been cut further in the third quarter, as gas supplies via Nord Stream 1 have been reduced to 1/5 of the pipeline's capacity since late July.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

³⁸ The Russian economy is projected to shrink by 4–6 per cent in 2022 (August assessment by the Central Bank of Russia). Bank of Russia, *Monetary Policy Guidelines for the Year 2023 and the Period 2024-2025* [in Russian], 11 August 2022, p. 49, http://www.cbr.ru/about_br/publ/ondkp/on_2023_2025; Bank of Russia, *Monetary Policy Guidelines for 2023–2025*, 11 August 2022, p. 25, http://www.cbr.ru/eng/about_br/publ/ondkp/on_2023_2025.

development of the clean energy sector at scale problematic. Finnish Fortum and Italian Enel, two of the three largest wind power industry players on the Russian market, are leaving – though the final pull-out or transfer of assets is being slowed down by Putin's recent decree prohibiting any transactions with foreign-owned shares of assets in Russia without his explicit approval.³⁹ Fortum put breaks on new investment projects and plans to withdraw from Russia, while Enel is planning to leave the country within months. Danish Vestas, a producer of wind blades used for Fortum's Russia projects, also intends to withdraw. Due to uncertainty over the future of investments, the Russian government has delayed the competitive selection of new solar PV and wind power projects for construction under so-called "capacity provision agreements" from the second half of 2022 to the first half of 2023.⁴⁰ Russia's renewables sector, which has been becoming more competitive over the recent years and managed to achieve price parity for new solar PV and wind power projects compared to new fossil-based power generation by early 2022, has now only two major players left – Hevel and Rosatom – the latter state-owned. The exodus of oil and gas majors (among the biggest are BP, TotalEnergies and Exxon) is also likely to be detrimental to Russia's decarbonisation efforts. Aside from the interest some of these companies expressed in investing in Russian renewables⁴¹ (although on-paper only), they have been aiming to boost their investments in broader measures reducing the emission intensity of the Russian oil and gas sector, including energy efficiency and methane leakage reduction – in line with their global strategies. Other major companies from other sectors (most importantly retailers like IKEA⁴²), that were interested in investing in renewables in Russia to comply with their own decarbonisation strategies, have also left Russia. The exodus of international investors from the Russian energy sector is highly likely to persist, even in the unlikely scenario of Russia's leadership stopping the invasion of Ukraine and starting peace talks in the immediate perspective. Russia's first default since 1918, being cut off from SWIFT (one of the key components of the global payments system), and the investment risk perceived due to sanctions and the Kremlin's retaliatory policies have not only driven "Western" investments out of the country. They are also repelling any new investment decisions from countries the current Russian regime calls "friendly", most importantly China, for which the Russian market is not significant enough to further strain relationships with the EU and the US – both economic partners of a far bigger weight.

³⁹ Russian Presidency, *Decree No. 520 of 5 August 2022: "On the Application of Special Economic Measures in the Financial and Fuel and Energy Sectors in Connection with the Unfriendly Actions of Central Foreign States and International Organisations"* [in Russian], <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202208050002>.

⁴⁰ "The Second Renewable Energy Support Programme in Russia Is the Final One" [in Russian], in TASS, 14 July 2022, <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/15215355>.

⁴¹ BP, *Rosneft and BP Agree to Cooperate on Carbon Management and Sustainability*, 4 February 2021, <https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/news-and-insights/press-releases/rosneft-and-bp-agree-to-cooperate-on-carbon-management-and-sustainability.html>; "Total Energies Can Invest in Green Projects in Russia" [in Russian], in NANGS, 7 July 2021, <https://nangs.org/news/renewables/total-energies-mozhet-investirovaty-v-zelenye-proekty-v-rf>.

⁴² "IKEA Makes First Solar Park Investment in Russia", in Reuters, 13 April 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/ikea-energy-russia-idAFL1N2M60RS>.

The break-up of international and business-to-business partnerships does not only result in the lack of new money. It comes with restricted access, and in some cases, a ban on the import of new technologies that are key for Russia's decarbonisation. These include not only components needed to lessen the CO₂ and methane emissions intensity of Russia's oil and gas sector, but also the components for boosting the deployment of competitive renewable generation facilities (particularly in the wind sector, which has more physical potential in Russia), as well as software and semiconductors that are key for digitising and "smartifying" Russia's energy production and consumption processes. Securing some of these technologies and high-tech goods from other markets, e.g., China, India or Turkey, will be possible, yet one cannot expect a smooth pivot away from the West here either, due to logistical bottlenecks and the overall trade risks associated with the sanctions regime. Cooperation with "Western" partners on emerging technologies, on which the 2050 strategy is betting for decarbonising Russia's energy sector – hydrogen and carbon capture and storage (CCS) – has been thrown several years back as the dialogues have been interrupted and resuming these efforts with partners from "friendly" countries is likely to be hampered by changes in both the financial and the political environment.

Finally, external policy instruments that have been driving Russia's decarbonisation agenda have practically lost their role as a driver in the current environment. The EU's announced Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) policy, which is only going to be introduced in 2023, has provided a major impetus for Russian industry stakeholders to rethink their decarbonisation strategies and timelines, and, in turn, to provide a push to the Russian government to ensure that the enabling policy and regulatory environment is in place for them to do so. CBAM, however, assumed uninterrupted trade relations with Russia, including in goods categories that will be subject to the carbon tax. The relevance of this instrument is considerably lower now, with iron and steel, which account for about half of Russian exports subject to CBAM,⁴³ banned from the European market. Whether "green steel" remains on the agenda of Russian industry without its main demand centre, is highly uncertain.

3. Russia and the new geopolitics of climate and energy: A tentative outlook

Political space for engaging Russia on climate, as well as the financial and market space for enabling the transformation of Russia's energy system towards climate neutrality are now extremely constrained. In the current context, Russia's clean energy and (still fairly low) climate ambition is hanging by a thread – at least until

⁴³ Mirela Petkova, "Weekly Data: EU's CBAM to Impact Russia, China and the UK the Most", in *Energy Monitor*, 7 February 2022, <https://www.energymonitor.ai/?p=74473>.

there are significant shifts in the present sanctions regime.

While the outcome of the Ukraine war and the future of the Russian economy and political regime are anything but certain, it is very likely that Russia's pre-COP26 role of a "game-spoiler" on global climate ambition will resurface with new strength. The major focus may now be on blame-shifting onto the EU, the US and other parties to the sanctions regime as the triggers of the global economic crisis and major blockers of progress on climate. Early signs of using climate as a bargaining chip were present already at COP26, when Russia declined to join the Global Methane Pledge,⁴⁴ seeking sanctions relief for "green investment projects" for state-run fossil fuel companies such as Gazprom.⁴⁵ One of the biggest methane emitters, Russia has been increasing flaring at both oil and gas production sites (with a 23 per cent increase for the first five months of 2022 compared to the same period last year⁴⁶) as the companies have a production surplus, and at the transport junctures, most evidently at the Portovaya compressor station of Nord Stream 1, which now operates at 20 per cent capacity or less.⁴⁷ Though the government has until now declined requests by the oil and gas industry to increase the flaring allowance limit from 5 per cent to 30 per cent of production, the petroleum gas is still being flared, throwing Russia further back on its climate ambition – something it can now conveniently blame on the Western sanctions. Referring to climate ambition ahead of this year's COP27 climate conference, Russian vice-minister of foreign affairs recently stated that the sanctions against Russia have been not only a hard hit for the Europeans' purse, but for ecology in general.⁴⁸

The pivot of Russia's key energy partners towards decarbonised energy systems and, in the medium term, towards alternative fossil fuel suppliers on the one side, and Russia's quest for access to alternative export markets and technologies on the other, will lead to new geopolitics of energy on the Eurasian continent and beyond, with the first trends already emerging.

With its historic supplier of fossil fuels becoming a major economic and security liability, the EU and its member states are reconfiguring their energy relations

⁴⁴ The pledge, signed by over 100 countries, aims at reducing the global methane emissions by 30 per cent by 2030.

⁴⁵ Marc Champion, "Russia Wants to Protect the Planet and Gazprom at Climate Summit", in *Bloomberg*, 21 October 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-10-21/russia-will-look-for-sanctions-relief-for-climate-projects-at-cop26>.

⁴⁶ "The Ministry of Energy and the Ministry of Natural Resources Will Not Suspend Fines for Associated Petroleum Gas Flaring" [in Russian], in *Vedomosti*, 21 July 2022, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/economics/news/2022/07/21/932372-minenergo-i-minprirodi-ne-priostanovyat-shtrafi-zaszhiganiye-png>.

⁴⁷ "Russia Flares Surplus Gas It Does Not Market", in *Atalayar*, 8 August 2022, <https://atalayar.com/en/node/27824>.

⁴⁸ Anatoly Komrakov, "Sergey Vershinin: Sanctions Hurt Not Only the Wallets of Our European 'Partners', But Also the Ecology in General" [in Russian], in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2 August 2022, https://www.ng.ru/economics/2022-08-02/4_8502_sanctions.html; "Western Anti-Russian Sanctions Hurt Ecology – Senior Diplomat", in *TASS*, 3 August 2022, <https://tass.com/politics/1488487>.

with a much stronger geopolitical vector towards the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). This shift goes beyond the short- to mid-term dash for non-Russian liquefied natural gas (LNG) and pipeline gas (as in the case with German-Qatari negotiations, the EU's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Egypt and Israel, or its MoU with Azerbaijan). New partnerships aim also at mutually beneficial long-term cooperation in the energy sphere, supporting the transitions of energy systems and economies to a low-carbon/renewable resource base. Several partnerships offer a framework for such cooperation: the EU–Gulf Cooperation Council partnership; the EU–MENA Future Energy dialogue (launched this year); or the “hydrogen diplomacy” offices opened by Germany in MENA countries with high renewable potential.

Along with this shift, and obvious interest within the countries of the MENA region to use the ongoing geopolitical turbulence and forge stronger energy and trade relationships with the EU, there is a divide between the EU and emerging markets and developing economies (EMDEs). This divide has been widening since the Covid-19 pandemic, and now threatens to cement the North-South gap and the lack of trust in “Western” energy and climate governance. As the EU started to aggressively tap into the global LNG markets in the wake of the war, it ended up pricing out price-sensitive importing countries in South and Southeast Asia (among them Bangladesh, Pakistan, Thailand and others). These countries' discontent with Western politics grows, as they are forced to resort to coal- and oil-based power generation and demand curtailment to avoid blackouts and social unrest. This is taking place amidst one of the biggest economic and food crises, exacerbated by climate impacts, such as the recent South Asian heatwave and floods.

To maintain its position as a global leader on the energy transition and climate, the EU will need to find ways to accelerate its transition away from reliance on Russian, and ultimately all fossil fuels, without harming the economies of other countries. This can be done by strictly managing and reducing the EU's own fossil fuel demand, ramping up investments in enabling clean energy infrastructure and efficiency in the most vulnerable countries, and leading on the establishment of resilient and transparent supply and value chains, among other measures. Whether it will be able to do so will be one of the key factors shaping the geopolitics of energy in this decade.

Russia is very unlikely to turn into an economic pariah akin to Iran, due to the sheer size and a different structure of its economy, and MENA as well as Asia and the Pacific will be the regions where it will wrestle with the EU and the US for spheres of influence. An early iteration of this trend is Russia's rerouting of parts of its seaborne oil exports away from the US and EU markets: offering heavy discounts, Russia has managed to sell growing quantities of crude to India and China, and fuel oil to Saudi Arabia. It is, however, doubtful whether this will lead to the formation of an “authoritarian energy club” around Russia as the major resource base. While Putin's government boasts of high-level agreements in principle signed with some

of these countries, including the Memorandum of Understanding with Iran⁴⁹ and the Roadmap for Economic Cooperation with Turkey, these and other countries including China do not have a lot of appetite for turning political rhetoric into action.

It is likely that these economies will use their relationship with Russia to support their own energy interests, including consolidating a pro-gas lobby at this year's COP27 or the G20; maintaining the existing oil and gas governance fora where Russia is a member, including OPEC+ and the Gas Exporting Countries Forum; and securing access to cheaper oil and coal, or to critical minerals such as nickel, zinc, uranium or copper. However, barely any of these economies (aside from, possibly, Iran, which itself has been under US sanctions for over forty years) would risk their relations with much bigger trade and technology partners by letting their relationships with Russia evolve beyond the current "energy and resource opportunism" – at least until the war is over.

All this provides a twofold challenge for accelerating global climate action. On the one hand, the global energy and economic crisis – both to a large extent exacerbated by Russia's invasion in Ukraine and the new geopolitical and geoeconomic course both Russia and the "Western" economies have taken – risks putting brakes on transformation of global energy systems and weakening the world's climate ambition. Making sure this does not happen largely depends on whether EU member states, the US and other industrialised economies manage to stick to their domestic decarbonisation plans and reclaim their global leadership on climate and energy transition. At the same time, it is essential that these countries start ramping up financial, political and regulatory support to EMDEs – to cushion the shocks of the ongoing global crises (beyond energy) and pave the way for an accelerated and managed shift to renewable-based economies.

On the one hand, even the economic slowdown in Russia, exacerbated by sanctions, does not change the fact of Russia being the fourth largest CO₂ emitter and the third largest emitter of CH₄. Hence, unless it embarks on a pathway towards climate neutrality, the goal of containing global warming within 1.5°C stays beyond reach. While resuming full-fledged cooperation with Russia on any front, including climate and energy, seems unimaginable at this moment, the EU, its member states, the US and other economies partaking in the sanctions regime will need to find a *modus operandi* that at least keeps the bare minimum of cooperation alive.

There are at least two areas where action is possible and necessary even now. First, maintaining academic ties and enabling the participation of climate and energy scientists from Russia in the international scientific community is key both from the data availability and monitoring perspective (including emissions data; data

⁴⁹ "Iran and Russia's Gazprom Sign Primary Deal for Energy Cooperation", in *Reuters*, 19 July 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/iran-russias-gazprom-sign-primary-deal-energy-cooperation-2022-07-19>.

on environmental degradation – particularly in most vulnerable regions, e.g., the Arctic; deforestation; absorption capacity of carbon sinks, etc.). It also prepares the ground for industrial and political cooperation at a later point, when the dialogue with a broader group of stakeholders in Russia becomes possible again. Second, supporting the civil society and academia in exile, given that many environment and climate activists, political scientists, economists and energy experts had to flee Russia after the war due to the risk to their and their families' wellbeing, is essential for ensuring the future of the Russian climate and energy research and civil society community beyond the current regime.

Updated 5 September 2022

References

Polina Bakunovich, "Russia Introduces Project Ecology", in *Climate Scorecard*, 13 September 2018, <https://www.climatescorecard.org/?p=18224>

Bank of Russia, *Monetary Policy Guidelines for 2023–2025*, 11 August 2022, http://www.cbr.ru/eng/about_br/publ/ondkp/on_2023_2025

Bank of Russia, *Monetary Policy Guidelines for the Year 2023 and the Period 2024–2025* [in Russian], 11 August 2022, http://www.cbr.ru/about_br/publ/ondkp/on_2023_2025

BP, *Rosneft and BP Agree to Cooperate on Carbon Management and Sustainability*, 4 February 2021, <https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/news-and-insights/press-releases/rosneft-and-bp-agree-to-cooperate-on-carbon-management-and-sustainability.html>

Ben Cahill, "European Union Imposes Partial Ban on Russian Oil", in *CSIS Critical Questions*, 8 June 2022, <https://www.csis.org/node/65679>

Marc Champion, "Russia Wants to Protect the Planet and Gazprom at Climate Summit", in *Bloomberg*, 21 October 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-10-21/russia-will-seek-sanctions-relief-for-climate-projects-at-cop26>

Chief Executive Leadership Institute, "Over 1,000 Companies Have Curtailed Operations in Russia—But Some Remain", in *Yale SOM News*, last updated 6 September 2022, <https://som.yale.edu/story/2022/over-1000-companies-have-curtailed-operations-russia-some-remain>

Denis Chukanov et al., "Renewable Energy and Decentralized Power Generation in Russia", in *SWP Comments*, No. 45 (November 2017), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/renewable-energy-and-decentralized-power-generation-in-russia>

Climate Bonds Initiative, *Russian Federation Adopts Green Taxonomy. Matches 100g CO₂ Gas-Power Threshold in EU Parliament's Approved Act*, 10 November 2021, <https://www.climatebonds.net/node/188715>

CMS, "New Bill Limits Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Another Step in the Decarbonisation of the Russian Economy", in *CMS eAlerts*, 2 April 2021, <https://www.cms-lawnow.com/ealerts/2021/04/new-bill-limits-greenhouse-gas-emissions-in-the-decarbonisation-of-the-russian-economy>

Correctiv, *Sanctions Tracker: Live Monitoring of All Sanctions against Russia*, last updated 6 September 2022, <https://correctiv.org/en/?p=107538>

European Commission Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, *EU Taxonomy: Complementary Climate Delegated Act to Accelerate Decarbonisation*, last updated 11 July 2022, <https://europa.eu/!g4pwqb>

Eurostat, *Russia-EU – International Trade in Goods Statistics* (data extracted in February 2022), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Russia-EU_-_international_trade_in_goods_statistics

Yvetta Gerasimchuk and Yuliia Oharenko, "Case Study: Russia", in *Beyond Fossil Fuels: Fiscal Transition in BRICS*, Winnipeg, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), November 2019, <https://www.iisd.org/node/14626>

Anna Geroeva, "Renewable Energy in Russia: Slow Growth" [in Russian], in *Vedomosti*, 29 April 2022, https://www.vedomosti.ru/ecology/science_and_technology/articles/2022/04/29/920410-vie-v-rossii-medlennii-rost

International Energy Agency (IEA), *Energy Fact Sheet: Why Does Russian Oil and Gas Matter?*, 21 March 2022, <https://www.iea.org/articles/energy-fact-sheet-why-does-russian-oil-and-gas-matter>

IEA, *Gas Market Report, Q3-2022*, July 2022, <https://www.iea.org/reports/gas-market-report-q3-2022>

International Finance Corporation and World Bank, *Energy Efficiency in Russia: Untapped Reserves*, Washington, World Bank, 2014, <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/20675>

Anatoly Komrakov, "Sergey Vershinin: Sanctions Hurt Not Only the Wallets of Our European 'Partners', But Also the Environment in General" [in Russian], in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2 August 2022, https://www.ng.ru/economics/2022-08-02/4_8502_sanctions.html

Tatiana Lanshina, "Decarbonization Discourse in Russia: A Stocktaking Paper", in *Heinrich Böll Stiftung E-papers*, November 2021, <https://www.boell.de/en/node/70817>

Tatiana A. Lanshina et al., "The Slow Expansion of Renewable Energy in Russia: Competitiveness and Regulation Issues", in *Energy Policy*, Vol. 120 (September 2018), p. 600-609

Jörg Lau, "Wandel Durch Handel", in *Internationale Politik*, No. 5 (September/Oktober 2021), p. 15, <https://internationalepolitik.de/de/node/35702>

Jean-François Mercure et al., "Reframing Incentives for Climate Policy Action", in *Nature Energy*, Vol. 6, No. 12 (December 2021), p. 1133-1143, <https://doi.org/10.1038/>

s41560-021-00934-2

Mircon, *A New Energy Strategy to the Year 2035 Has Been Approved in Russia* [in Russian], 12 June 2020, <https://www.mircond.com/news/utverzhdena-novaya-energeticheskuyu-strategiyu-rossiyskoy-federatsii-na-period-do-2035-goda/>

Tatiana Mitrova and Yuriy Melnikov, "Energy Transition in Russia", in *Energy Transitions*, Vol. 3, No. 1-2 (December 2019), p. 73-80, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41825-019-00016-8>

Mirela Petkova, "Weekly Data: EU's CBAM to Impact Russia, China and the UK the Most", in *Energy Monitor*, 7 February 2022, <https://www.energymonitor.ai/?p=74473>

Russia, *Federal Law No. 296-FZ of 2 July 2021: On Limiting Greenhouse Gas Emissions* [in Russian], <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202107020031>

Russia, *Nationally Determined Contribution* [in Russian], submitted on 11 November 2020, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/NDC_RF_ru.pdf

Russian Government, *Decree No. 1523-r of 9 June 2020* [in Russian], <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202006110003>

Russian Government, *Decree No. 1587 of 21 September 2021: "On Approval of Criteria for Sustainable (Including Green) Development Projects in the Russian Federation and Requirements for the Verification System for Sustainable (Including Green) Development Projects in the Russian Federation"* [in Russian], <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202109240043>

Russian Government, *Decree No. 3052-r of 29 October 2021* [in Russian], <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/000120211010022>

Russian Government, *Decree No. 3183-r of 25 December 2019* [in Russian], <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202001040016>

Russian Presidency, *Decree No. 520 of 5 August 2022: "On the Application of Special Economic Measures in the Financial and Fuel and Energy Sectors in Connection with the Unfriendly Actions of Central Foreign States and International Organisations"* [in Russian], <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202208050002>

Nathalie Trudeau and Isabel Murray, "Development of Energy Efficiency Indicators in Russia", in *IEA Working Papers*, January 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5kgk7w8v4dhl-en>

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), *Report on the Technical Review of the Fourth Biennial Report of the Russian Federation*, 2 September 2020, <https://unfccc.int/documents/249900>

Yana Zabanova, "Navigating Uncharted Waters. Russia's Evolving Reactions to the CBAM and the European Green Deal", in *Heinrich Böll Stiftung E-papers*, November 2021, <https://www.boell.de/en/node/70825>

Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) is a private, independent non-profit think tank, founded in 1965 on the initiative of Altiero Spinelli. IAI seeks to promote awareness of international politics and to contribute to the advancement of European integration and multilateral cooperation. Its focus embraces topics of strategic relevance such as European integration, security and defence, international economics and global governance, energy, climate and Italian foreign policy; as well as the dynamics of cooperation and conflict in key geographical regions such as the Mediterranean and Middle East, Asia, Eurasia, Africa and the Americas. IAI publishes an English-language quarterly (*The International Spectator*), an online webzine (*AffarInternazionali*), three book series (*Global Politics and Security*, *Quaderni IAI* and *IAI Research Studies*) and some papers' series related to IAI research projects (*Documenti IAI*, *IAI Papers*, etc.).

Via dei Montecatini, 17 - I-00186 Rome, Italy

T +39 06 6976831

iai@iai.it

www.iai.it

Latest IAI PAPERS

Director: Riccardo Alcaro (r.alcaro@iai.it)

- 22 | 21 Kamila Godzinska and Maria Pastukhova, *Russia's Climate Action and Geopolitics of Energy Transition: The Uncertain and Unsettling Outlook following Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*
- 22 | 20 Oleg Buklemishev, *The Russian Economy Is Muddling Through the Sanctions War*
- 22 | 19 Marina Pisklakova-Parker, *Gender Issues in Russia*
- 22 | 18 Isak Runarsson, *Can the West Afford to Let the World Go Hungry? Overcoming Challenges to Establishing a Humanitarian Corridor in the Black Sea*
- 22 | 17 Marco Giuli, *The Geopolitics of Clean Hydrogen – Opportunities and Challenges for Italy*
- 22 | 16 Olga Romanova, *Legislation as a Tool for Expanding the Power of the State and Limiting Political and Civil Rights in Modern Russia*
- 22 | 15 Nathalie Tocci, *Why Ukraine (and Moldova) Must Become EU Candidates*
- 22 | 14 Denis Volkov, *Russian Youth: Their Attitude to the Ruling Elite and Political Processes*
- 22 | 13 Dario Cristiani, *An Overview of the Current State of US-Italian Political-Security Relations*
- 22 | 12 Adriana Castagnoli, *The US–Italy Economic Relations in a Divided World*

Podcast: La guerra di Putin

Nona Mikhelidze

14 Giugno 2022

PODCAST PRIMO PIANO

In questo podcast, **Nona Mikhelidze**, senior researcher dell'Istituto Affari Internazionali, intervista **Andrei Kolesnikov**, ricercatore presso il Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Tra i temi che ascolterete in questa conversazione l'ideologia della guerra di Putin, le prospettive per l'avvio di un negoziato, la questione storica – dal punto di vista di Mosca – dell'aggressione all'Ucraina.

La ricerca di Andrei Kolesnikov si concentra sulle principali tendenze che plasmano la politica interna russa, con particolare attenzione ai cambiamenti ideologici all'interno della società russa.



Podcast prodotto nell'ambito del progetto dell'IAI – "L'impegno selettivo dell'Ue con la Russia", finanziato dal Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione internazionale

Foto di copertina EPA/MIKHAIL METZEL / KREMLIN POOL / SPUTNIK



Podcast: "In Ucraina la guerra suicida di Putin"

Nona Mikhelidze

24 Giugno 2022

PODCAST | PRIMO PIANO

In questa intervista, **Nona Mikhelidze**, ricercatrice Senior dell'Istituto Affari Internazionali, dialoga con **Grigory Yudin** – scienziato politico e sociologo russo – sulla "guerra più insensata della storia russa".

Yudin è un esperto di opinione pubblica e sondaggi in Russia. È editorialista del quotidiano Vedomosti e della rivista online Republic, nonché del sito web Proekt. Ha collaborato anche con Open Democracy. Yudin è stato uno dei pochi osservatori a predire l'invasione russa dell'Ucraina.



Podcast prodotto nell'ambito del progetto dell'IAI – "L'impegno selettivo dell'Ue con la Russia", finanziato dal Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione internazionale

Foto di copertina ANSA/US MINISTERO DIFESA RUSSIA

