

Inhabited Island



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“Your conscience is spoiled by constant attention, it begins to wail at the slightest inconvenience, and your reason bows respectfully before it.”

Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. "The Inhabited Island"

Editor-in-Chief's Column



Olga Belokon

As we wrote in the previous issue of “The Inhabited Island”, we are moving on to a wide coverage of events taking place in the Russian and Ukrainian diasporas around the world.

In July-September, "The Inhabited Island" visited several European countries. Everywhere during our trip, we saw signs of solidarity with the people of Ukraine. First of all, the Ukrainian flags caught the

eye. They hung near government buildings, in museums, cafes, and were exhibited in the windows of residential buildings.

Support for Ukraine and anti-Putin activities in the Russian-speaking community of Germany, – not only political, but also in education, cultural life and humanitarian aid – have acquired an unusual and impressive scope for us New Zealanders.

In the article "Art Against War" read about an unusual documentary performance presented on one of the Berlin stages in early September.

Svetlana Romashova's article "The Trauma of Forced Emigration through the Eyes of a Psychologist" introduces the reader to the experience of a child educational psychologist who helps Ukrainian children, teenagers and their mothers who fled the war, to find the ground under their feet. Lisa Wolfson, the head of the group of the citizens' initiative "Demokrati-Ya", kindly agreed to give an interview to "The Inhabited Island", in which she told how she came up with the idea of creating such a group, what "Demokrati-Ya", based in



Olga Romanova (left) and Olga Belokon (right) in front of the Panda Platform Performance Hall, September 7, 2023. The photo was taken immediately after the performance of Frau N. For more details, see the article "Art Against War".

Düsseldorf and Berlin, does, and how it fits into the complex landscape of the Russian opposition movement in Germany. We were shocked by the story of a private elite school that opened its doors to Ukrainian children and teenagers who fled Ukraine and ended up in Germany unaccompanied. Unfortunately, for some reason, this material cannot be published in this issue, but we hope that it will be able to see the light of day in the future. Read about what has recently happened in the Russian and Ukrainian communities of New Zealand in a short article by Mikhail Vorobyov "Let's support Ukraine".

A lot of things have happened in the world since the publication of the previous, 6th issue of “The Inhabited Island”.

However, since 7 October, all of them have faded into the background: the unprecedented brutality of the Hamas attack on Israeli civilians on the border with the Gaza Strip and the simultaneous firing of rockets into Israel have marked the beginning of a new Israeli-Palestinian war. And now it is the main topic of all the world's news channels.

MIDDLE EAST

Hopes for peace in the Middle East, linked to the planned talks between Israel and Saudi Arabia, have been dashed. Israel was literally one step away from the long-awaited start of building normal relations with the Arab world around it, before the recognition of Israel by the Muslim countries of the Middle East. Alas, the large-scale state terrorism launched by Putin's regime in Ukraine has proven to be contagious. It is not for nothing that US President Joe Biden, in one of his recent speeches, put both regimes – Putin's Russia and Hamas – on the same level. Hamas's attack on Israel has undone all efforts to bring about peace. Israel declared war aimed at the total destruction of Hamas.

The price of this bloody war is almost 1500 brutally murdered Israelis, more than 14,000 dead Palestinians and more than 200 hostages taken by Hamas.

Mass protests, both pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli, swept across the world. Pro-Palestinian protests were voiced by both Muslims and left-leaning Europeans, Americans, including students and staff of prestigious American universities, and representatives of left-wing movements in other countries of the West. They accused Israel of war crimes, genocide of the Palestinian people and occupation of Palestine for colonial-imperialist purposes and demanded an immediate ceasefire.

A wave of anti-Semitic acts and speeches has led to the fact that, as the leading politicians of the European Union state, Jews no longer feel safe in Europe. It should be added that this is not only in Europe.

Recent public speeches and actions in New Zealand echoed the events that had taken place around the world. On November 12, pro-Palestinian demonstrations took place in Auckland and Dunedin, bringing together several thousand people. A few days earlier, pro-Palestinian protesters lit up the Auckland Museum in the colours of the Palestinian flag. The action was a response to the illumination in the colours of the Israeli flag organised by the Museum. The week before, a synagogue was evacuated in Melbourne, and an attempt was made to set fire to the Israeli Consulate in Auckland, which was spray-painted with graffiti with pro-Palestinian slogans. <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/israel-hamas-war-aotea-square-protesters-rally-for-new-zealand-to-join-france-and-others-in-calling-for-ceasefire-in-gaza/X6BA4OCAO5CFVDTJB446CT7TYY/>

The Ukraine war and Israel's war against Hamas are no longer perceived as local military conflicts. It seems that the world is entering another dark period in its history ...

Watching with horror what is happening, we do not undertake to give an exhaustive political assessment of the events in this brief review of events. We believe that a more productive way to help our readers understand what is going on is to invite them to think about the answers to a few questions:

1. Is Hamas a terrorist organisation or an organisation fighting for the liberation of Palestine? Is the answer to this question obvious to you after the events of October 7? Why are the mass pro-Palestinian protests demanding freedom for the people of Palestine from Israeli occupation and not from Hamas? After all, it is no secret that 2 million Palestinian civilians have been held hostage by Hamas, which uses them as human shields, hiding its offices, weapon depots and other things in residential buildings and hospitals.

2. Is Israel the last bastion of imperialism and colonialism, or is it defending its right to exist? To answer this question, let's remember that Hamas's main message and goal is "From the



A Ukrainian flag in the window of a residential building in the French city of Annecy. Photo on the left – an enlarged fragment of the photo on the right.

river to the sea, Palestine will be free." If you imagine a map of Israel, it is not difficult to guess that this call means a call for the total destruction of the State of Israel. The events of October 7 are the beginning of the implementation of this slogan in reality. Another Holocaust?

3. Israel's enemy is not the civilian population of Gaza, but Hamas. The war was unleashed by Hamas, and the Israeli military is making efforts to reduce civilian casualties. But why, during the weeks of devastating bombardment of Gaza, did Israel refuse to begin a multi-day humanitarian respite and limit itself to short daily pauses? Can any righteous cause – in this case, protecting one's country from annihilation – be justified by so many victims, especially among children and women, trapped in Gaza? Was the demand for civilians to leave northern Gaza within 24 hours justified? Were the demands to evacuate the hospitals where the seriously ill and wounded were lying justified? Hard questions that we don't have answers to. Over time, in a historical perspective, the actions of the Israeli army will be objectively assessed. One can only hope that if the IDF has committed war crimes, the perpetrators will be punished. In the meantime, we see horrific images of bloody war, empathise with the immeasurable suffering of thousands of innocent people – on both sides of the border – and rejoice at the ceasefire and the release of hostages.

RUSSIA

Is Putin alive or lying among the food in a refrigerator at Valdai?

With the help of Professor Valery Solovei, this question has become almost the main one in discussions of the current political situation in Russia. Dmitry Peskov's reaction: "We have only one Putin" – and the obituary-like speech of Nikolai Patrushev, who emerged from the shadows for the first time in many years, give some reason to believe that this is true. However, it does not matter whether Putin is physically alive, since he is already a political corpse. Only God knows what is happening in the Russian corridors of power. We just have to watch. And to believe that at some point there will be a window of opportunity...

UKRAINE



New Zealand activist Ilya Mezentsev – in front of the New Zealand parliament building. Wellington, November 7th. Ilya holds a double-sided poster with portraits of Israeli hostages. In his Facebook post, he writes: "At least 100 New Zealand schoolchildren coming out of the Parliament from the field trip looked at these faces, surprised at how many children and older people were victims of terrorists."

The Ukrainian military continues to fight courageously on the fronts of their war. The summer counteroffensive is over. It did not lead to the liberation of large areas of occupied territories, which, in our opinion, led to an important result – the establishment of parity of forces. Could Ukrainians dream of parity at the beginning of the war? The

Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, General Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, with his sensational interview, professionally analysed the situation and concluded that

the war had turned into a positional one. The interview, of course, was addressed to Ukraine's Western partners. Zaluzhnyi clearly formulated what technical support Ukraine needs to get out of the positional war, which benefits Russia, and to continue successful offensive operations. Let's hope that the first positive reaction – the decision of the German authorities to double military aid to Ukraine – will not be the last. We just have to watch ...

The Trauma of Forced Emigration through the Eyes of a Psychologist



Svetlana Romashova (real name known to the editorial office but changed for security reasons) is an educational psychologist from Moscow, who has extensive experience working with a variety of children. In 2019, Svetlana moved to

Berlin for family reasons. Since March 2022, she has been helping Ukrainian refugees as a volunteer psychologist.

In early March 2022, a flood of refugees poured from Ukraine to Europe. Poland and Germany received the most people. In these countries, a countermovement immediately arose – helping volunteers. At first, it was necessary to meet people at railway stations, then help with accommodation, to escort them to various state institutions. Pretty quickly, people started asking on social media if anyone knew a child psychologist. I responded. I got my first clients. And then the mothers began to pass on my contacts to others who needed the help of a psychologist. That's how I ended up in this flow.

Among those who have arrived, there are mothers who have experienced personal tragedies. You have to work with them separately, and this is a special conversation. This should be written about separately.

Here we will talk about relatively safe refugees – those who did not lose loved ones and were not injured. But their lives were still ruined.

What childhood problems have I been most often contacted about? Characteristically, no-one complained that a child was traumatised. The most frequent appeals boiled down to a child being disobedient, rude, got into conflicts and fights at school. Such children spend all day on the phone or at the computer, do not want to do homework, do not want to help with housework or take out the rubbish. In other words, the usual complaints of ordinary parents of young teenagers. At the same time, it turned out that all our usual recommendations to parents, effective in peaceful life, are not applicable here. Here's why.

The first thing to understand is that these people are not immigrants. They are refugees. An immigrant, who is going to leave certainly not because of a good life, weighs all the risks. Perhaps he does not really understand what exactly awaits him, what he will have to face, but he understands that there will be difficulties, and he is psychologically ready for them at the beginning of his journey. Refugees from Ukraine are people who did not plan to go anywhere. They had to leave at a moment's notice. Many have never been abroad, do not know languages, they went not WHERE, but FROM. They would like to return home if there was a place to return to. And their children are the most ordinary – not always perfect, capricious, introverted, hyperactive, each with their own

characteristics. In a word, ordinary children. After moving, the first shock gradually passed, people found places to stay in dormitories or with families and began to settle down. At the same time, it still seemed to many that they had left for a very short time, that all this horror would end soon. It must be said that the state provides refugees with great material assistance. But to receive this help, people have to go to different authorities, collect a bunch of documents. Ukrainian mothers were faced with having to somehow overcome these bureaucratic obstacles without knowing the local language. At the same time, the system was not designed for such a surge of requests and coped with it quite poorly. At first, every visit to such institutions ended in tears and hysterics for many: the accumulated resentment at the injustice of this world had to pour out somewhere. It began to spill out on those around them, including children whose behaviour did not meet their expectations.

It should be noted that in Europe, school attendance by school-age children is compulsory. For children who do not know the language, special classes are organised in schools. It is not easy for any child to adapt to a new school. My clients found themselves in an unfamiliar language environment. The difficulty of adaptation was not only the lack of language. The entire educational process is organised in a different way in German schools. As a result, children are under constant severe stress.

Now imagine how in a very small space (a room in a dormitory), after school a child meets a mother, who has spent the day going to different institutions. By the time they meet, both are emotionally exhausted, on edge, and just want to rest and come to their senses. Their expectations of each other at this point clearly do not coincide. A mother expects help and sympathy from a child or a young teenager, as from an adult. The child expects the same level of support from the mother as they used to receive at home, in Ukraine. On top of that, there are worries about the father and grandparents who stayed at home ... The mother sees that the rubbish has not been taken out, the dishes have not been washed, the child is playing on the computer. As a result, a scandal is almost inevitable.

Both the mother and the child feel that they have been treated unfairly, that they have ruined their lives for no reason. The level of general aggression around us has increased many times, but this aggression is poured out on whoever is nearest at hand, that is, on each other.

If there is also a grandmother in this family, this, on the one hand, alleviates domestic problems, but can create additional tension, because grandmothers in the post-Soviet space tend to be even less flexible and try to recreate everything they are used to at home in a new place.

Strange as it may seem, online education in a Ukrainian school turned out to be a very serious psycho-traumatic factor. Ukraine, in order not to lose its citizens, made a decision

dictated by political reasons, an ambiguous one from the point of view of age psychology.

It is believed that certificates of study at a foreign school will not be recognised when refugees return and that children will be placed in the same class in which they studied before departure.

To continue continuous education, a child who is abroad must complete a Ukrainian school programme online and file their homework electronically. Teenagers in grades 5-8, often lose interest in learning. The main thing for them at this age is communication. And here is a situation where they have to study in two schools at once. They were torn away from the usual circle of communication, and at the same time, some of their schoolfriends remain in Ukraine, which means that you can live there. The child wants to go back. As a result, the little time that mothers and children spend together is often taken up with arguments and battles over the need to do homework for a Ukrainian school.

dressed, the mother has the feeling of "I am a good mother". People lost control of their lives in an instant. But the idea of what a "good mum" is is still from that old life. And it is very important for them to show each other and the whole world that they are good mothers and that they have wonderful, well-groomed children – "excellent students".

Even adults who make a normal move to a new place often take a long time to assimilate. If teenagers were to enter adolescence in a normal peaceful life, both they and their parents would gradually be able to adapt to it. But our Ukrainian mothers really want (and they can be understood) to have at least something under control in this uncontrolled world. And then, with triple energy, they begin to control. What they think they can still control is their children. After all, you want everything to work out well and right away.

This is a brief description of the problem. And what to do with all this? How can a psychologist help, who, alas, does not have a magic wand?



Parents who turned to me as a child psychologist frequently complain that their child is bullied at school. A common parental opinion in the post-Soviet space was the following: – a child should be able to stand up for himself: "If others offend them, hit back." In Europe, this is not the practice. At the same time, the child often cannot correctly assess the situation that he sees as conflictual, including because of their lack of language. As a result, the school complains about the child's aggressiveness, but the parents are not able to understand the situation in detail. They feel that their child is being treated unfairly. In German schools, there are specialists in resolving conflicts between children, but Ukrainian parents often have no idea about this pedagogical technology. We have to explain to both adults and children how to behave in such situations.

All of these stories have something in common. People had a life in which everything was clear: work, career, the best school in the city for a child, clubs. The child is always neatly

My experience shows that in order to help these people, it is necessary to create points of stability in this unstable world. In a strange and incomprehensible city, a child has a place where she can come once a week, drink juice or tea with cookies, play board games and talk about how the week at school went, whether she called his grandparents, what professions she liked, what she would like to study further, and share her ideas. And complain that her mum doesn't understand her.

A child must have a goal. Without this there will be no learning motivation. The child needs to understand in which country she will live, then she will understand why she should study in each of the schools. Since no-one knows how things will turn out. You need to develop a motivation for learning that is understandable for the child. For example, we discuss with her that Ukraine, of course, will win, but then it will need to be restored. Of course, Europe will take part in this, and then specialists with European education and knowledge of the Ukrainian language will be needed. At the very least, this

reduces the initial protest, and then the child is gradually drawn in.

As a rule, mothers turn to me to "fix" their child. They themselves have no time to spend talking to a psychologist, there are too many more important things. You have to persuade them, invite them for coffee.

After all, a point of stability is also important for a mother, the opportunity to discuss over coffee everything that has been written here. And gradually together we will come to the point that the main thing now is the relationship with the child. And school, lessons, dishes – these are all important problems, but of a secondary level.

Together we discuss what is more correct in the extreme situation in which everyone finds themselves: to have an absolutely obedient child who will pass the school curriculum at any cost, or to raise a responsible person who will be able to make conscious choices and make independent decisions? We also talk about how to combine control and the need to learn self-reliance.

If the mother gradually calms down and comes to a relatively balanced state, then "magically" the child becomes calmer. And each of them gets the experience that the world is not completely bad, there are those in it who are ready to help. In this way, step by step, we are moving.

Art vs. War



Olga Belokon

On the 7th of September, an unusual theatrical performance took place in Berlin – a documentary performance called "Frau N". I was told the project was originally conceived as a reading of a recent interview conducted by journalist Artur Solomonov with a resident of Berlin, Frau N (the name of the heroine in the play has been changed). Frau N's

childhood and adolescence coincided with the years of formation and "heyday" of Hitler's regime, and her youth during the Second World War. Somehow, the reading turned into a real theatrical performance. The production of the documentary performance was undertaken by Tatiana Marek, a young Israeli director, the musical arrangement by Evgeny Shapovalov was very expressive.

The most unusual thing about this project was that the main roles in the play were played not by actors, but by well-known Russian opposition journalists and public figures – Alexander Plushchev and Olga Romanova. Plushchev now hosts the DW News Show on the Deutsche Welle radio station and develops his own [YouTube](#) channel. Romanova is the head of the Russia Behind Bars Foundation. She is also active in the opposition Russian-language media.

I believe that the well-known saying "Art is a great power" will best explain why these people, who were forced to leave Putin's Russia because of the danger of being repressed for their active citizenship and journalistic activities, turned to theatrical art as a means to support like-minded people and reach the hearts of those who have not yet fully understood what is happening in Russia now.



Scenes from the play

I was lucky enough to get to this performance. The theatre venue – a small hall in Prenzlauerberg, one of the central districts of the former East Berlin – was provided to the creators of the production by the Panda platform. Panda is a cultural centre that supports anti-Putin cultural initiatives and also

provides support to Ukrainian refugees in Berlin <https://panda-platforma.berlin/>. The programme of cultural events "Panda" was distributed free of charge to all spectators who came to the performance. I was struck by the density of the programme: events on the platform take place almost daily, which once again confirms that Berlin has now become a real centre of the Russian opposition.

A lot of people gathered for the performance. All the chairs were already taken, but spectators kept arriving. In the end, the organisers let everyone into the hall, so many had to stand or sit on the floor in the aisles and near the stage.

... The lights go out in the hall... On the stage at the table is a Russian journalist (Plushchev). He strikes up a conversation with the landlady of the apartment (Romanova), where he is staying for a short business trip in Berlin. An elderly woman, virtually blind, asks the journalist to help her rewind the yarn. She tells you to call her Nora, just Nora. Word for word, Nora reminisces into long-ago memories. These memoirs are striking in their frankness: Nora does not spare herself, she simply and honestly tells, and just as honestly answers the journalist's questions – how she perceived certain events of her life and the life of the country, how the perception of the same events changed with the change of epochs ... a happy youth in

Greater Germany during the Third Reich ... The perception of Hitler as a hero who led the country out of crisis, providing the Germans with prosperity and prospects ... The desire of a young girl to serve her Motherland, the great Germany ... Going to the cinema with my friends to see films that expose the greed and other vices of the Jews ... General indifference to journalists, writers, and simply people who do not accept the regime disappearing without a trace ... At that time, she and her relatives and friends did not know about the concentration camps – after all, they were not written about in the newspapers and not shown in the movies ...

Interestingly, Nora's enthusiastic optimism came to an end after the events of Kristallnacht on November 9, 1938, when she saw destroyed shops, shards of shop windows scattered along the streets ... Nevertheless, during the war, at the call of the government, Nora goes to Poland, where she lives and

works on a farm, whose owners have been evicted ... And she does it to help her beloved Motherland ...

In May 1945, Nora and her mother and grandfather waded knee-deep in water through the half-flooded tunnels of the Berlin subway to the north, where German military units were said to still hold out. They got out of the subway, where they had spent many hours, when it became known that the surrender had been announced. And they saw the city levelled almost to the ground ... Walking through this city, Nora meets a Russian soldier from Buryatia, Boris. Boris addressed her in perfect German. They began to meet every day. It wasn't a novel, but Nora remembers Boris as a Man who remained a Man in an inhuman time. On May 9, Boris did not come to the meeting. Nora has been trying to find him for years. For many years Nora wrote to various Soviet authorities, to the Politburo, then to Gorbachev personally, but it was all in vain – the Russian archives remain classified ...



Participants of the project, from left to right: Evgeny Shapovalov (sound engineer), Alexander Plushchev, Marina Marek (director), Olga Romanova, Artur Solomonov (author of the interview with the prototype of Nora)

Now Nora follows the events taking place in Russia and Ukraine. She says that the Russians have fallen ill with the same disease from which the Germans were once cured, that propaganda is a great power, and that the Germans are now relieved that they are no longer the bearers of evil.

The play ends with the Russian journalist going to the pub and there composing a touching letter to Nora on behalf of Boris's grandchildren, who keep a photograph of Nora, which she gave to Boris in the distant 1945 ...

More than an hour-long performance is watched in one breath. The obvious parallels between Nazi Germany and modern-day Russia, stemming from Nora's story, send shivers down your spine.

The actors did a great job. It was easier for Plushchev: he was actually playing himself. But Romanova had to transform into a very complex and ambiguous character, and even into a heroine who is twice her age. Olga/Nora turned out to be a completely lively person – so accurate were the intonations, gestures, all the behaviour of her heroine on stage. Romanova appeared in this performance before the audience in a new capacity, demonstrating an obvious dramatic talent.

I would like to say once again to all the creators of the performance: Bravo!

Cross-Border Civil Society – A Dream or Reality?

Lisa Wolfson lives in Düsseldorf. She is a PhD researcher in the medialogy and cultural anthropology. Lisa moved to Germany from St. Petersburg as an 11-year-old. She is the co-founder of one of the Russian-speaking anti-war anti-Putin civic initiatives in Germany. The interview with Lisa was recorded in Cologne on August 19, 2023.

Olga Belokon: Lisa, you moved to Germany as a child and have lived in this country all your adult life. How did it happen that anti-war, anti-Putin activities became almost the main business of your life?

Lisa Wolfson: Anti-war initiatives – grassroots movements of Russians and all those whose identity is linked to Russia – appeared after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but some of the new civil society organisations were formed earlier, in 2021. This was due to the return of Alexei Navalny to Russia in January 2021. Navalny's arrest was the impetus for the emergence of anti-Putin initiatives around the world, including in the Russian-linked community in Germany. This push in 2021 led to people in Germany, primarily in Berlin, taking to the streets in thousands of demonstrations in parallel with the demonstrations in Russia. I remember riding the train from Cologne to Berlin and thinking, "I have to go to the demonstration. There won't be many people there, I need to support them." When I approached the Kanzleramt [the building where the office of the German Chancellor is located], there were only a couple of people standing there. And then, suddenly, people began to flock to the square from all sides, and the square quickly filled. The procession moved to the Embassy of the Russian Federation. I noticed that people of different ages came. Many of them I would not identify as Russians or Russian women and people associated with Russia (when we came to Germany 30 years

ago, it was very easy to identify immigrants from the post-Soviet space on the street by their appearance, by the way they behaved). There were a lot of students. Literally a week later, I flew to Moscow, where protests were taking place at that time. I saw with my own eyes Moscow, flooded with riot police, the National Guard, with blocked streets ... It was an unreal sight. In Europe, too, there are rallies that are accompanied by a large number of police, for example, the May Day demonstrations in Berlin, but I have never seen such a demonstration as in Moscow at that time. I tried to be careful, but I went everywhere. I was lucky that I wasn't harmed in any way. Harsh detentions and beatings took place in the immediate vicinity of me. So, I've seen enough. Watching all this, communicating with people, I felt some kind of helplessness. A few days later, I was walking in Zamoskvorechye, standing on a bridge ... And suddenly I realised that many people in Germany do not understand what is happening in Russia, that something must be done, and I want to do something. I wanted to believe that there should be some alternative for Russia, some other future, that it is possible,



Lisa Wolfson

that I should somehow participate in its construction.

For a long time, the idea has been important to me that the spaces of the diaspora and the spaces of life in Russia should not be separated from each other. These spheres are interconnected, and this connection must be strengthened through civil interaction. The rather widespread idea that they do not intersect with each other is false, although it is their discontinuity that is traditionally declared by many people. I left Russia as a child, and every time I came to



Anti-war rally in support of Russian and Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia, Berlin, January 2023. At the microphone is Lisa Wolfson. To her right is Leonid Gozman.

Russia, I heard: "You don't live here, you don't understand life here, and therefore you have no right to speak and judge." I have dual citizenship, German and Russian. Citizenship means some kind of rights (although the state in Russia is not legal), as well as obligations. This means that you can participate in elections (there are virtually no elections today) even if you do not live in Russia. Having this passport, which I have not surrendered and which I have not renounced, carries certain obligations. I've always been aware of that. I've had a premonition for a long time that this would somehow come true, although I didn't know how exactly ...

After I returned from Moscow, I started looking for people who were already doing something here in Germany and were better integrated into the Russian-speaking, Russian-connected community than I was. It includes people of different waves of emigration (some left Russia a long time ago, and others left after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine), people of different ethnic origins, including not only ethnic Russians, but also Jews, Germans from the former USSR, and representatives of the indigenous peoples of Russia. Some no longer have Russian citizenship or have never even had one, such as ethnic Germans who came to Germany from Kazakhstan but continue to associate themselves with Russia. There are also people in this community who support Putin.

In Berlin in the spring of 2021, when many people were looking for like-minded people and wanted to do something, a tent camp was organised in front of the Brandenburg Gate, where educational events were held for a whole month. I found out about this camp and decided that I would go there. Just at this time, protests were taking place in Berlin in defence of Navalny, who went on a hunger strike in jail. I went to Berlin, took part in a demonstration and joined the campground. There I met guys with whom I found a common language. We decided that we wanted to create an organisation.

Olga Belokon: What is the name of your organisation?

Lisa Wolfson: The organization is called "Demokrati-JA". It's a play on words. Its meaning in Russian is democracy starts with me [in Russian *ya* (*я*) means "I"], and in German "*ja*" [pronounced "*ya*"] means "yes". We had this idea – to combine two spaces in the name: German-speaking and Russian-speaking. This is hybridity in the positive sense of the word,

and this was important for us. We were looking for a name for a long time, preferring not to include an ethnic or national component in it. Now as in Germany, in the same way, there are many organisations and civic initiatives throughout the world, the names of which include such a component: "Freies Russland NRW" (Free Russia North Rhine-Westphalia) in Dusseldorf, "Free Russians" in Munich (they are called in English), "Free Russians Global" in the Czech Republic and others.

Olga Belokon: What do you do? What specific goals do you pursue?

Lisa Wolfson: Our team organises various events, although our activities are not limited to this. We are engaged in the creation of an active civic community and educational activities.

Olga Belokon: How many people are there in your organisation?

Lisa Wolfson: There are ten people in total, but not all of them are equally active. Four people are the most active.

Olga Belokon: A very small group.

Lisa Wolfson: Yes, people don't believe how such a small group can do so much. We organise meetings with discussions on various topics, support political prisoners in Russia,

and organise exhibitions, including online. In the summer of 2022, we organised the so-called "Picnics Against the War", to which we invited refugees from Ukraine, as well as people who moved here for political reasons from Russia and Belarus. We also held themed picnics, on which specific topics were discussed, helping people navigate an unfamiliar environment.

Olga Belokon: Are your public actions covered on the internet and social networks?

Lisa Wolfson: Yes, we have a website. Of course, we would like to improve it, but it's hard to do everything at once. Naturally, we have a Facebook group with about 2,100 followers. We have channels on both Instagram and Telegram.

One of the main aspects of our activity is community building. Last October, we organised a meeting in Berlin to which we invited representatives of initiatives like ours. We gathered the participants of this meeting from all over Germany, from different lands. About 80 people from 30 Russian-



Международный митинг в Брюсселе в день рождения Алексея Навального, июнь 2023. Слева направо: Даша Дадли, Александр Морозов, Лиза Вольфсон и Елена Сергеева. Женщины на фотографии - соосновательницы инициативы «Demokrati-JA»

speaking initiatives related to Russia gathered. We spent two days together, and now we are building an alliance.

Olga Belokon: Do you want to unite all these groups?

Lisa Wolfson: Yes, we want horizontal unification. It's not an easy task.

Olga Belokon: Can such an alliance grow into a political party?

Lisa Wolfson: Yes, we are thinking about it. We don't know yet what will come out of this venture. The diaspora is very heterogeneous, people are all different. Since not all Russian speakers are associated with Russia, it is difficult to find the terminologically correct name for us. The alliance is designed in such a way that it will unite the spaces of Germany and Russia. It embeds the idea of a cross-border civil society.

Olga Belokon: Civil society exists in Germany. There is no such thing in Russia. Is your goal to form a civil society in Russia? But you're not in Russia.

Lisa Wolfson: In a global sense, it doesn't matter where you are – the values are the same, the problems are the same. We are cosmopolitan. When we do something in Germany and when we register organisations in Germany, it is clear that we are part of the civil society in Germany. But at the same time, because our work is closely linked to Russia, we support those who are who is persecuted there, and those who cannot speak out because of the danger of being persecuted. We speak on their behalf. In this sense, we are representatives of Russian civil society. "Demokrati-JA" is a bridge that connects different people, different organisations and different countries. For example, we cooperate with the Feminist Anti-War Resistance (FAS). They are very active in Russia, and they have strong cells all over the world. They also have a cell in Berlin.

It is clear that many oppositionists will return to Russia as soon as the opportunity arises. Therefore, it is important to do something here, to build this community here in the hope that people who have returned to Russia will bring there the ideas, principles and infrastructure of modern civil society.

Olga Belokon: After the start of the war, many well-known journalists, politicians and public figures moved to Germany. More than 1,000 special visas for this category of persons were issued by the German government to Russian oppositionists who emigrated to Germany. As a result, Berlin has become the de facto centre of the Russian opposition movement. Do you have any contact with this circle of people? Do you interact with them?

Lisa Wolfson: Yes, we invite famous people to participate in our events and take part in the events of our colleagues. For example, tomorrow (August 20) there will be an event in Berlin, which we will organise together with FreeNavalny Deutschland. Leonid Volkov, who will come from Vilnius, and Tatyana Felgenhauer will speak at this event. Olga Romanova and Leonid Gozman also speak at our events. In October last year, Alexander Morozov came from Prague to one of the events. In May, on our actions on the culture of remembrance were performed by Irina Shcherbakova and other representatives of Memorial. At a large rally organised by Demokrati-JA, on the anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Vitaly Mansky, Anton Dolin, Andrei Arkhangel'sky, Maria Tunkara and municipal deputies from Russia who are now in Germany spoke.



Anti-war rally in Düsseldorf organised by Freies Russland NRW, June 2023.

Olga Belokon: Who supports you financially? Do you have sponsors?

Lisa Wolfson: Nobody supports us now. In the past, we received a little support from private individuals – Germans

at an exhibition "Demokrati-JA" ("Putins Hosts and Ukrainian political prisoners in the Kreis") in 2023.

(not Russian-speaking) who saw our actions at the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. At that time, we organised hundreds and thousands of weekly actions. At that time, the whole of Berlin

took to the streets every weekend, but we thought it was very important that Russians and Russian women came out to protest. Then, at the beginning of March 2022, the white-blue-white (BSB) flag appeared. We were supported by a German civil society organisation, from which we received equipment (amplifiers, etc.) We also received mini-grants for the creation of exhibitions about political prisoners (online: <https://www.demokrati-ja.org/exhibition/main> and offline). These are all very modest amounts. We need support. We are



Lisa talks about the travelling exhibition "Demokrati-JA" entitled "Putins Geiseln" ("Putin's Hostages"), dedicated to Russian and Ukrainian political prisoners in the Russian Federation, PANDA Platforma, Berlin, September 2023.

currently working on the professionalisation of the organisation. We want to create an alliance of initiatives in Germany, which would be a force independent of other political forces, especially those that are trying to crush us. When we are

invited to opposition meetings – in Berlin, in Brussels – we do not refuse, we go. But it is very important for us to preserve our subjectivity in civil society.

Olga Belokon: Can you estimate what part of the Russian-speaking community in Germany holds pro-Putin views?

Lisa Wolfson: No, I can't. To do this, you need scientific data. I know people who are doing this. But now I can't even approximate it, because until I was 21 years old, I didn't communicate much with Russian speakers. Unfortunately, I see a lot of people – on social networks, in chat rooms, expressing pro-Putin views. It should be understood that the propaganda of the Putin regime purposefully spreads its disinformation among Russian-speaking migrants (and not only among them) – through Rossotrudnichestvo, the so-called Russian Houses, various media and Russky Mir as a whole. Even among the refugees from Ukraine, there are people who are influenced by this propaganda. Or here's an example from the old émigré community: ethnic Germans who were persecuted in the Soviet Union come to Germany and think they are returning to their homeland. But many of them feel like strangers here. And then they are picked up by Putin's propaganda ...

Our task is to counter such things through integration into democratic processes through civic education. I would like to hope that the victory will be ours.

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An island of the "Russian world" in the centre of Europe?



Olga Belokon

Back in Soviet times, institutions were opened in various European cities to maintain cultural contacts between European countries and the Soviet Union. Such an institution was opened in Berlin in 1984. It was then called the House of Soviet Science and Culture.

In the '90s, after the collapse of the USSR, the institution was renamed the Russian House of Science and Culture, or simply the Russian House (Russisches Haus der Wissenschaft und Kultur). Famous Russian actors, directors, artists came to the Russian House on tour; exhibitions and screenings of Russian and Soviet films in the Russian language were organised. I worked in the Russian House with a children's group for the study of the Russian language. At that time, we lived in Berlin and visited the Russian House. There I was lucky enough to see one of the last performances of Maya Plisetskaya (who at



Left: Advertisement with the logo of the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation. Right: Sign at the entrance to the premises of the Bilingua Children's Study Group (Centre for the Support and Development of Bilingualism)

that time had already emigrated to Germany and lived in Munich) of her famous "The Dying Swan". Once we went to a performance by Mikhail Zhvanetsky.

After the Russian authorities unleashed the war in Ukraine, it became clear to many that the Russian Houses, supported by the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo for short), at a certain point, under the guise of developing cultural ties, became centres for the dissemination of pro-Putin disinformation and propaganda. Rossotrudnichestvo fell under the



Left: the main entrance to the Russian House. Berlin, Friedrichstrasse, August 2023. Right: An advertisement with an invitation to study in Russia

seventh package of EU sanctions and, as a result, Russian Houses in Europe began to be closed.

At the beginning of September this year, while in Berlin, we decided to go to Friedrichstrasse and see what the building of the former Russian House looks like now. Imagine our surprise when we saw the same signboard, fresh posters and realised that the Russian House in Berlin was open. We went inside. In the foyer of the second floor there was an elegant buffet, in the concert hall a symphony orchestra was rehearsing, which indicated that at least some rooms of the house were rented out. On the top floor, we found the premises of the children's language group, where we talked to one of the teachers. From her we learned that the group is working, but they were on holiday.

It was strange to see posters with the logo of the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, the same ministry that had just released its infamous history textbook for high schools. It was as if the logos of Goebbels's office had hung in the German cultural centre of the United States in the 1930s.

It turned out that we were not the only ones perplexed by the strange situation with the Russian House in Berlin. It turns out that the Berlin prosecutor's office has already been contacted with complaints about the violation of the sanctions regime, and Ukrainian activists are staging protests and pickets in front of their homes. However, the administration of the house allegedly insists that the institution is an independent



Café in the foyer of the second floor

legal entity and has nothing to do with Rossotrudnichestvo. You can find more information about this scandal in the publication by Deutscher Welle.

<https://www.dw.com/ru/pocemu-russkij-dom-v-berline-ot-kryt-nesmotra-na-sankcii-es/a-67343714>

Let's support Ukraine



Mikhail Vorobyev

There is no end in sight to the Ukrainian war, which has been going on for almost two years. Fighting continues at the front. Shelling of cities. Destruction. Death. And tiredness ... Fatigue has also accumulated among those who are far from Ukraine, who have been organising or involved in humanitarian actions in support of Ukraine since the beginning of the war. All the more valuable is the assistance that our New Zealand activists continue to provide to Ukraine. Here's a quick overview of them:

Political actions:

On August 20, New Zealand activists joined an international rally organised by the international community of anti-war Russians: "Putin is a murderer! Putin to The Hague!"



Participants of the action "Putin is a murderer! Putin to The Hague!" in Auckland, August 20, 2023

Humanitarian actions:

During August-October, the RSIA (Russian Speaking Integrity Alliance) group organised three charity events and sales of baked goods:

- On July 23, the action took place at St Heliers Church. Proceeds from the sale were donated to a group of emergency physicians and rehabilitation specialists led by Dr. Vladislav Sinyakhovsky (\$NZ1,313.78) and Maxim Duomkin and his team of volunteers rescuing people in flood areas and organising a summer camp for orphaned children and adolescents in the districts, formerly under occupation (\$NZ2,500). Screenshots of the transfers and thank-you letters from the



Charity sale of pastries on August 26th in Parnell.



Charity sale of pastries at St. Ignatius' Church, October 15

recipients of the aid are published in the RSIA Facebook group.



Maxim Duomkin and his team

- On 26 August, a charity sale of pastries was held at a fair in Parnell. The total amount of revenue was \$NZ2803. Of this, \$1,800 was sent to Maxim Duomkin for the

purchase of food and necessary goods, and \$1,000 to Dr. Vladislav Sinyakhovsky.

- On October 15, pastries were sold at St. Ignatius Church, St. Heliers. The total revenue was \$NZ2,638 NZD. Of this, \$1,638 was sent to Maxim Duomkin and his team to help with the supply of firewood for the winter to those in need, \$1,000 to Dr. Sinyakhovsky.

Here is an excerpt from a post published in the RSIA Facebook group:

"Winter is coming, and cold weather has set in Ukraine. Families living in war-affected areas are facing incredible hardship due to destroyed roads and communications.

Pensioners in Ukraine are paid only 2,700 hryvnias per month, which is about \$US60 to \$US70. And to heat their homes and cook meals, they need about \$100 more per month. It is impossible to do this without external assistance. Volunteers help these families gather firewood for the winter. The cost of one truck of firewood, enough for a cold winter, is

\$US350 (about 12,500 hryvnias)."

A group called the Help Ukrainian Children Alliance was launched in Christchurch in May. One of the group's initiatives is the production of traditional Ukrainian dolls. All proceeds are sent to institutions helping children in Ukraine.

On November 16, a charity concert of the well-known band "Antytila" took place in Auckland. This is the group's first visit to New Zealand.

All information, including photos, is taken from posts published in the RSIA Facebook group



A Motanka doll made by the "Help Ukrainian Children Alliance"

Humour

*We have collected the material presented here from various sources. Some of them are not humorous. Nevertheless, we felt that the humour page was the only appropriate section for all these materials. **

Two pieces of news, good and bad:
The good news: Putin is dead.
The bad news is that it is not certain.
(Alexander Nevzorov)



They write that:

- Alla Pugacheva came to Russia for Putin's funeral; **
- the FSB# is deliberately spreading a rumour about Putin's death, although in fact it was not Putin who died, but his body double.
- the FSB is deliberately spreading the rumour about Putin's death in order to divert attention from the war and the problems of Russian reality.
- the FSB is deliberately spreading rumours about Putin's death in order to create information chaos and undermine trust in ANY media.
- Putin pretends to be dead to avoid trial in the Hague.
- Rumours of Putin's death are preparations for elections: a dead Putin is more popular than a living Putin.

*Recently an anonymous Telegram channel "General of Foreign Intelligence" announced that Putin died on October 26 and that he is currently replaced by Putin's body double. This information has been confirmed by Moscow resident and political scientist Valery Solovei, who claims that he has access to confidential Kremlin information. Both sources report that Putin's body is stored in the food freezer at his residence in Valdai. There is no independent confirmation of Putin's death and the internet is full of allegations that both "General of Foreign Intelligence" and Valery Solovei are controlled by the FSB# and that the rumours about Putin's death are beneficial to the FSB. We find that it is difficult to believe that the rumours about Putin's death are orchestrated by the FSB.

**Alla Pugacheva is a popular Russian singer and song writer. She left Russia after the invasion of Ukraine. Shortly after the alleged death of Putin, Pugacheva visited Russia. One of her popular songs has the refrain "And you're as cold as an iceberg in the ocean".

FSB – Federal Security Service, the successor organisation to the KGB and NKVD – a powerful Russian secret police.



The school "Russian for Children" invites school-age children to study the Russian language, literature, history and acting. Classes in small groups.
 School Details: www.russianforkids.co.nz
<https://www.facebook.com/russianforkids.co.nz/>
 Registration for classes: about lgabelokon@russianforkids.co.nz
 Ph 02108450845

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