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ANALYSIS

Empowered Exile or Inhibited Action? Anti-War Russian Diaspora Organizations in the EU

Ekaterina Vorobeva, University of Bremen

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Abstract
This paper examines whether anti-war Russian diaspora organizations in European Union member states experience their exile as empowered or, on the contrary, as inhibited. By summarizing the findings of previous studies on Russian exiles' access to media presence, freedom of association, and advantageous political networks, the analysis suggests that while empowerment may vary between countries, significant doubts remain that their exile in the EU can be considered empowered. The revealed inhibited nature of exile may be attributed to the lack of a coordinated approach among EU member states toward the new wave of politically active Russian migrants, as previously noted by Shamiev and Luchenko (2024).

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the intensified "repressive turn" in Russian politics forced at least 700,000 Russians to leave the country (Gel'man 2015; Zavadskaya 2023). Due to the sudden nature of this migration, personal networks, and visa restrictions, the majority settled in the neighboring states of Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Georgia, as well as in visa-free Turkey and Serbia (Zavadskaya 2023). However, tens of thousands also moved to the EU and the US (Zavadskaya 2023). Since emigration, a significant share of these migrants have continued their political activities; from abroad, they have created organizations and initiatives designed to enable them to participate remotely in the politics of their homeland. They take part in anti-war protests, awareness-raising, information dissemination, charity, and other activities (Turchenko 2023; Darieva et al. 2023).

To be effective, however, these actions require "empowered exile," which is achieved by leveraging free media and freedom of association, as well as by building networks with powerful actors in host countries and international organizations to influence the home government (Henry and Plantan 2022). In this paper, I will briefly discuss whether anti-war Russian diaspora organizations in the EU experience empowered or, on the contrary, inhibited exile. Drawing on previous studies and reports, I find that—possible differences in the degree of empowerment between countries notwithstanding—there is substantial doubt that Russian migrants' exile in the EU can be considered empowered. According to earlier studies, this may be attributed to the absence of harmonized policies among EU member states toward Russian exiles (Shamiev and Luchenko 2024).

Diasporas in the Politics of Their Authoritarian Homelands

In the scholarship on political transnationalism, there is a body of literature devoted to diaspora engagement in the politics of an authoritarian homeland. For example, previous research has focused on Venezuelan migrants in the US and other states (Esberg and Siegel 2022), North Korean defectors in the UK and US (Chubb and Yeo 2018), Syrians (Conduit 2020), and Turks and Kurds (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003) in EU member states. Compared to democracies, the authoritarian regimes from which emigrants flee may show a more diverse repertoire of attitudes, acting simultaneously to include and exclude emigrants. In the Russian case, the state, on the one hand, labels emigrants as traitors, threatens them with repression, and fiercely resists their involvement in domestic affairs, undermining their legitimacy and limiting their influence on those who remain (Turchenko 2023). On the other hand, in order to support its own legitimacy and democratic facade, the Russian government expresses a seeming openness to the political engagement of its emigrants; for example, in the presidential elections of March 2024, it was announced that Russian citizens, even those residing in "unfriendly" states, could vote from abroad.

The authoritarian regime, which often forces dissenters to flee the country, makes foreign states the center of its political opposition (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003). Henry and Plantan (2022) use the notions of horizontal voice (directed at fellow citizens) and vertical voice (directed at political leaders) to map the position of exiled political actors in the affairs of their home country. Specifically, they claim that "while activists-in-exile lose horizontal voice through remote engagement, they gain vertical connections through empowered exile" (Henry and Plantan 2022, 274). In discussing the weaknesses of the position of Russian environmental activists abroad, the scholars mention that they often lose legitimacy as domestic political actors, in part due to black PR, and can be accused of being puppets in the hands of foreign powers, or of pursuing their own inter-

ests without suffering the consequences (Bauböck 2003; Henry and Plantan 2022). Conversely, Henry and Plantan (2022) note that exile can be empowered if migrants have access to the necessary resources. The scholars specify that when exiled activists escape the censorship of their home country and are able to take advantage of free media abroad, exercise freedom of association and organization, or participate in shaping the host country's foreign policy toward their homeland, we may be witnessing empowered exile (Henry and Plantan 2022). The ability to build power networks is also crucial; for their work to be successful, migrants need to engage authoritative actors from foreign governments or international organizations with leverage to influence the political situation in the home country (Henry and Plantan 2022). In addition, by building connections with local actors and thus becoming politically socialized in a host country, migrants can acquire a new set of activist tools for political struggle (Esberg and Siegel 2022). For example, Esberg and Siegel (2022) found that after moving to the United States, Venezuelan activists became more critical of their home government, more focused on foreign audiences, and more supportive of foreign intervention—such as military action or sanctions—to change the political regime at home.

Russian Opposition in the EU

Many of the new wave of Russian immigrants demonstrate significant political activity and liberal sympathies, which distinguishes them from the older waves of Russian immigrants, most of whom arrived after the Soviet Union collapsed (Domańska 2023; Krawatzek et al. 2023). Although it is difficult to calculate the exact proportion of politically active war-induced Russian migrants, large-scale quantitative studies suggest that at least one-fifth participate in protests or volunteer abroad (e.g., Krawatzek et al. 2023; Kamalov et al. 2023). To achieve greater effectiveness and coordination, these new migrants have created many organizations and initiatives with the anti-war stance as their common unifying factor (Zavadskaya 2023). Terekhov (2023) lists 302 anti-war initiatives around the world, including such major projects as the Ark (Kovcheg), Feminist Anti-War Resistance, Free Russia Foundation, and others. Previous research has examined the political activities of these and other organizations in Germany (e.g., Domańska 2023), Georgia (e.g., Darieva et al. 2023), Armenia (Krawatzek et al. 2023), and globally (Kamalov et al. 2023).

Despite their common anti-war position, these groups and exiled activists may find it difficult to build alliances and reach understanding. Previous research, as well as articles in this issue of the Russian Analytical Digest, have explored the obstacles to and prospects for unifying the Russian opposition (see, for example, Turchenko and Zavadskaya's article in this issue), which remains geographically dispersed and ideologically fragmented. More specifically, some of the articles in this issue have explored the internal divisions within the Russian opposition in exile in terms of their visions of Russia's future and how to achieve it (Makarychev), intergenerational divides (Golova and Selivanova), gender inequalities in activism (Nugumanova) and differences that may arise from diverging host country environments (Tysiachniouk). In addition, Siiutkin's article shows the internal struggles for power and democratization within anti-war organizations, which may also delay the unification of the opposition.

Given the extreme difficulty of engaging in Russian politics due to various severe restrictions and the challenges of building alliances with fellow Russians and other opposition groups in exile (see, for example, Ginzburg's article in this issue), these organizations are particularly interested in joining forces with well-established parties and political actors in host countries, as well as with international organizations (Darieva et al. 2023). Previous studies have shown that Russian immigrants, on average, have high levels of trust in host governments and societies and are therefore open to networking (Zavadskaya 2023). Turchenko (2023) claims that connections with the political elites of host countries and the international community are an important tool by which for Russian migrants to influence the politics of their homeland. In this regard, Zavadskaya and Turchenko's article in this issue shows that anti-war organizations target different audiences, from Russians in Russia to international officials, in an attempt to build political connections. However, research remains limited on the power networks that anti-war Russian diaspora organizations form in destination countries and globally to achieve empowered exile.

Diasporic Empowerment or Constrained Action?

Summarizing the results of the limited number of previous studies, it can be said that the anti-war Russian diaspora may not experience exile as empowered. Indeed, they face considerable difficulties in accessing such tools as media presence, freedom of association, and beneficial networks. Terekhov (2023) finds that anti-war organizations struggle with low media visibility, often due to a lack of funding and local anti-Russian sentiments, among other reasons. In the case of Germany, Domańska (2023) notes that the general public in the country is hardly informed about the activities of Russian anti-war organizations. In addition, although war-induced Russian migrants enjoy freedom of association

in their host countries, they may find the institutionalization of their organizations to be difficult or impossible due to their Russian citizenship, lack of knowledge of the local bureaucracy, and language barriers (Terekhov 2023). This directly affects the funding available to them, as it is difficult for non-institutionalized, new organizations to secure funds (Terekhov 2023). As a result, anti-war organizations, especially those led by young and unconventional activists, struggle to survive (Shamiev and Luchenko 2024).

In terms of building power networks in host countries, previous research has shown mixed results. In the Baltic states and Poland, the framing of Russians as a potential security threat seems to adversely affect their ability to build connections and maintain legitimacy in their actions (Shamiev and Luchenko 2024). On the contrary, in Germany, with its history of mutual cooperation, positive discourse, and "humanitarian visas" for exiled Russians, interactions between local organizations and the Russian diaspora are more active (Darieva et al. 2023). However, Domańska (2023) insists that "a crucial task will be to develop permanent channels of dialogue and work between Russian political emigrants and expert circles and decision-makers in host countries." Indeed, although some prominent figures of the anti-war movement, such as Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Garry Kasparov, have been invited to high-profile events like the Munich Security Conference or the Foreign Affairs Council, Shamiev and Luchenko (2024, p. 16) conclude that "this dialogue is neither systemic nor systematic." In June 2022, pro-democracy, anti-war Russians attempted to create such a systemic channel of dialogue by establishing the Secretariat of European Russia in Brussels; however, since the day of its founding, the initiative does not seem to have been particularly active or visible. Therefore, the inclusion of Russian activists in the European political community and local civil society activities is a goal yet to be achieved (Domańska 2023; Shamiev and Luchenko 2024).

Finally, several scholars (e.g., Domańska 2023; Shamiev and Luchenko 2024) call for the creation of a more comprehensive, better coordinated and synergized EU policy toward new, politically active Russian emigrants, whose potential has not yet been fully recognized. For Shamiev and Luchenko (2024, p. 1), "European decision-makers should create a more coordinated response to Russian exiles, giving them certainty for the future and enabling them to develop the skills they may one day need." This response should cover humanitarian visas and political asylum regulations for Russians, which currently vary greatly across the EU states. As many migrants still hold an unstable and uncertain legal status, they may not feel safe putting more effort into their political activities in the face of possible repression by the Russian state (Shamiev and Luchenko 2024).

Conclusion

Previous studies suggest that anti-war Russian diaspora organizations often struggle to experience exile as empowered due to challenges in achieving media visibility, taking full advantage of freedom of association, and building power networks in their European Union host states. Scholars suggest that this may be a consequence of EU member states' lack of harmonized policies toward politically active Russian emigrants (Shamiev and Luchenko 2024). In order to empower Russians' exile, Shamiev and Luchenko (2024) suggest developing a coordinated approach to war-induced Russian migrants, creating a discussion platform to regularly and systematically involve them in civil society actions, providing quality support, and facilitating networking among anti-war organizations, including those located in non-EU states. Future research could further explore the practical needs of these organizations and their strategies for building power networks in host countries.

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ANALYSIS

Mapping the Opposition in Exile

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Abstract
This article examines the role of—and challenges facing—the Russian political opposition in exile. Operating from abroad due to security concerns, opposition groups are constrained yet remain active in influencing political dynamics in Russia. This preliminary analysis underscores the importance of maintaining connections with domestic constituencies to support "authoritarian erosion" and highlights how exiled communities contribute to the delegitimization of the regime through transnational networks. We map the landscape of political initiatives as supply-side politics for Russian exiles.

The conventional view is that an opposition that unsuccessfully attempts to change the existing regime through elections or revolt is a "failed" opposition (Bedford and Vinatier 2018: 687). In closed political regimes like Russia's, however, increasing repression means that the opposition is pushed into exile and "non-political" realms. Exiled oppositions often face a tradeoff between linkages to domestic constituencies and political relevance within the regime, on the one hand, and safety from political prosecution and self-preservation, on the other hand. Opposition groups that operate from exile cannot, therefore, necessarily be seen as "failed."

Maintaining contact with a sending society is of crucial importance to undermining an authoritarian regime from abroad (Bedford and Vinatier 2018: 69). Remaining politically visible and relevant to those who have stayed without losing ground on domestic political developments is a challenging task. To what extent do political and civic projects have meaningful contacts with Russians in Russia, if they are oriented toward them at all? After all, another potential constituency for these political groups is exiled Russians, whose interests diverge from those of Russians in Russia and may vary across host countries and other subgroups.

Exiled communities can challenge authoritarian regimes in their home countries and contribute to regime delegitimation through transnational networks (Burgess 2020; Betts and Jones 2016). Diasporas are dynamic, influenced by elites who bring money, networks, and ideas (Betts and Jones 2016: 8–9). They provide financial and ideological support, disseminate alternative information, and attract new supporters. Their influence includes international advocacy for civil and political rights, support for network creation, the establishment of alternative media sources, and the imposition of diplomatic pressure through lobbying for sanctions. The extent to which opposition elites engage with ordinary migrants shapes the diaspora's political efficacy.

This article analyzes political initiatives in exile, focusing on their engagement with both Russians abroad and those remaining in Russia. We offer a typology of these initiatives based on their strategies for expanding their political constituencies and cooperating with host societies and international officials. Using secondary sources, we categorize these initiatives according to their stances vis-à-vis both the diaspora and supporters in Russia; their mission; and their format. This framework helps map the landscape of political initiatives as supply-side politics for Russian exiles and assesses how well they meet existing demand (see our article "Russian Wartime Migrants: Matching Political Demand with Supply" in Russian Analytical Digest no. 316).

Beyond Parties and Elections

When an authoritarian regime becomes hegemonic, electoral and partisan opposition becomes unfeasible. However, other modes of resistance remain accessible. Bedford and Vinatier (2020) propose a typology of oppositional "resistance models" that differentiate between the electoral, media, lobbying, and education realms. We adapt this typology to diaspora politics by introducing a dimension that measures opposition groups and initiatives' orientation toward the exiled community.

The Russian opposition and anti-war movement abroad is diverse in its formats, target audiences, political orientations, and missions. Initiatives range from international political forums and coalitions, social movements, volunteer groups, media, and grassroots urban and environmental efforts to military units like the Russian Volunteer Corps and secessionist movements like "Free Buryatia" (Shamiev and Luchenko 2024). We categorize these initiatives by their main activities. Lobbying efforts include expressing support for Russian exiles and other groups (e.g., raising awareness of human rights violations and political prisoners) and advocating for eased legal arrangements for exiles. Media outlets include inde-

pendent TV channels, YouTube bloggers, and Telegram channels. Education initiatives encompass exiled university projects like Free University; emergent think tanks and research centers; and public lecturers like political science popularizer Ekaterina Schulman and history teacher Tamara Eidelman.

Some initiatives span multiple realms, like the Anti-Corruption Foundation (ACF), which uses YouTube channels and bloggers like Michael Naki and Aleksander Pluschev to spread news and political analysis. Mikhail Khodorkovsky's projects also operate across various platforms, supporting Russian exiles and defected businesses. While exiled initiatives rarely participate in elections, they gained prominence during Russia's most recent presidential elections by staging collective actions like "Noon against Putin" and supporting candidates like Boris Nadezhdin. Some projects focus on Ukraine, providing humanitarian aid or recruiting for Ukrainian military units, among them the Civic Council in Warsaw and Legion Free Russia.

Human rights organizations like OVD-Info and Memorial focus on defending human rights within Russia while attracting global attention. Media outlets like Meduza, Novaya Gazeta, and TV Rain serve the Russian audience by providing independent news. The Feminist Anti-War Resistance engages both domestic and diaspora audiences. Radical groups focus on military involvement, while national movements like Free Buryatia, Free Yakutia, and the Tatarstan independence movement address regional and ethnic issues, drawing international attention to their causes.

All these initiatives and realms of activities form a complex ecosystem of opposition activities abroad, some of which have a clear political focus, while others are more advocacy groups or activists' initiatives (see Figure 1 on p. 9).

Russians in Russia or Russians in Exile?

Unlike the Belarusian opposition, anti-war and anti-Putin Russians do not have unified political representation. Yulia Navalnaya, who assumed the role of leader following Alexei Navalny's tragic death in custody, has in fact become a spokesperson defending the interests of the Russian opposition, including those outside Russia. The latter was unequivocally formulated in her February 2024 address to EU politicians in Brussels:

> Always make a distinction between Putin and Russia. People fleeing war and dictatorship are not your enemies. They need sympathy and protection. They should not be punished, they should be helped. A mechanism like the modern Nansen Commission is needed. It is these people who will one day be part of the Beautiful Russia of the future. They want to help Russia become a normal country so that they can return home sooner. And you should help them to do the same (Yulia Navalnaya's address to EU politicians, February 19, 2024—Meduza 2024).

Almost two years earlier, however, Leonid Volkov, another prominent politician from the ACF structures, had said that Russians abroad were not the organization's target group due to their small number:

> We are a Russian political organization that fights for power in Russia and is engaged in representing the interests of anti-Putin Russians, Russian voters. For us, this is our focus, and we must not lose it under any circumstances. Everyone should do what they can do well. About 300,000–400,000 people left Russia after the war started, according to various estimates. There were 30–40 million anti-Putin Russians before the war, about 30% of the electorate. Now, I think there are more of them. That is, no more than one hundredth of them left, 99% stayed there. Our tasks, our projects, are aimed at those who have stayed (Leonid Volkov's interview with Radio Liberty, November 22, 2022—Shakirov 2022).

At the same time, many of the Russians who left were supporters of Navalny or at least supported some of ACF's initiatives. For example, more than 80% of migrants surveyed in 2022 were aware of what "smart voting" was and were likely to follow its recommendations (Kamalov et al. 2022), a share far higher than Russians in Russia (where 12.4 percent of respondents reported that they were aware of the "smart voting" recommendations in 2021—Levada Center 2022).

Free Russia Forum, with Garry Kasparov and Mikhail Khodorkovsky as its most prominent representatives, has closer ties with Western political institutions and de facto seeks to reinforce the capacity and internal cohesion of the opposition-minded Russian diaspora, including recent migrants. In their June 2024 op-ed for Politico, Kasparov and Khodorkovsky promoted the "Passport of Free Russia," a project intended to support the anti-Putin Russian diaspora by issuing them a document that would help them integrate into Western societies. This passport aims to encourage Russian emigration, thereby creating a brain drain that would ultimately weaken Putin's government by depriving it of intellectual and military resources (Free Russia Forum 2024a). Opposition-minded Russians in Russia are viewed as an asset in the hands of the Putin regime. However, systematic attempts to reach out to the Russian community are less visible. The resolution that came

out of the May 2024 gathering in Warsaw reaffirms the commitment of Russian expatriates and their allies to fighting against the authoritarian regime in Russia and promoting democratic changes, as well as highlighting the importance of solidarity among Russians living outside Russia in their efforts to instigate political and social change back home (Free Russia Forum 2024b).

These two major opposition forces manifest diverging approaches to the transnational community of Russians and take different views of their importance in political struggle. Navalny-affiliated groups like ACF are reluctant to draw the line between those who have stayed and those who have left or tend to emphasize their Russian origin. Free Russia Forum is an unambiguously diaspora-oriented project that not only advocates the rights of this group but has even promoted out-migration from Russia. The recent schism around the ACF documentary "The Traitors," narrated by Maria Pevchikh, illuminates the political and ethical reasons why ACF and the Free Russia Forum (or, more specifically, Khodorkovsky's group) cannot act as allies: the generational gap, ACF's lack of close ties with Yeltsin- or early Putin-era elites, and differing attitudes toward the legacy of the 1990s (Shamiev and Luchenko 2024). ACF's potentially divisive rhetoric and its refusal to engage in political advocacy for Russian emigres is likely to translate into decreased support among the exile community.

With Navalny's death and after two and a half years of war, fatigue has accumulated among emigrants and the fear of persecution has increased. All of this does not favor optimism and "investment" in long-term political and civic projects aimed at Russia. The fact that migrants remain active in terms of volunteering and donations is indicative of an orientation toward the emigrant community, assistance to Ukraine, and host countries' civic initiatives.

During the more than two years of war, discussions have revolved around whether democratization is even possible in Russia, and if so, how; who might be the agent of this change; and where Western politicians should therefore direct their efforts. There is also the question of who should be helped: the opposition in exile, migrants, those left inside the country, no one, or all? However, before thinking about this topic, it is important to answer the question of whom the public speakers who speak for the Russian opposition represent politically. Do they have any significant public resources inside the country, or do they focus on the Russian community abroad and are not primarily interested in the processes at home? Often, these projects—from ACF to the Free Russia Forum—are considered to perform a similar function, but this is not entirely true. Having categorize these initiatives by whom they target, their current ties to Russians in Russia, and how focused they are on emigration, it quickly becomes clear that 1) few of the initiatives aim at fighting for power in Russia; 2) these forces are less likely to target recent Russian exiles; and 3) the ecosystem of Russian exiled organizations also encompasses media, education, and advocacy projects that directly and indirectly prop up political initiatives. To what extent migrants themselves consider political organizations in exile to be their political representatives remains an open question.

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Figure 1: A Stylized Typology of Opposition Groups and Initiatives by Their Target Audience and Main Realm of Activity

	Russians in Russia	**Russians in Exile**	**Host society**	**Ukraine**	**International organizations**
Lobbying / advocacy	**"Humanitarianists"** OVD-Info Memorial Feminist Anti-War Resistance Vesna	**"Animators" or "creators" of diaspora** Kovcheg Free Russia Forum	**Diaspora associations** Rusos Libres in Spain, Russian Democratic Society in Serbia, Freies Russland NRW	**Volunteer organizations working with refugees** Friends of Mariupol in Estonia Emigration for Action in Georgia	**Points of dialogue with the anti-war, anti-Putin Russia** The Anti-War Committee The European Russia Secretariat
Media	**Independent media in exile** Meduza, TV Rain		**"Interpreters of Russian context"** Paper Kartuli Novaya Gazeta – Europe		
Education	Individual bloggers (prosvetiteli)	Smol'ny without Borders Free University			
Electoral and non-electoral politics	ACF Feminist Anti-War Resistance			Free Russia Legion	

Source: Compiled by the authors on the basis of research.

ANALYSIS

Only the Bare Necessities: The (Tense) Relationship Between the Belarusian and Russian Non-systemic Oppositions Before and After the "Great Prisoner Swap" of August 2024

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Abstract:
Although the Belarusian and Russian non-systemic opposition movements continue to fight the personalist autocracies in their respective home countries from exile, no cooperation can be observed between the two national democracy movements—in contrast to the apparently "fraternal" autocrats Lukashenka and Putin. But why is this the case? This article argues that, in addition to the ideological discrepancies between the two sides, the absence of an institutional basis for such cooperation is a decisive factor. The article concludes by briefly outlining a possible way out of this problem.

Two Women, One Fate?

On February 16, 2024, a picture went around the world in which Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya embraced Yulia Navalnaya, who had just experienced a stroke of fate, during a meeting at the Munich Security Conference 2024. Tsikhanouskaya expressed her condolences to Navalnaya, who, like the rest of the world, had learned a few hours earlier of the death of her husband, Alexei Navalny, in a Russian prison camp. At first glance, the parallels between the two women and their fates seemed evident to many outsiders. Both had had to leave their husbands behind in their respective home countries because the men were serving years-long prison sentences due to their political opposition to the autocrats in their respective countries. Both had been forced to flee into exile for their safety and that of their children. Moreover, both now claim to lead their respective countries' democratic movements. The subsequent call from many outside observers for the merger of the forces of the two opposition movements thus appeared self-evident and supposedly logical—at least at first glance.

Upon closer inspection, however, greater analytical sensitivity is required. It would be incorrect and even counterproductive to draw a clear parallel between the respective political anti-autocratic movements in Belarus and Russia due to some similarities between the individual biographies of Tsikhanouskaya and Navalnaya. Both groups are indeed acting against a repressive and personalistic autocracy in their respective countries. However, the two movements are significantly different political actors that are opposed to one another in many respects. This contrast makes cooperation between the two oppositions difficult. But which factors are decisive for these differences? Furthermore, why does it make sense to think about cooperative initiatives between the two democratic movements? This analysis will deliver answers to these central questions.

Twin Sisters or Cousins?

Considering that the respective enemies of the two dissident groups (Alyaksandr Lukashenka and Vladimir Putin) have been working together for a long time, the question arises as to why the motto "The enemy (of the ally) of my enemy is my friend" does not apply to both groups—especially since there is no language barrier between the two sides.

Although both groups emphasize using chance encounters at public events to discuss mutual experiences in the fight against their autocracies, such discussions remain on an individual level. For example, Tsikhanouskaya has often spoken about her acquaintance with "only" the Russian dissident Vladimir Kara-Murza. In a 2023 interview with Deutsche Welle, Dmitry Gudkov—another Russian oppositionist—portrayed the cooperation between the two movements as somewhat sporadic and limited to coincidental encounters.

These circumstances are all the more surprising because similar problems confront both democratic movements. Both movements face the challenge of organizing an effective opposition policy against their authoritarian regime from exile. Both are also discussing intensively within their respective camps whether the political struggle against their autocracy must be waged only by peaceful means or (also) by armed means. It is well known that the "Belarusian Kastuś Kalinoŭski Regiment" and the Russian "Freedom of Russia Legion" are fighting against the Kremlin's army as part of the Ukrainian armed forces—and both paramilitaries have, to put it mildly, a mixed reputation within the corresponding opposition movements, a conjuncture that can be traced back to their political roots in right-wing

extremism. Finally, both exile groups face the common danger of losing political relevance due to their absence from their homeland or of "falling ill" with a loss of political reality concerning the political needs of their (potential) electorate in their homeland. So why not pool political resources, establish joint forums, discuss similar challenges, and create a democratic and synergistic counterweight, just as Lukashenka and Putin already do at the level of autocratic cooperation?

The Political Hurdles to Cooperation

It is helpful to refer to the well-known political triad of polity, policy, and politics when exploring the reasons for the lack of cooperation between the Belarusian and Russian non-systemic oppositions. The first term stands for the institutional framework within political practices. The second focuses on the content and goals of a political dynamic. The third covers the processual character of a political project, starting with a political decision and ending with its implementation.

The Institutional Hurdles

The first key difference is located at the institutional level (polity). Unlike its Belarusian counterpart, the Russian non-systemic opposition has no identifiable leader. It is well known that Russia's diverse democratic opposition forces often curtailed (and continue to curtail) their synergistic capabilities through internal power struggles. Often, these are questions of ego (who is leading whom?). An excellent example of this is the 2016 dispute between Alexei Navalny's Progress Party and the self-described liberal-democratic PARNAS party, led by former Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, who had fallen out of favor with the Kremlin. The two leaders argued over which of them should lead the joint democratic coalition list for the then-upcoming 2016 Duma elections. As a result, the coalition collapsed before the 2016 parliamentary elections.

The Belarusian side is not facing such a problem. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya has been able to consolidate herself as a leader since the events of the fraudulent presidential election in Belarus in August 2020. This was facilitated by the fact that the leading opposition candidates for the presidency in Belarus at the time had not been permitted to register for the election or had been unlawfully detained by the Minsk regime. One could argue that Navalny likewise gained political weight across Russian (opposition) party lines after his return to Russia and his subsequent imprisonment in January 2021. Nevertheless, the comparison with Tsikhanouskaya is still lacking. His arrest severely limited Navalny's political influence, in contrast to the Belarusian opposition leader, even if she could "only" operate from exile. More precisely, the two opposition figures have been on opposite political trajectories since the beginning of their coexistence. Tsikhanouskaya started out as a political symbol of the Belarusian democracy movement due to the imprisonment of her husband, Syarhey Tsikhanouski, and thus her political career began involuntarily. Over the years, she grew into a recognized political actor. Navalny's career arc, by contrast, went in the opposite direction. He consciously began as a politician and only became a political symbol of resistance for many after his return to Russia from Germany and his subsequent arrest in Russia in 2021. However, given that even after Navalny's death, no clear leader can be identified within the Russian democracy movement, a constructive dialogue between the two national oppositions continues to be complicated. Yulia Navalnaya's takeover of her late husband's political affairs does not yet appear to be bringing about a noticeable political vector change in this context.

This polity problem is also visible in the lack of opposition institutions recognized by all Russian dissidents. Indeed, after the outbreak of the war against Ukraine in February 2022, a "parliament in exile" ("Congress of People's Deputies") based in Warsaw was founded and recognized by some (not all) Russian politicians in exile. Here, the Belarusian opposition is one step ahead of its Russian colleagues. During the wave of protests in 2020, the Belarusian opposition established a coordination council of Belarusian opposition forces recognized by central Belarusian dissidents. Despite the imprisonment and (involuntary) departure of many of its members from Belarus, the Belarusian opposition has managed to keep it alive in exile. Thus, the polity-related differences between the two groups also obstruct inter-institutional cooperation between the two democratic movements.

The Ideological Hurdles

At the policy level, cooperation is likewise tricky and contradictory. This situation is rooted in the ambiguous signals that the two movements have—consciously and unconsciously—sent each other over the past few years. Such actions have led to mistrust on both sides. For example, many Belarusian opposition members follow the mantra that Russian liberalism does indeed exist but that it disappears as soon as Russia's so-called "near abroad" is the topic of debate. Thus, in the early stages of his political career, Navalny was accused in Belarus of flirting with right-wing radicalism. In 2008, he also took aim at the Belarusian language and praised the Lukashenka regime in an Internet post. In fairness, however, it must be mentioned here that, during the wave of protests in 2020, Navalny declared his solidarity with the democracy movement in Belarus several times. Yet for many Belarusians, this could not eliminate the contradiction in his political persona.

For its part, the Belarusian opposition movement around Tsikhanouskaya has also sent disturbing signals to Russian colleagues. In an interview with the Russian online news portal RBK in September 2020, Tsikhanouskaya repeatedly described Putin as a "wise leader." This lack of distance from the Kremlin of course annoyed the Russian non-systemic opposition, which was already suffering from increased Kremlin repression. Such crude ingratiation with Moscow was also common among the first generation of the Belarusian democratic opposition in the 1990s. Shortly after the so-called "creeping coup" through Lukashenka's constitutional referendum in late autumn 1996, many Belarusian democratic forces relied on the Kremlin as a supporter and mediator. However, this was a political miscalculation by the then-opposition: the Yeltsin administration went behind their backs to support the Lukashenka clan.

Still, like Navalny, the Belarusian opposition has undergone a gradual political evolution. The first change occurred immediately after the Kremlin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, when Tsikhanouskaya explicitly condemned this war of aggression. A European element was added to this evolution during the annual conference of the Belarusian opposition in exile in Warsaw in August 2023. There, Tsikhanouskaya clearly announced that the future of Belarus lies in Europe and unequivocally spoke out against the geopolitical orientation of Belarus toward Russia. However, such a change is probably driven less by a desire to strengthen ties with the Russian opposition in exile than by a desire to secure her leadership position within the Belarusian diaspora. Due to the exiled Belarusian opposition's geographical distance from citizens in the Belarusian heartland, the diaspora is increasingly becoming the only political base of the country's democratic forces.

At this point, the question arises as to whether cooperation between the two countries' opposition forces is necessary. The answer to this question depends on a second question: Does the departure of one autocrat from political office automatically lead to the departure of the other authoritarian ruler? If so, a collaboration makes sense. If not, one side will be wasting its political, financial, and time resources on the other side's goals without gaining any political benefit. Since the answer to the second question will continue to be purely speculative until "D-Day" arrives, it should come as no surprise that cooperation will probably remain at a low level: an occasional and random dialogue between individuals from both groups, without entering into mutual obligations or really letting the other side look at one's cards.

The "Great Prisoner Swap" in August 2024 and Its Implications for the Relationship Between the Two Opposition Groups

The recent prisoner exchange, which took place on August 1, 2024, between the US and its Western allies, on one side, and Russia and Belarus, on the other, offers several interpretations of the relationship between the two dissident groups.

Particularly striking was the fact that among the 16 people the West received (in exchange for eight Russian spies) were seven Russian dissidents—but not a single Belarusian oppositionist. This sparked criticism of the Belarusian opposition in exile: supporters complained that the movement's leaders had not done enough to lobby the West for at least a few slots on the exchange list for imprisoned Belarusian political prisoners. But are these accusations justified? Three different dimensions offer possible interpretations of what happened here.

The first dimension of interpretation is that the absence of Belarusian dissidents on the exchange list may indicate that the Belarusian opposition is politically "weaker" than the Russian one—at least in terms of its sphere of influence among Western addressees. According to statements by key Belarusian opposition figures such as Pavel Latushka and Franak Viačorka, the Belarusian Coordination Council only got wind of the fact that such an exchange was scheduled in Ankara on the day before the prisoner swap (August 31, 2024). This circumstance might even suggest that there exists political competition between the Russian and Belarusian oppositions for the channels of political influence in exile.

A second dimension of interpretation reveals how the democratic movements might be viewed in the West. As will be made clear in the conclusion, using the example of Western sanctions policy, there is reason to believe that Western policymakers—perhaps out of ignorance—mistakenly view the Belarusian and Russian autocracies as a monolithic authoritarianism. The same incorrect view might also apply to the two exiled opposition movements. If this is the case, it might be that those in the West responsible for the recent prisoner exchange incorrectly presumed that the release of any political prisoners—whether from (only) Russia or Belarus—would be viewed as a success by both groups. The exchange's results could also be interpreted as the West deliberately bypassing the Belarusian opposition to avoid exerting too much pressure on the Lukashenka regime (implying that the West does not view the two dissident groups—and autocracies—as identical). The aim may have been to avoid provoking Lukashenka into opening a second front against Ukraine with the active participation of Belarusian forces or intensifying his hybrid warfare against Poland and the Baltic states

in the form of illegal smuggling of refugees from the Middle East and Africa into these states.

The third and final dimension of interpretation calls for conclusions not to be drawn too quickly about the strength of the Belarusian non-systemic opposition. The statements of some officials from Warsaw in recent weeks and months might indicate that the issue of Belarusian political prisoners is being discussed on a separate negotiating track. It should be noted here that some Belarusian citizens in Polish prisons have been convicted of espionage activities. Consequently, the exchange in August 2024 might have represented only the "Russian" track, with a "Belarusian" version perhaps still to follow. However, there are two central problems here. First, it is unclear whether the alleged spies with Belarusian nationality imprisoned in Poland were working on behalf of Minsk or Moscow. The latter is known to recruit people with foreign citizenship for espionage activities. Applied to the spies imprisoned in Poland, the question therefore arises of whether the Western allies actually "have" people that Lukashenka would want to exchange for political prisoners in Belarus. Second, given the most recent statements made by one of Tsikhanouskaya's closest advisers, Franak Viačorka, one has to ask whether the Belarusian opposition in exile is even involved in such a "Belarusian" negotiation track. In a Deutsche Welle news article published on the day of the prisoner exchange, Viačorka falsely claims that there are no "Lukashenka-spies" in the Western allies' prisons. He assumes this would explain why no Belarusian oppositionists were released in the last exchange. Interestingly, this might reinforce the first dimension of interpretation: The channels of influence and communication of the Belarusian opposition in Western institutions might be significantly smaller than those of their Russian counterpart in exile.

Final Thoughts and Political Recommendations

The situation described above is regrettable because of several overlaps in the two groups' current challenges. Lobbying in Western institutions (for example, on the issue of the release of political prisoners from Belarus and Russia) and the EU visa policy for Belarusian and Russian citizens, which has been viewed critically by both sides since the outbreak of the Kremlin's war against Ukraine in 2022, are such overlaps. The question of alternative identity documents for diaspora members on both sides also represents an intersection: since September 2023, Minsk has allowed Belarusian citizens to extend or apply for new passports only within the country's borders. According to an investigation by Novaya Gazeta Europe, the Kremlin is expected to begin handling Russian identity documents similarly this year. Joint online media work would also be an opportunity for synergy projects.

Here, the EU states could become active. They could push for establishing forums under the mediatory aegis of such states as Germany, Poland, and Lithuania (where many exiled oppositionists from both sides have found refuge). Supported by European experts in the field of non-systemic opposition movements in the post-Soviet space, such EU states could initiate an exchange of ideas between the two groups at an institutionalized or polity level. The aim here would not be primarily to forge an alliance between the two movements, but rather to increase the political predictability of the other side for both dissident groups. Such an endeavor extends especially to the scenario, which has so far been difficult to imagine, in which one of the democratic movements one day actually succeeds in participating in the political shaping of the post-authoritarian era of its home country and is thus also able to exert influence on that country's foreign policy vis-à-vis the home country of the other opposition group, which may remain under authoritarian conditions.

This approach would be equally informative for the EU. The fact that EU sanctions policy toward Belarus and Russia has been almost identical since the beginning of the war against Ukraine in 2022 suggests that within the EU (as well as within the Russian liberal intelligentsia), not all officials have yet understood that the two autocracies and dissident movements are different actors that deserve distinct treatment. However, the first prerequisite for this plan would be for the Russian opposition to finally succeed in speaking with one voice (with external help, if necessary). Therefore, the potential moderating forces must start their preventative work promptly. As the Roman philosopher Seneca once said, "Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity."

About the Author

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ANALYSIS

Echoes of Activism: Sociological Insights on the Russian Exodus to Europe

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of migration from Russia to Europe on the evolution of environmental activism in exile. It investigates whether relocating to Europe marks a turning point for activists or whether they can maintain their efforts as they did in Russia. The study focuses on activists who have moved to countries like France, Great Britain, Finland, Germany, Montenegro, and Serbia, exploring how the political, economic, and social conditions in these host countries influence activists' ability to continue their work.

The departure of environmental activists from Russia has surged since the Russian regime expanded and intensified its repressions following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This article analyzes how the migration of these activists to Europe has transformed environmental and human rights activism in exile compared to its state within Russia. Is migration to Europe a critical juncture for activists or can they continue the work they started in Russia? I explore the migration of activists to France, Great Britain, Finland, Germany, Montenegro, and Serbia, considering the host countries' migration contexts and analyzing how their political, economic, and social environments create conditions for activism. Additionally, I examine activists' experiences through the lens of their careers.

Research for this paper was conducted between 2022 and 2024, utilizing participant observations and qualitative biographical interviews. A total of 58 interviews were conducted across different countries: Finland (N=7), Germany (N=11), France (N=7), the UK (N=11), Serbia (N=9), and Montenegro (N=19).

Activists engaged in global transnational networks can address global issues regardless of their relocation. In Russia, Greenpeace employed 110 people, around 15% of whom have fled the country due to repressions, relocating to places like Georgia, Germany, and the UK. Climate change experts from various NGOs—now based in countries such as Germany, Finland, Turkey, and Georgia—continue their work toward mitigating climate change globally. Some participated in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conferences of Parties (UNFCCC COP27) in Egypt in 2022 and the Conference of Parties (COP) 28 in Dubai in 2023. However, many globally operating NGOs and experts have chosen their destinations strategically. For instance, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) relocated its Global Forest Program to Serbia in 2021, Greenpeace moved its Geographical Information System (GIS) hub to Amsterdam, and Bellona, an NGO focusing on nuclear safety, transferred its Russian office to Vilnius, Lithuania. The organizational environment of the host countries, NGO policies, and established collaborations often determined these choices.

In this paper, rather than focusing on NGOs, I track the individual journeys of environmentalists who have migrated to Europe, providing a detailed examination of how their activism has evolved in exile. I examine several categories of environmentalists: a) NGO experts working on transnational projects, many of whom specialize in a particular issue; b) activists who emigrated from Russia due to the risk of arrest, most of whom now live in Europe on humanitarian visas; c) environmentalists with experience living in eco-villages in Russia; and d) lifestyle environmentalists involved in waste separation and recycling (see Figure 1 on p. 18).

Migration to Germany

Germany provides humanitarian visas to activists who can demonstrate repression, offering accommodation, stipends, and opportunities to learn the German language. Many activists initially migrate from Russia to Georgia, Armenia, Serbia, or Montenegro and then move to Germany upon receiving these visas. Experts often find jobs and new projects in Germany.

Germany has become favorable for activists seeking stable funding and engagement in environmental, humanitarian, or antiwar projects, particularly those who previously collaborated with German NGOs. It has become a hub both for activists who in Russia faced the risk of arrest and for experts who worked on transnational projects (see Figure 1: Germany, categories 1–2). Environmentalists often become part of the Russian antiwar community, give lectures, and attend events at the Reforum space sponsored by the Free Russia Foundation, an organization deemed undesirable in Russia. Experts work with German NGOs. For instance, one expert works as a climate project coordinator with a Berlin-based transnational journalism network and is part of the Ukraine War Environmental Consequences Work Group (UWEC). This group comprises both Ukrainian and Russian experts who have migrated to different countries. They conduct assessments of the war's direct

and indirect impacts, including the destruction of the Kakhovka dam, on Ukrainian ecosystems.

Members of the environmental NGO Eco-Defense, dispersed across various EU countries, engage with German environmental NGOs on antiwar projects. In Russia, they campaigned against environmentally harmful projects using consumer boycotts and targeting investors and banks. Their knowledge of supply chains has facilitated their involvement in antiwar activism. In exile, Eco-Defense collaborates with German environmental NGOs to identify violators of EU trade sanctions, sharing this information with the EU Parliament to aid enforcement.

Overall, Germany offers a supportive environment for Russian activists-experts and activists-asylum seekers, enabling them to continue their work and advocacy in a conducive setting.

Migration to the UK

Professional environmentalists who had been working on various transnational projects moved to the UK before or after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, often for study opportunities that eventually led to residency (see Figure 1: UK, category 1). The UK offers study and work visas for dependents, making relocation easier than to other European countries. Activists find the culture familiar, with a shared appreciation for English literature and landmarks like Trafalgar Square. This migration is primarily professional, with many NGO representatives focusing on their new roles rather than integrating into the Russian diaspora in London.

I encountered several individuals in the UK, including the head of Greenpeace's action department, who relocated to the UK on January 26, 2023, after a six-month wait for documents. She had previously participated in the Pole to Pole expedition, raising awareness for the Ocean Treaty, which aims to protect 30% of the world's oceans. Her experience helped her secure a position in the UK action department, where she assisted with logistics for the Bermuda expedition, encouraging countries to ratify the treaty signed in May 2023.

Another informant came to Kent University on a student visa for the Conservation and Local Communities Program and decided to stay after the war began. With a background at the WWF and Greenpeace, she had previously coordinated projects on the implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in the Altai region of Russia and the Far East. She edited and co-authored a book on the wildlife trade in Russia that is well known in Europe. Now, working at the Fauna and Flora NGO in Cambridge, she focuses on CITES compliance in Central Asia.

An activist who had worked with the WWF in communications and fundraising came to the UK to study at the London School of Economics. During her studies, she interned at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and volunteered at a homeless shelter, ultimately securing a communications role with the NGO Crisis, which focuses on homelessness.

An Oxford student who had worked with Indigenous peoples in Siberia to protect the Podkamennaya Tunguska River now holds a part-time position related to Indigenous issues at the Pitt Rivers Museum and volunteers with local NGOs to protect the River Thames from pollution.

These individuals have successfully leveraged expertise gained in Russia to secure jobs in the UK, applying their skills in new contexts beyond Russia.

Migration to Finland

Finland, like the UK, attracts mostly professional experts and students, as it is comparatively difficult to receive asylum there (see Figure 1: Finland, category 1). Finland shares a border with Russia and saw a significant influx of Russian migrants when the war in Ukraine began. This group consisted primarily of students, individuals with relatives in Finland, and those who had previously collaborated with Finnish counterparts. Among the newcomers were climate activists, environmental journalists, and a notable activist who opposed the Shies landfill in the Arkhangelsk region. Additionally, a municipal deputy from St. Petersburg, known for protecting an urban park, was the only person in Finland to successfully obtain refugee status. Other migrants acquired residence permits as students or professionals.

Upon arrival, these individuals made concerted efforts to integrate into Finnish society. They began learning the language and applying for jobs or grants, with many aspiring to become Finnish citizens in the future. Despite facing challenges in finding employment with Finnish NGOs, unlike their counterparts in the UK, Russian academics have found success working in Finnish universities.

Overall, Finland has provided a relatively stable environment for these Russian migrants, enabling them to continue their professional and academic pursuits while integrating into a new society.

Migration to France

France issues humanitarian visas to at-risk individuals from Russia, though benefits are only provided once refugee status is granted. Despite these challenges, France remains a desirable destination for activists facing prosecution in Russia, even with obstacles like the French bureaucracy and the language barrier. Those who obtain refugee status continue their work on various projects,

though most do not find regular employment within French NGOs. Notably, only one informant is currently working with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on environmental issues, while NGO representatives—like those from the WWF and Greenpeace—are primarily based elsewhere (see Figure 1: France, categories 1 and 2).

Environmentalists in France often combine their work with antiwar and human rights activism, finding a supportive community within the Russian anti-Putin diaspora. The influx of migrants between 2022 and 2024 has revitalized institutions like the Turgenev Library, which now hosts events focused on literature related to the Ukrainian war. The small volunteer NGO Russ Liberté has expanded into the Reforum Space, a free coworking and resource center offering lectures and art performances. The Russian diaspora's traditional monthly picnics on the River Seine now occur weekly, with the season extended until late November.

An environmental refugee from Ozersk, Russia, who previously led the NGO Planet of Hope has become a key figure in the antiwar movement. Since fleeing to Europe 10 years ago to avoid arrest, she has raised awareness about the Mayak nuclear plant's impact on local populations. After earning a law degree from the Sorbonne, she became an active campaigner for Ukraine, appearing frequently on French TV and assisting newcomers as a lawyer and translator.

A prominent human rights expert who led the NGO For Human Rights also sought refuge in France. Involved in environmental movements like We Have to Live Here and the Shies protests, he initiated an antiwar petition in 2022 and obtained refugee status in 2023. In Paris, he founded the Sakharov Institute, which supports activists at risk and helps them transition to life in France. The Institute, funded by the same foundations that supported For Human Rights, remains active in antiwar platforms.

Another activist at the Sakharov Institute, previously an urban ecologist in Kaliningrad, is now a refugee in France working on developing an environmental program. She volunteers in climate awareness initiatives and educates others on opposing the Putin regime.

In summary, France has become a key destination for Russian activists at risk. The humanitarian visa program, though limited, provides a crucial lifeline for at-risk individuals, who continue their advocacy within a supportive diaspora community.

Migration to Serbia

Serbia has emerged as a significant hub for the migration of Russian citizens, primarily because it does not require a visa for entry. However, migrants without residence permits must undertake monthly visa runs, leaving and re-entering the country. For those with employment and residency permits, obtaining Serbian citizenship is relatively easy compared to other European countries.

Serbia hosts environmentalists at risk, experts involved in transnational projects, environmentalists who previously resided in Russian eco-villages, and lifestyle activists involved in garbage cleanups and recycling (see Figure 1: Serbia, category 1–49). Several environmentalists have secured positions at environmental NGOs in Belgrade. For instance, the head of the WWF Forest Program works at WWF Belgrade, and representatives from various environmental NGOs have joined the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). One notable activist, who worked as a project manager at the NGO Biologists for Nature Protection (also known as the Baltic Fund for Nature) until 2022, transitioned to a role at IUCN managing conservation initiatives in Central Asia. Her expertise in international project management, fluency in Russian, and familiarity with nature protection in countries of the former Soviet Union facilitated this career move.

In Belgrade, a group of Russian activists organizes cleanups, as well as waste collection and recycling efforts. They further offer consultations to Russian migrants on recycling practices.

Former eco-settlers in Serbia choose to reside in the countryside, with some families maintaining permaculture gardens. Some of my informants were volunteering in a village adjacent to Fruška Gora National Park. They engaged in building straw and clay houses, creating interactive playgrounds for children, and organizing work and play weekends. Another activist resided temporarily in a tent, working with a different Serbian family at Forest University, which forges online connections between academics and individuals eager to embrace alternative lifestyles outside major cities.

Overall, Serbia provides a conducive environment for Russian environmentalists and activists, supporting their professional endeavors and lifestyle choices while presenting unique challenges and opportunities.

Migration to Montenegro

Montenegro, which does not require visas, has become an attractive destination for Russian migrants, particularly environmental experts, eco-villagers, and lifestyle activists (see Figure 1: Montenegro, categories 1, 3, and 4). Many migrants, especially those without employment or residence permits, undertake monthly visa runs. Since the war in Ukraine, educational institutions in Montenegro have grown significantly. In 2024, the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences became Montenegro's first liberal arts college. The Private Adriatic College expanded into independent schools across several towns, and the Cosmos private school and kindergarten, originally in

Budva, opened a new branch in Bar in 2023, drawing many families. An environmentalist now heads the school, involving students in transnational environmental projects and maintaining an educational permaculture garden.

Environmentalists in Budva engage with events organized by Reforum, which unites opposition voices, and Coffee Auditorium, which hosts lectures by distinguished speakers. One informant is active in the Libertarian community, which fosters green initiatives. Their Libero City project aims to create an environmentally friendly space for co-working, business development, and socializing, with plans for solar panels and a permaculture garden, though these were still in the early stages as of July 2024.

Russian-speaking migrants have organized environmental initiatives, such as the Green Adriatic network, which focuses on beach cleanups and educating the public about waste management and recycling. Its volunteer branch, Reciklažica, operates in multiple coastal towns, including Bar, Sutomore, Budva, Tivat, Kotor, Herceg-Novi, and Kumbor. Volunteers collect and deliver separated waste to the recycling center in Kotor monthly. Reciklažica also supports stray animals.

Individuals with experience in Russian eco-villages, as well as with the Global Eco-Village Network and the Deep-Life Gathering initiative, established the Mountain Land Project in Montenegro. This project, situated near Mojkovac, involves cooperatively purchased land and an intentional community guided by sociocratic decision-making processes. The land is used collectively for summer camps and various festivals, including those focused on music, education, biology, and meditation. The project emphasizes sustainability, with participants using a common house, mostly staying in tents, preserving surrounding forests, and planning to establish a permaculture garden. This initiative is developing successfully.

Overall, these developments illustrate the diverse and dynamic nature of Russian migrant contributions in Montenegro, encompassing education, political activism, environmental stewardship, and community building.

Concluding Remarks

Environmentalists' experiences vary significantly depending on the migration regime, political, economic, and social environment. Those who were previously employed by established NGOs in Russia often secure positions within environmental NGOs in Europe, allowing them to continue their work in different contexts or regions. This professional migration spans multiple countries, though nations like the UK, Germany, France, and Finland offer more favorable conditions for professional environmentalists seeking employment and long-term settlement. Germany and France, in particular, have become safe havens for at-risk activists, providing them with humanitarian visas.

Activists previously engaged in transnational, grant-funded projects often manage to continue their grant-seeking efforts, particularly in Germany and France, with some success also in Finland. However, sustaining a project-based livelihood proves more challenging in Serbia and Montenegro. In these countries, at-risk activists and lifestyle activists frequently remain in a state of flux, ready to relocate in search of better opportunities.

Russian migrants have embraced lifestyle activism, engaging in activities like clean-ups, waste separation, and recycling, especially in areas where waste management infrastructure is underdeveloped, such as Serbia and Montenegro. Meanwhile, environmentalists in Germany, Finland, and France often focus on antiwar and human rights activism. In Serbia, however, such activism faces significant threats, highlighting the varying levels of safety across regions.

Overall, this study illuminates the complex landscape of activist migration, the continuity and adaptation of their work, and the diverse challenges and opportunities they encounter in their new environments.

About the Author

Maria Tysiachniouk holds a Master of Science in Environmental Studies from Bard College, NY, a PhD in Biology from the Russian Academy of Sciences, and a PhD in Sociology from Wageningen University (2012). Throughout her entire career, she has studied the environmental movement in Russia and its transformation. Tysiachniouk has written over 270 publications on topics related to transnational environmental governance, edited several books, and conducted fieldwork in several countries and regions. She is currently a senior researcher at the University of Eastern Finland.

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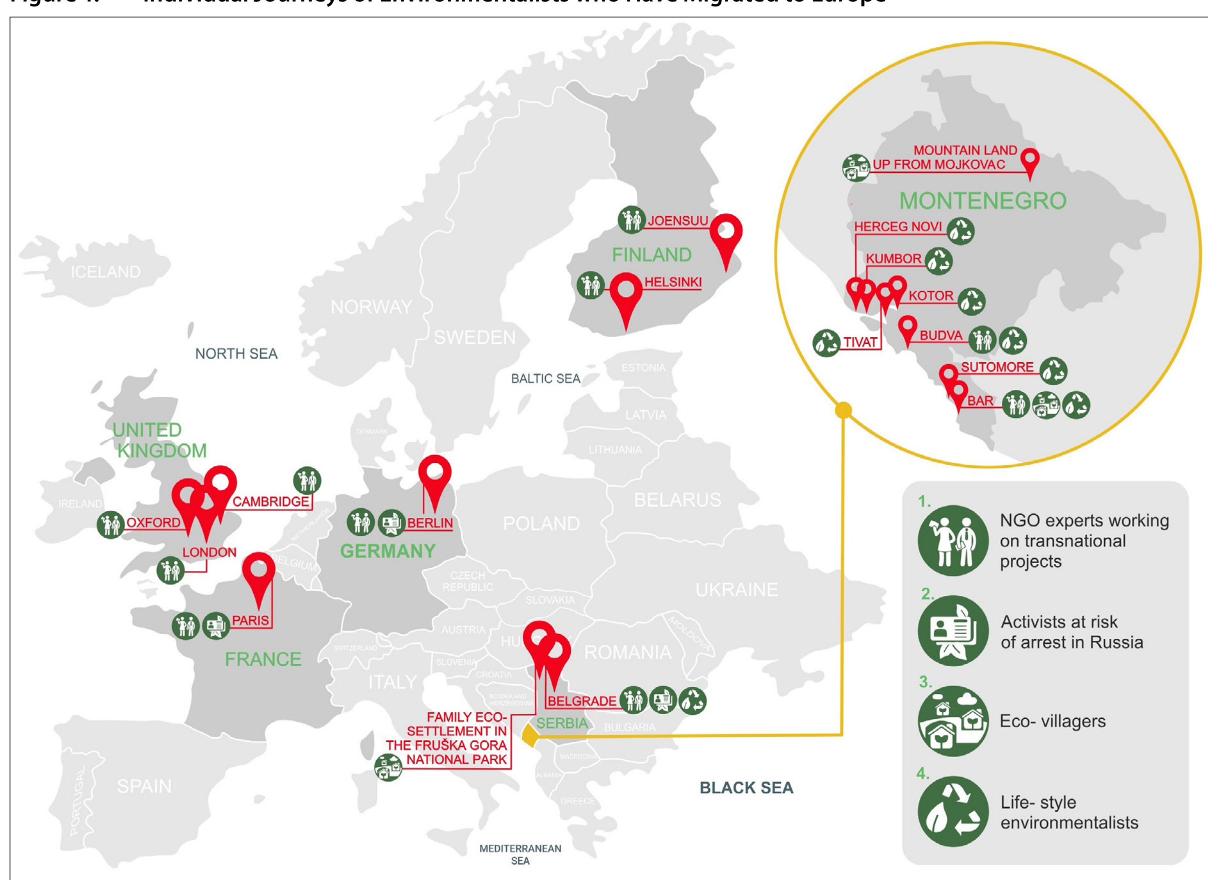
Figure 1: Individual Journeys of Environmentalists who Have Migrated to Europe



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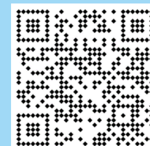

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