

# Bear with Us: What Is To Be Done About Russia

## *Recommendations on the conditions for engagement between Russia and the West*

### BACKGROUND

From October 18-21, 2023, Salzburg Global Seminar hosted an off-the-record, high-level dialogue, “Bear With Us: What Is To Be Done About Russia?” to explore scenarios and questions about what to do about Russia in the mid- to long-term.

Russia’s current war against Ukraine has made it plain that the hope for Russian liberalization and Europeanization after the Cold War has run aground. The war has dramatically changed the shape of Russian politics and likely the Russian state itself, with a future that is both uncertain and potentially more dangerous.

Post cold-war efforts to account for Russia in the existing transatlantic and European security architecture have broken down, and newer and even bigger threats might continue to emerge from a weakened and perhaps further disintegrated Russian Federation.

The Wagner Group mutiny in June 2023 also gave the impression that the power of President Vladimir Putin might fray, that his regime could be more fragile than many observers had assumed, and that events can unfold quickly once a fuse is lit.

In this context, all likely scenarios for the future of the Russian state are worrying. How to bolster Europe and the wider region against these acute and worsening threats, while continuing to engage and work with Russian youth, civil society, artists, scientists, and the private sector will present a significant and long-term challenge for the future of Europe.

Against this backdrop, there is an urgent need to think radically about present and future engagement with Russia.

Discussions focused on what options exist for managing and mitigating increasing uncertainty and danger exuding from Moscow. Fellows shared insights into political, economic, and security developments within and across Russia, as well as on the dynamics of other ongoing conflicts on Europe’s periphery. Discussions also looked beyond the current war on Ukraine to other regions affected by Russian encroachment as well as other historical conflicts where lessons can be drawn.

At the end of the program, three working groups developed a number of recommendations. These recommendations do not necessarily represent consensus among participating Fellows, nor do they necessarily represent the positions of Fellows’ respective organizations or institutions. However, Fellows wished to make these recommendations public with the goal of helping policy-makers develop new thinking and clearer approaches for dealing with the intractable problem: What is to be done about Russia?

## **WHERE IS THE ROOM FOR ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN THE WEST AND RUSSIA? SHOULD THERE BE CULTURAL OR SCIENTIFIC EXCHANGE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND CIVIL SOCIETY? SHOULD ARTISTS PERFORM? SHOULD ATHLETES COMPETE? SHOULD OBJECTORS BE WELCOME?**

**Engagement between Russia and the West during times of active conflict and frigid relations is fraught with challenges. It requires clear goals, a multifaceted approach, and, above all, patience. Each step must be taken with careful consideration of its potential political consequences and the realities on the ground.**

### **CONSIDERATIONS**

What does the West want when it seeks to engage Russia? To transform Russia into a more democratic regime? Lower tensions? Is such engagement a worthy goal in its own right? Even if we are clear on what we want, ongoing tensions, divergent views of the international system, and contrasting ideologies significantly complicate the process.

Engagement with Russian state actors should be contingent on Russia's total withdrawal from Ukraine and the implementation of meaningful accountability measures and should involve a fundamental shift. This approach would focus on avoiding any false equivalencies between divergent ideologies, particularly when one represents autocracy, state capture, suppression, and genocide.

### **DISCLAIMER:**

It is important to note that there is no unanimous consensus among the participants of this discussion on the recommendations provided in this document. The complexity of the issue and the diverse perspectives involved make it challenging to reach a fully satisfactory agreement on whether reengagement with Russia is currently feasible. Furthermore, when referring to the Russian diaspora, those in exile, and the Russian-speaking community in this document, we specifically mean individuals who openly condemn the Russian aggression against Ukraine (starting from 2014) and express a desire to change the current regime in Russia. This focus reflects the understanding that engagement with these groups should align with the broader goals of promoting peace, democracy, and respect for international law. This approach recognizes the limitations and risks inherent in engaging with entities or individuals within Russia due to the current political climate and legislation that interprets foreign contact as potential "foreign influence". Therefore, the recommendations primarily focus on engagement with Russians outside of Russia - in the diaspora and those in exile, who meet the aforementioned criteria.

### **Conditional Engagement with State Actors:**

- Any engagement with Russian government and state entities should be conditional upon Russia's complete withdrawal from Ukraine and adherence to international laws and norms.
- Any dialogue or cooperation with state actors should be linked to clear accountability measures and progress towards ending authoritarian practices.

### **Engagement with Russian Diaspora and Exiles:**

- Focus on connecting with and supporting the Russian diaspora and civil society members who are in exile. This includes NGOs, academia, independent journalists, cultural figures, and activists who have been compelled to leave Russia due to the current political climate.
- Support and amplify the voices of Russian dissidents, activists, and independent thinkers who reside outside of Russia.
- Develop, promote and facilitate platforms where Russian civil society members in exile can share their experiences, insights, and visions for the future of Russia. Their stories and experiences can provide valuable insights into the realities of living under, and resisting, an authoritarian regime. These platforms could be in the form of online

portals, international conferences, or collaboration with global media outlets. They can help amplify their voices and ensure they are heard in international policy discussions and diplomatic dialogues.

- Facilitate and fund initiatives that empower Russian-speaking communities abroad. These initiatives could include cultural events, educational programs, and forums for open discussion that cater to the needs and interests of the diaspora.
- Identify and establish strong partnerships with Russian NGOs, academic institutions, and cultural organizations operating in exile. These entities often continue to uphold democratic values and work towards positive change despite being outside their home country.
- Allocate grants, training opportunities, and other essential resources to Russian organizations in exile. This support will help strengthen their capacity for independent operation, increase their impact, and ensure their voices are heard on an international stage.
- Organize cultural and educational exchanges that specifically involve Russian artists, scholars, and professionals in exile. Such exchanges can take place in neutral venues or through virtual platforms, ensuring a safe and open environment for expression and dialogue.
- Actively promote and highlight the contributions of the Russian diaspora and exiled civil society in fostering a deeper understanding of Russian culture, politics, and society from a perspective independent of the current regime.

### **Rejecting False Equivalencies:**

- Emphasize the distinction between the ideologies and aspirations of the Russian diaspora and civil society in exile, and those of the authoritarian regime in Russia. Recognize that these groups often have divergent views and experiences compared to the official state narrative.
- In all communications and engagements, be cautious to avoid language or actions that could inadvertently legitimize or normalize the practices of the authoritarian regime. This includes being mindful of how the Russian state might manipulate such engagements for its propaganda.
- Encourage and support the critical voices among the Russian diaspora and those in exile who speak out against autocracy and advocate for democracy and human rights. This support can be in the form of amplifying their messages, providing them with resources, or offering platforms for their expression.
- Develop educational and cultural initiatives that accurately reflect the diverse experiences and perspectives of the Russian people, especially those who have been forced to live outside of their home country due to political reasons. These initiatives should aim to enlighten the global community about the complexities of Russian society and politics, beyond the scope of state-controlled narratives.
- Foster collaborations and dialogues with Russian-speaking communities around the world. Such engagements can offer a more nuanced understanding of the Russian culture and societal dynamics, beyond the binary of pro-regime versus anti-regime.

### **Strategic Communication:**

- Adjust communication strategies to target the Russian diaspora and international audiences, highlighting the challenges faced by those living under the current regime.
- Utilize digital platforms and social media to disseminate information and narratives that counter state propaganda, reaching the global Russian-speaking community.
- Focus on narratives that highlight the human costs of conflict, promote democratic values, and counter misinformation from authoritarian sources.

### **Sports and Cultural Engagements:**

- Organize sports and cultural events that involve unaffiliated athletes, artists, and performers from the Russian diaspora and those in exile. Host these events in neutral venues or through international events to ensure independence from governmental influence.
- Facilitate art exhibitions, music performances, and other cultural activities that highlight the experiences and talents of the Russian diaspora and exiled communities, providing them a platform for expression and cultural exchange.
- Encourage academic conferences and student exchange programs that involve Russian scholars and students in exile, facilitating a free exchange of ideas and fostering international understanding and collaboration.

### **Science and Education:**

- Engage in scientific collaborations that are explicitly independent of Russian state influence, focusing on global challenges and shared human progress with significant participation from Russian scientists in exile.
- Promote academic partnerships and exchanges that involve Russian educational institutions and scholars in exile, ensuring these interactions are free from governmental control and contribute to a broader exchange of knowledge and ideas.

### **Public Diplomacy and Information Campaigns:**

- Implement public diplomacy efforts that specifically reach out to the Russian diaspora, emphasizing the values of freedom, democracy, and human rights, and providing support and platforms for diaspora voices.
- Aid independent media initiatives run by the Russian diaspora that provide alternative viewpoints and counter state propaganda, especially those initiatives that can effectively reach both the diaspora and those within Russia.

### **Track II Diplomacy:**

- Facilitate Track II diplomacy efforts that involve members of the Russian diaspora and exiled civil society. These dialogues can explore solutions to current conflicts and build relationships that transcend official diplomatic channels, offering perspectives outside of the governmental narrative.

### **Supporting Regional Stability:**

- Utilize the unique insights and connections of the Russian diaspora and exiled civil society in efforts to support regional stability. Their perspectives can be invaluable in understanding the nuances of the region's dynamics and in formulating effective diplomatic strategies.
- Encourage and support members of the Russian diaspora and civil society in exile to act as advocates for peace and stability in their home region. Their voices can play a crucial role in international forums, providing a counter-narrative to the official state position and promoting a more balanced understanding of the regional situation.
- Engage the Russian diaspora in initiatives that aim to build international solidarity and cooperation in addressing the consequences of conflicts involving Russia. Their involvement can enhance the effectiveness of these initiatives by bringing diverse perspectives and experiences.
- Back humanitarian efforts led by the Russian diaspora aimed at providing aid and support to Ukraine and other neighboring countries affected by Russian aggression. Their cultural and linguistic affinity can make these efforts more impactful and sensitive to the needs of those affected.
- Involve the Russian diaspora and exiled civil society in policy discussions and diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving regional conflicts. Their input can offer valuable insights into potential solutions and strategies that respect the complexities of the situation.

### **Transparency and Accountability:**

- Ensure that all engagements are transparent and held to high accountability standards.
- Implement mechanisms to regularly monitor and evaluate the impact of these engagement strategies. This is crucial to ensure they are effective and do not inadvertently support the authoritarian regime.
- Be prepared to adjust strategies based on feedback and changing circumstances.

### **Building International Coalitions:**

- Work with international partners to build a coalition that specifically supports engagement with the Russian diaspora and civil society in exile. This coalition should focus on ensuring a consistent and effective message that resonates with these groups, recognizing their unique role and potential impact.
- Encourage the active involvement of the Russian diaspora and exiled civil society in international advocacy efforts. Their participation can help shape a more effective and representative approach to promoting democracy and human rights, especially as it pertains to the Russian context.
- Work closely with international organizations to ensure that efforts to engage with and support the Russian diaspora and exiled civil society are integrated into broader strategies for promoting democracy, human rights, and regional stability. This coordination can help maximize the impact of these initiatives and ensure they are aligned with global efforts.
- Foster initiatives that promote cross-cultural understanding and solidarity between the Russian diaspora and other communities around the world. Such initiatives can strengthen the global response to challenges posed by the current Russian regime and support a united front in advocating for democratic values and human rights.

**In this approach, the focus shifts to empowering and engaging with the Russian diaspora and civil society in exile, maintaining a firm stance against the authoritarian regime. This strategy is dedicated to upholding democratic values and human rights, recognizing the distinct separation between these groups and the state under Putin's rule.**

### **Why Implement This Approach?**

- **Upholding Democratic Values and International Law:** This approach underscores the importance of democratic principles and adherence to international law. It sends a clear message against autocratic behavior and military aggression.
- **Empowering Russian Civil Society in Exile:** Engaging with the Russian diaspora and exiled civil society empowers voices advocating for change and resilience against authoritarian influences.
- **Preventing Legitimization of Authoritarian Regime:** By focusing on the diaspora and exiled civil society, the strategy avoids inadvertently supporting or legitimizing the authoritarian regime.
- **Creating Leverage for Change:** This conditional engagement underscores that meaningful relations with the West depend on respecting international norms and human rights.
- **Supporting Global Stability:** The approach promotes global stability and peace, insisting on adherence to international laws and norms, particularly in conflict zones.

### **Win-Win Component**

- **Support for the Russian People in Exile:** This strategy aligns with the aspirations for freedom and democracy of the Russian diaspora and civil society in exile, offering support without endorsing the government's actions.
- **Strengthening International Norms:** By standing firm on principles of international law and democracy, this approach reinforces these norms globally.

- **Building Foundations for Future Relations:** Engaging with the Russian diaspora and civil society in exile lays the groundwork for future relations based on mutual respect and democratic principles.
- **Promoting Global Security:** The approach contributes to global security by insisting on adherence to international norms and supporting conflict resolution efforts.

## Narratives

- **Shared Human Values:** Emphasize narratives that resonate with the Russian diaspora and exiled civil society, highlighting shared human values and aspirations for freedom, peace, and democracy.
- **Costs of Conflict:** Focus on the human cost of conflict, including the experiences of the Russian diaspora and exiles, to promote peace and understanding.
- **Empowerment and Hope:** Highlight stories of empowerment, resilience, and hope within the Russian diaspora and exiled civil society.
- **Unity in Diversity:** Promote the idea that diversity of thought and cultural expression among the Russian diaspora strengthens global unity.
- **Common Global Challenges:** Stress the importance of collaboration in addressing global challenges, leveraging the unique perspectives of the Russian diaspora and exiled civil society.
- **Respect for Sovereignty and International Law:** Underline the importance of respecting national sovereignty and adhering to international law, as advocated by the Russian diaspora and exiles.

## RULES

Ensuring a “win-win” scenario in engagements between the West and exiled Russians amidst conflict, requires adherence to certain principles or rules. These rules are designed to foster positive outcomes and mutual benefits, even when the larger political context remains contentious. Here’s how this can be structured for each sphere of engagement:

### Strategic Communication:

- **Avoid Escalation:** Refrain from rhetoric that demonizes, threatens, or uses aggressive language, as this can escalate tensions and close doors for dialogue.
- **Transparency and Truth:** Commit to factual, honest reporting and communication, avoiding propaganda or misinformation campaigns.
- **Open Channels:** Keep lines of communication open and responsive, allowing for direct, unhindered dialogue to clarify stances and prevent misunderstandings.

### Sports:

- **Apolitical Platform:** Ensure that sports engagements with the diaspora remain free from political influence, focusing on the spirit of sportsmanship and not political agendas.
- **Equal Representation:** Encourage participation from the diaspora on equal terms, avoiding any form of discrimination.
- **Celebration of Unity:** Use sports events to emphasize commonalities and shared human excellence, involving the diaspora.

### Science:

- **Collaborative Over Competitive:** Focus on joint projects involving diaspora scientists that require input from both sides, emphasizing collaborative achievement over nationalistic competition.
- **Shared Benefit:** Engage in research and initiatives where outcomes positively affect both the diaspora and wider global community (e.g., climate change, health initiatives) and avoid zero-sum scenarios.

- **Open Knowledge:** Promote transparent exchange of information and findings, ensuring that scientific advancement remains the focus, not political gain.

### **Culture:**

- **Respect for Diversity within the Diaspora:** Emphasize and celebrate the diverse cultural expressions and experiences within the Russian diaspora and exiled communities. Recognize the rich variety of perspectives and backgrounds that these groups bring, while avoiding narratives that suggest cultural supremacy or denigration.
- **Fostering People-to-People Connections:** Concentrate on cultural initiatives that encourage personal relationships and exchanges among members of the Russian diaspora and between the diaspora and other communities. Prioritize events and programs that facilitate individual interactions and mutual understanding, rather than focusing on state-level engagements or broad political statements.
- **Encouraging Non-Political Cultural Expression:** Support opportunities for cultural expression by the Russian diaspora and exiled civil society that remain independent of political influences. Encourage artistic and cultural endeavors that reflect the personal experiences, histories, and identities of these groups without being co-opted for political messaging or propaganda. This could include art exhibitions, music and dance performances, literary readings, and film screenings that showcase the talents and stories of the diaspora and exiled communities.
- **Promoting Cross-Cultural Collaboration:** Foster collaborative cultural projects that bring together the Russian diaspora and other cultural groups. These collaborations can help bridge cultural divides, promote mutual understanding, and showcase the shared human experience beyond political and geographical boundaries.
- **Documenting and Sharing Diaspora Experiences:** Support projects that document and share the experiences of the Russian diaspora and civil society in exile. This can include oral history projects, documentary films, and digital archives that preserve and disseminate the stories of these communities, providing valuable insights into their experiences and contributions.

**Across all these rules, the underlying principles are mutual respect, honesty, and a commitment to peaceful engagement. By ensuring that these spheres remain free from the direct influence of political agendas, they can serve as bridges, maintaining and even strengthening connections during times of diplomatic strain. These positive engagements provide a counterbalance to political hostilities, preserving the human and cultural links necessary for any future reconciliation processes.**