

LIFE IN EXILE: A NEW APPROACH TO RUSSIAN DEMOCRATS IN EUROPE

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SUMMARY

- Thousands of Russian political migrants have moved to the EU since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Yet the EU lacks a harmonised approach towards these new arrivals.
- There is huge potential to work more closely with Russian democrats in exile, to sustain their campaigning, and to help them acclimatise to their new homes.
- The EU and member states should also have greater regard to political migrants' own personal safety vis-à-vis the Russian state and assist them to guard against subversion by the Kremlin.
- 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 should democracy return to Russia.
- At the same time, Russian democrats in exile should fill some critical gaps in their work with each other, their compatriots at home, and European stakeholders. They should professionalise their activities, become more aware of security threats, and improve their communication practices.

Small investment, big return

Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, tens of thousands of Russians have moved to Europe. Many are political migrants and asylum seekers whose work and activism are now banned in Russia – yet the European Union lacks a coordinated approach to Russia's democrats in exile. Because of this, Europeans are missing a historic opportunity to consolidate their relationship with these members of the diaspora and their networks at home. By making a small investment in closer relations with this community, the EU could support them to shape Russia's future. The EU can thus secure European interests, increase Russia's democratic potential, and strengthen the bloc's place as a global democratic leader.

Without a clearer approach to Russian political migrants, the EU runs several risks. Local political dynamics in different member states could make the Russian immigrant community easy bait for hostile populist politics. Russian state actors could exert influence over unintegrated Russians who do not speak the local language and lack an understanding of host states' history and cultural nuances. And activists could become disillusioned and end up economically marginalised – especially if Russia defeats Ukraine and the regime remains in place.

More profoundly, the lack of a coordinated offer for recently arrived Russian democrats in Europe reflects broader strategic uncertainty in Europe about how to deal with Russia and the war in Ukraine. Europeans are not unified in their approach to these issues. Yet this should not mean that Russian political migrants fall foul of messy policy when their work supports goals shared with the EU, including strengthening policies on Ukraine and Belarus. The existing approach also jeopardises the efforts of Russian anti-war activists, politicians, and independent media based in non-EU European countries who need to visit the bloc for their work. At the very least, investing in opponents of a regime that has wrought havoc in Europe is essential to fulfil hopes of peace across the continent.

For their part, the Russian opposition and civil society in exile can also do more to work better with European partners. The existential question for democratic Russians is whether they will repeat the fate of the Iranian, Cuban, Syrian, and Venezuelan diasporas, whose leaders failed to achieve democratic change and return home; or whether they will find common ground among themselves and advance a strategic approach to the democratisation of Russia. They should raise the levels of their professionalism as part of this, and articulate a collective understanding of what democracy in Russia might look like and how to get there – inspiring Russian migrants and their European allies alike.

This paper draws on desk research; interviews conducted by the authors with nine European politicians, Russian opposition members, and civil society activists; and survey findings from Outrush, a leading research programme on Russian immigration.

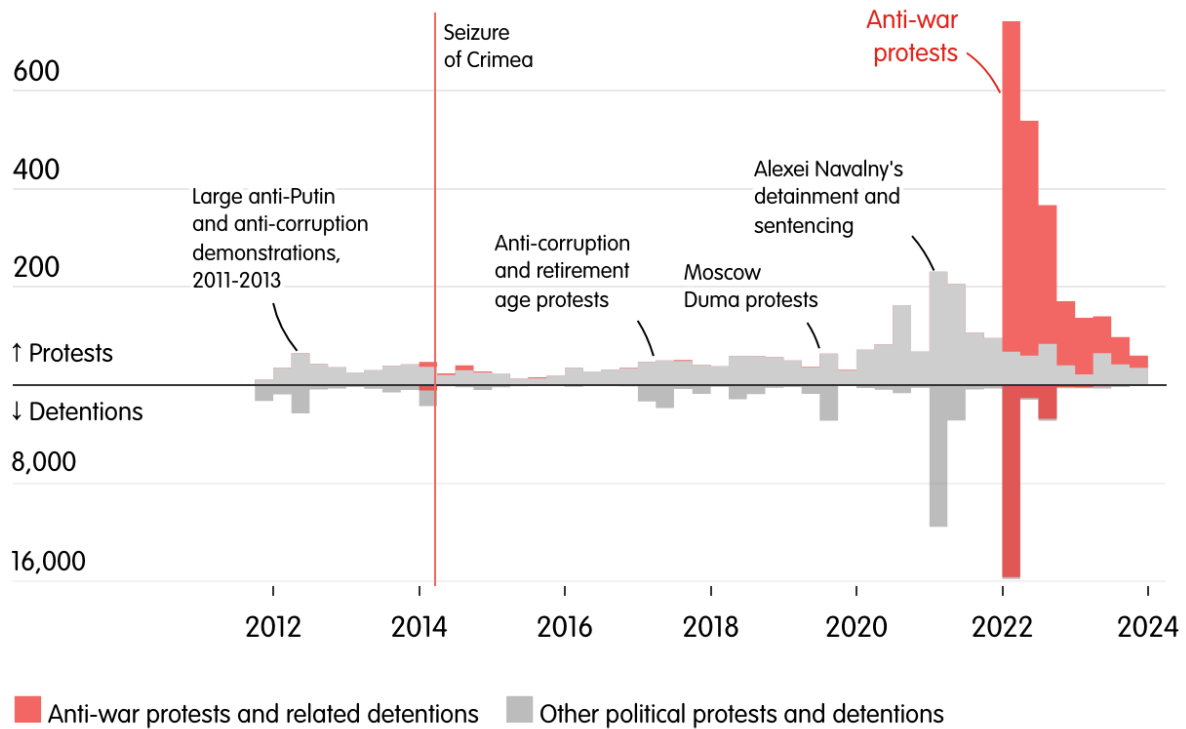
Russia's democrats in exile

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has been one of the greatest challenges in the EU's 70-year existence. The bloc's response has been substantial and comprehensive: it has demanded Russia withdraw its forces, applied sanctions on a massive scale, and provided unprecedented support to Ukraine. However, the EU is yet to capitalise on the opportunities offered by the exodus of Russian political migrants. European leaders and civil society should seize these opportunities to advance their national and European interests, those of Russian democrats – and ultimately the interests of Russia itself.

In 2022, a new chapter opened in the history of Russia's democratic opposition. Europeans need to understand who the recently arrived Russians are, what they went through back home, and what they have experienced since arriving in Europe.

Russian opposition and civil society groups have been tireless advocates for democracy in Russia. Since 2003, the Russian parliament has essentially been run by one party, with all real opposition excluded from formal political processes. In response, Russian democrats set up civil society organisations which fought for fair elections, human rights, environmental protections, and more. From 2005-2009, they organised Dissenters' Marches against the regime across Russia, while in 2011-2012 the country saw the largest-ever anti-Putin and anti-corruption demonstrations. Following the seizure of Crimea in 2014, Russian civil society organised anti-war and pro-Ukraine demonstrations. After the 2022 invasion, a diverse group of multiple anti-system movements carried out protests, vandalised government buildings, and engaged in other activities. They created a new white-blue-white Russian flag in distinction to the Russian flag displayed on military vehicles in Ukraine. Opposition leaders such as Alexei Navalny and Boris Nemtsov were killed, and many – such as Vladimir Kara-Murza, Ilya Yashin, and Ksenia Fadeyeva – remain in prison.

Political protests and detentions in Russia. Quarterly records, 2011-2023.



Source: OVD-Info
ECFR · ecf.eu

After February 2022, hundreds of thousands Russians, including thousands of democratic activists and journalists, moved abroad in fear of political persecution and military conscription. The war on Ukraine was the tipping point for many, who felt they had come to the point where they had done all they could at home – at least in the rapidly deteriorating circumstances surrounding the war. Indeed, research by Outrush shows where their sympathies lie: three-quarters of recent Russian political migrants back the payment of reparations to Ukraine and more than half say they personally feel guilt for the conflict. Similarly, half of all Russian war immigrants surveyed (including those who left for non-political reasons) have volunteered and donated to support Ukrainian refugees and Russian NGOs and media.

Yet this puts them on the wrong side of the authorities. Interviews conducted for this paper suggest that migrants undertake these activities because they want Russia to democratise and still hope to return home one day; others support the Ukrainians as a way of making up for the moral pain of the damage done by Russia. In response to their activism and work, the Russian government declared immigrants' projects or their founders undesirable organisations

or foreign agents. Some have now found themselves on a federal warrant list.

At the same time, political migrants' ties to Russia are not broken. Despite the financial, bureaucratic, and political challenges they are living through, Russian democrats in exile stay in close touch with their friends and relatives in Russia. And they are avowedly political in their interactions: Outrush found that 91 per cent of them say they discuss politics with people back home on a regular basis. This community of activists offers an important link to Russian society.

Getting here from there

The potential of this wave of Russian immigration has yet to be properly recognised by European officials and politicians. Although migration is a part of the major geopolitical crisis with Moscow, the EU and its member states have not developed a coordinated approach to the Russian political diaspora as part of this confrontation. This may be more an act of omission than commission. One recent EU report on migration policy failed to mention Russian immigration even once, apart from a narrow mention of Russian IT specialists in Finland. But this blind spot generates unnecessary long-term challenges and may even undermine aspects of European security.

Widely differing responses across the EU towards recent Russian arrivals reflect the bloc's fragmented approach towards this new and developing cohort of migrants. During the first year of the full-scale war, debate centred on whether to tighten entry restrictions for Russian citizens, or even make them go back to Russia. Discussions extended to possible punitive measures in response to the actions of the Russian state. In the second half of 2023, this began to change, with pragmatic arguments appearing linked to Europe's security and foreign policy interests. Still, the debate now seems to be shifting from ethical arguments about supporting Ukraine and punishing Russians towards a more pragmatic approach to Russian immigration whose aims include reducing the labour supply in the Russian economy and using Russian civil society and democratic politicians as agents of counter-propaganda and potential regime change.

The implementation of responses varies wildly. At one end of the spectrum, countries such as the Baltic states have on occasion prevented Russians from claiming asylum, while others – such as Spain, Italy, and France – are still willingly issuing tourist visas for well-off Russian holidaymakers. Precise figures for Russian democratic migrants in the EU are available only by proxy for those accepted as asylum seekers and refugees – but many Russians live in the EU on bases other than these, such as humanitarian visas, family reunification visas, or work visas, according to which they move as qualified professionals or freelancers. The absence of

a harmonised EU regime for humanitarian visas, in contrast to the asylum process, complicates efforts to estimate the number of people arriving this way.

That being said, one thing is clear: Russians tend to avoid the formal asylum process. A total of 2,140 Russians received asylum in 2022 – small numbers when set against the 310,000 people who were granted asylum across the EU that year. Some of this may be due to advice shared within the community: the Ark project, which supports Russians abroad, has warned against applying for asylum. Indeed, there are reasons aplenty to heed such advice. The asylum process is accompanied by strict conditions that hinder one’s ability to earn a living and pursue personal growth, especially in the early years. And involvement in the asylum process can be brutal or even fatal. Over the last two years, three LGBTQI+ Russian asylum seekers have died in Dutch refugee camps alone. They reported slow procedures, harassment, and police brutality.

In terms of those who do seek asylum, Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and Spain make up 83 per cent of all applications by Russians in the EU: there were 23,050 asylum applications in 2022 and the first nine months of 2023. The asylum process can be very slow and take more than a year for an applicant to receive a decision. The French courts have lately also opened up more legal grounds for asylum on the basis of a European Court of Justice decision to accept military mobilisation in violent regimes as a reason for asylum.

Humanitarian visas and work-related permits

Humanitarian visas are non-harmonised entry documents that allow a non-national to approach a potential host country outside that country’s territory with a request for international protection. If the response is positive, the third-country national receives a visa allowing him or her to enter the territory of a state and apply for a specific type of long-term residence permit. In the EU, only Germany issues a dedicated humanitarian residence permit. The humanitarian residence permit allows the holder to extend their stay as long as the threat persists and enables the person to receive social benefits.

In other EU countries, an applicant may receive a general visa (a “national D” visa) granted on humanitarian grounds, which the holder must renew every year. In the

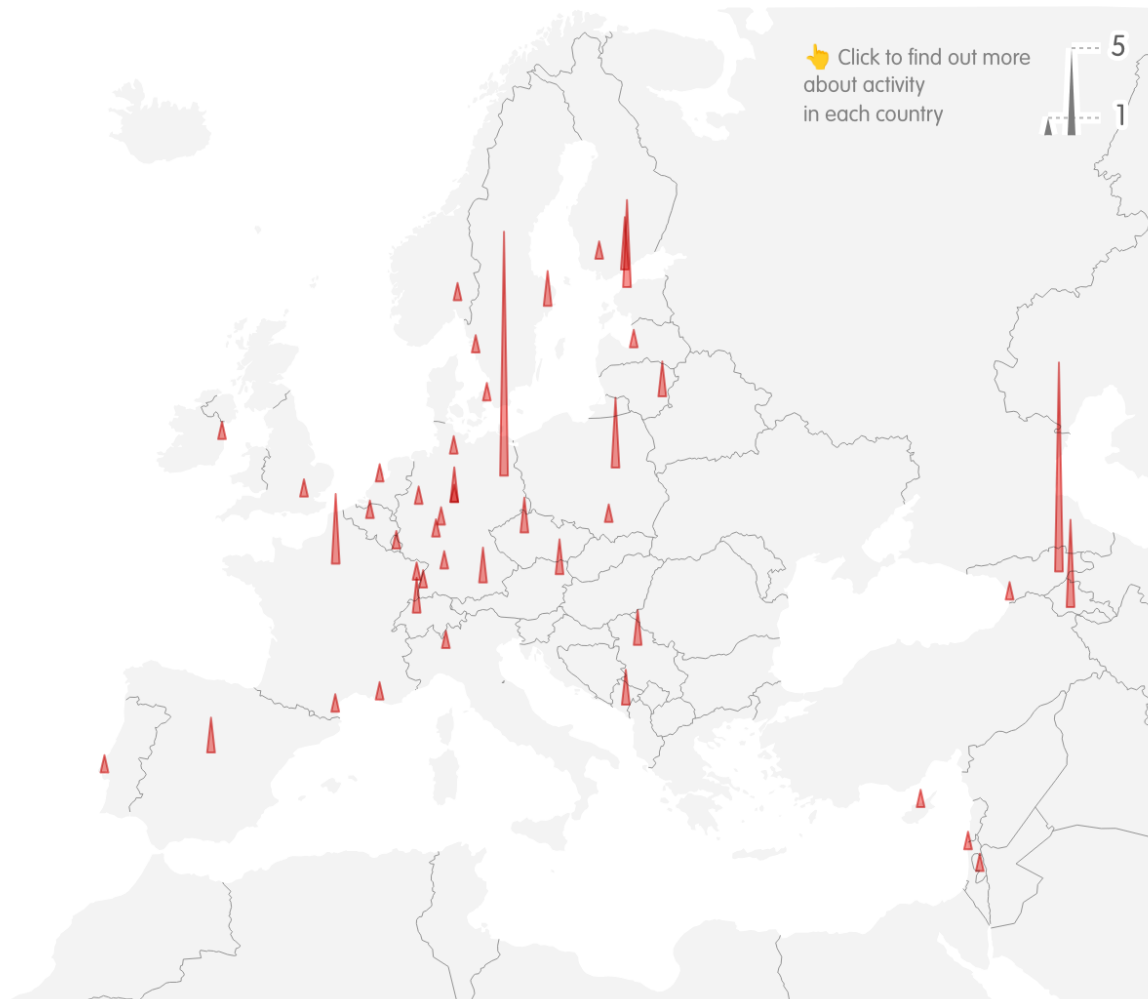
Baltic states, most Russian journalists and civil society activists have this type of visa, which gives them the right to stay and work in the country of issue. In practice, most applications are facilitated by recognised and well-known national human rights organisations, which vouch for the applicants to the national government. For more information on humanitarian visas in the EU, see this [European Parliament report](#).

However, some Russian political migrants, and many professionals who move, obtain national or EU (Blue Card) work-related residence permits, digital nomad visas (such as in Spain, Portugal, Romania, and Hungary), or freelance visas (such as in Germany, France, and the Czech Republic). Despite their political or civil society work, these applicants are not distinguished from general applicants – what matters is that their professional skills and income meet national requirements. Blue Card visas are more demanding than the general or humanitarian visa routes in terms of qualifications and income. But they can be more advantageous as they simplify the relocation of family members and can potentially lead to permanent residence.

[Latvia](#) and [Lithuania](#) have issued humanitarian visas to hundreds of Russian pro-democracy activists and media professionals, a fact which belies their governments' harsh anti-Russian rhetoric. Poland has also extended protection to around 1,700 Russian pro-democracy [activists](#). In the first 18 months of the invasion, Germany granted around 1,600 humanitarian [visas](#) to Russian citizens, including politicians, academics, and human rights activists, who had often first left Russia for Georgia, Armenia, Turkey, Montenegro, and central Asia. Interviews conducted for this paper suggest that France has also issued humanitarian visas, but with a requirement to reapply every six months. The interviewees report that the cost of living in France prevents those without sufficient income from coming.

Where particular types of Russians – activists, politicians, or media professionals – gather depends on a number of factors. These include the presence and capability of local human rights organisations (including how well connected they are with host governments), the informal policies of foreign ministries and migration authorities, and whether local politicians are willing to vouch for particular individuals. Interviewees say that France and Italy have developed a reputation for taking in persecuted Russian anti-war [artists](#) and granting them asylum, work, or study visas.

Location of anti-war initiatives with Russian founders or participants



Icons are placed at capital city locations where city-level data are unavailable.

Source: Kovcheg
ECFR · ecf.eu

The unsatisfactory nature of asylum procedures and the lack of harmonisation for humanitarian visas means that EU policymakers likely lack a clear picture of how many Russian political, media, and civil society migrants are living within the EU's borders – and in which member states they reside. This may hinder the development of a more coordinated approach towards Russian democrats.

It is also worth remarking on the relationship between members of the Russian political diaspora in the EU and those in non-EU countries, such as Georgia, Armenia, and Montenegro. Russian political migrants based outside Russia but living close to the EU retain

important contextual knowledge and networks in Russia that can enhance European understanding of what is happening inside the country. They donate to Ukrainian NGOs and even to Ukraine's armed forces, which makes them potentially liable to prosecution in Russia. Currently, those outside the EU are unable to travel easily to their colleagues in the EU without a multiple-entry visa. This contributes to inequality and fragmentation within the Russian community.

Making a new home

Integration challenges

Russian political migrants' relocation to Europe is often a difficult personal experience which can immediately begin to shape new arrivals' perceptions of the local authorities and societies. Our interviewees described how some, especially younger Russians, moved with barely a couple of hundred euros in their pocket. Outrush found that 1 in 10 survey respondents said they did not even have enough money to buy clothes. Russian migrants often take a significant downward step in living standards along with professional demotion; back home in Russia they might have owned property and had a stable job, social support networks, and a pension upon retirement. Having moved abroad, they must start anew.

Political migrants are affected by similar administrative challenges and political difficulties to other legal migrants. Otherwise typical bureaucratic and logistical obstacles are, for Russians, exacerbated by sanctions and anti-Russian sentiment (mostly in the Baltic states, Poland, and Georgia). These include difficulties in finding housing and the burden of overcompliance procedures to open a bank account, receive work permits, or acquire health insurance. Interviewees' (and the authors') personal experience shows that sanctions targeted at Russia writ large affect individuals by hindering their ability to transfer money from Russian banks to their accounts in Europe.

Where to work is another challenge. Outrush also found that around a quarter of Russian political immigrants are self-employed, while many continue to work for Russian or Russia-focused NGOs abroad. This is because they have insufficient knowledge of English or the local language, or they simply lack the skills and educational qualifications required in host markets. Only 8 per cent report that they can speak the local language, while a full 40 per cent say they know the language but do not speak it regularly or easily. In addition, local rules can make integration through work more difficult: in Germany, employment leads to the termination of social benefits, which may be higher than the salary on offer. At the same time, some may decline asylum-related social benefits and thus have little interaction with the

authorities. Interviewees for this paper report that many Russian political migrants decline benefits from host states because of the conditions attached.

Trust in one's new home

With migrants often arriving in unplanned or even chaotic ways, it can be hard for local authorities and others in member states to engage with the newcomers. A similar challenge is the level of confidence the migrants have in host governments. Low trust in governments will limit the relationships that members of the Russian political diaspora can develop with political figures in host countries. While established diaspora leaders are well connected with European politicians, more recent arrivals may behave cautiously or even evasively, limiting fruitful engagement with local officials.

Only 1 in 20 Outrush survey respondents say they fully trust their host government, although around half express some degree of trust. In 2022, 41 per cent said they do not trust their host governments – a figure which actually rose to 48 per cent the following year. Reported and anticipated discrimination surely plays a big role in political migrants' difficulties settling in: a quarter of those responding said they had experienced discrimination, while three-quarters expected it to happen to them at some point – such as being prevented from boarding intra-EU flights or renting an apartment. Other examples include apparent informal bans on employing Russian citizens in some countries. Exiles may also worry about their lives being turned upside-down on the whim of the authorities. The lack of a systematic approach to political immigration across the EU only compounds this unease about one day getting the order to leave.

On a more positive note, 80 per cent of survey respondents say they trust the local population of the countries they are residing in. They feel people-to-people interactions are generally good and help foster trusting relationships between Russian migrants and local citizens. There could be further mileage here to integrate the activities of Russian migrants with local social initiatives, including those not necessarily related to Russia, such as involvement in environmental projects, local volunteering, or elderly care. This would strengthen social ties between the immigrant and local communities and is something that host governments could consider more actively facilitating.

In this regard, the Russian diaspora already plays a central role in providing help for migrants. Russian-led initiatives such as the Ark project, Helpdesk, and Get Lost help simplify the relocation of their compatriots and assist anti-war Russians and Ukrainian refugees in emergencies by providing material support. They may be able to do more to work with local authorities to promote integration. The experience of interviewees for this paper and of the

authors suggests that Russians can successfully volunteer or work to support Ukrainian refugees as long as they clearly state their anti-war and anti-Kremlin position and acknowledge the Ukrainian view.

It is also important to promote integration in order to reduce the risk that the Russian community develop an adverse reputation due to the actions of some of its members. From the outside, the community may appear coherent and homogeneous to European citizens. Of course, it comprises highly diverse groups, including many who lived in Europe before the Ukraine war and Russian-speaking communities that have long been settled and even naturalised in EU member states. But the illusion of uniformity can contribute to tensions – such as when, for example, Russian-speakers in Germany organised a pro-Putin protest, or the case of Russian-speaking teenagers in Lithuania shooting at a classmate from Russia for his anti-war beliefs.

The attitude of ordinary Europeans towards the Russian diaspora, and the stereotypes that develop, could influence the assistance that officials and politicians give to Russians. They may withhold support if they worry about its popularity with voters. This is already effectively happening in some places, with universities ceasing to accept Russian students in the Czech Republic and Estonia. Equally, it is important to guard against Russian migrant communities becoming the target for populist politics. Indeed, the lack of clarity and variation in the bases on which Russian democrats are able to live in Europe may contribute to weaker public understanding and acceptance than there otherwise might be.

Trust in one's old home

Finally, escaping Russia does not mean that exiles feel safe from their own state. In 2022, around 40 per cent of respondents to Outrush research said they feared transnational repression by the Russian government because of their political activities. In May 2023, the president of the Free Russia Foundation, Natalia Arno, is alleged to have been poisoned in Prague. The same year, three Russian independent journalists suffered similar symptoms. And just as this report went to press, Leonid Volkov, a key Navalny ally, was injured in a hammer attack in Lithuania by a man yet to be identified.

Interviewees point out that these cases may be the tip of the iceberg because of survivorship bias – no one knows the real number of fatal 'heart attacks' or instances of sudden 'organ failure' that were not what they appear. These events are surprising to few. Deputy head of the Russian Security Council, Dmitry Medvedev, has said Russian emigrants who oppose the war should be prosecuted: "We will spit on their graves," he vituperated.

The Russian emigrant community risks being both a target and a resource for pro-regime activity, such as the aforementioned protests in Germany or the running of grossly anti-Russian xenophobic information campaigns that split the diaspora and alienate it from society in Russia. The Russian state is undoubtedly continuing its attempts to infiltrate democratic groups. For example, an activist from Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation came out publicly as working with the FSB, Russia's security service, which he claimed had paid him to spy on activists in Georgia. The plot failed because of his admission, but it is unclear how many such informers remain within the ranks of pro-democracy organisations. Indeed, some informers will have relatives and property in Russia that the Russian state can use to blackmail them. Individual members of the diaspora may also inadvertently support malign activities by making introductions among people they think they know well or sharing information on friends and colleagues or on host government policies and activities.

In response to such concerns, Lithuanian authorities took a tough stance and mandated regular screenings of all Belarusian and Russian nationals residing in Lithuania. Those who have declared previous employment with Belarusian or Russian public authorities, including the security services, are screened and can be declared a threat to national security, as 910 Belarusians and 245 Russian citizens were in 2023. The basis of this approach appears to be that these people could potentially maintain links with colleagues in their home country, share sensitive information with them either intentionally or unintentionally, or be blackmailed for engaging in borderline activities in the past that the Belarusian and Russian security services decide to classify as fraud, misappropriation of funds, or tax evasion.

As noted above, a major challenge for EU member states is the very number of legal routes to residency in the EU, combined with the fluidity of national identity in post-Soviet, Russian-speaking states. This can make it difficult to monitor and prevent suspicious actors from entering the Schengen area. The Kremlin regime exploits gaps in European asylum and immigration policy. Take, for example, the case of a Russian spy ring in Poland, which involved two Belarusian students, a Russian sportsman, and Ukrainian refugees. They were tasked with carrying out acts of disruption and violence, including setting fire to cars and houses and plotting to derail a train carrying military equipment to Ukraine. The perpetrators held a variety of documents, from student visas, to a long-stay D sports visa, and refugee or temporary protection status.

Similarly, in February 2022, a dual Spanish-Russian national Pablo Gonzalez (also known as Pavel Rubtsov) was arrested in Poland on suspicion of spying for the GRU, the Russian military intelligence. He had allegedly infiltrated the Boris Nemtsov Foundation in 2016 and was close to Zhanna Nemtsova, the daughter of the assassinated politician. Gonzalez became

a Russian citizen years after his mother moved from Russia to Spain. This case is an extreme example of the use and misuse of family reunification visas and naturalisation rights, as EU citizens are the least conspicuous for member state authorities. Each settlement document mandates a different degree of scrutiny of applicants – it is a counter-intelligence nightmare for member states.

Despite these cases, the level of awareness of the threats to their security among the Russian political community varies considerably. Little advice is currently shared either by Russian-led organisations or host state authorities about how political migrants can avoid unknowingly assisting Russian subversive activities. That being said, members of the political diaspora are naturally more aware than the rest of the Russian-speaking community– they stay in touch on social media, Telegram chats, and meet at political and non-political events. Democratic Russians can help themselves and host governments by becoming more aware, vigilant, and transparent about the risks. And host states' security services can work pragmatically with Russian diaspora organisations to help them follow basic security protocols and maintain open channels of communication about suspicious activity of other community members.

Member states should also have close regard to the personal safety of Russian democrats living on their territory. Some governments provide briefings or even personal protection for prominent opposition leaders. But ordinary activists, journalists, and independent researchers too often go completely unaware of the dangers they face. The Russian state engages not only in espionage and subversion but also the violent pursuit of some Russian citizens. Operatives from the notorious GRU Unit 29155 are known to have infiltrated or tried to infiltrate human rights groups, media organisations, and even artistic circles. The same unit was involved in the poisoning in the United Kingdom of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in 2018, which ended up killing a British woman and harming her partner and a police officer.

Negative experiences with the FSB and the police back home may affect Russian migrants' initial reactions to efforts by European police or counter-intelligence offer help and advice. Coupled with a lack of education about broader security risks, members of the Russian diaspora may also already distrust the host government. Individual cases can also divide opinion and further widen the chasm between political migrants and host authorities. For example, the arrest of Viacheslav Morozov, a prominent professor of international relations accused of spying for Russia in Estonia, has devastated many in the diaspora, who struggle to believe such a distinguished person could be suspected of such a crime. This reaction can understandably frustrate host governments. Nevertheless, it should also remind European policymakers of the need for more, not less, dialogue and mutual understanding between communities.

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Ultimately, Russian political migrants in the EU live in a psychologically challenging environment. They have had to leave Russia because of their political beliefs, but fear discrimination in their new homes and cross-border repression by the Kremlin. However, high levels of trust in the local population and positive people-to-people interactions suggest strong potential for deeper integration and better cooperation.

More systemic and intelligence-driven engagement with all members of the Russian democratic diaspora can limit the influence of Russian subversive actions and help better integrate and protect members of the diaspora. There is space here for European authorities to work more actively with Russian political migrants by promoting their participation in societal activities – thus countering the Kremlin's divisive strategies while simultaneously enhancing migrants' security and sense of belonging. This requires a nuanced understanding of Russian democrats' diverse backgrounds and experiences, as well as a commitment to providing legal frameworks that benefit all political migrants in the EU, including those fleeing other repressive regimes.

A relationship exists between the unharmonised rules surrounding humanitarian visas for Russian exiles and wider security concerns. Mandatory basic security training for recipients of humanitarian visas and refugees from hostile states, including Russia, could begin to address these concerns, as could awareness-raising through information campaigns and specialised events. This should form part of an enhanced approach from the EU and member states towards looking after members of the Russian political diaspora. It would also have positive spillover effects on the security of the Belarusian and Ukrainian communities in the EU, whose individual members may also act on behalf of, or inadvertently assist, the Russian state.

Engaging with the Russian democratic diaspora

Russian political migrants serve as unique points of contact for host governments to the opposition-minded community in Russia, and to Russian-speaking communities in other countries, including across Europe. Their activities play a significant role in integrating Russian exiles, fostering good relations within host countries, and ultimately bringing Russia's aggression in Europe to an end and paving the way to democracy.

Important examples include the Russian anti-war project Get Lost, which is based across Europe and has helped 520 Russian servicemen – equivalent to a standard infantry battalion – to desert, with 70 per cent moving to Kazakhstan or Armenia. The project has also helped 20,000 Russian men avoid the draft. Supporting Russian democrats and pro-democracy organisations in Europe can make a real difference to preparing the ground for a different future relationship with Russia.

On the media front, important Russian and Russian-led platforms help to communicate political messages and promote democratic understanding. These include TV Rain, which is now based in the Netherlands and has 4.21 million YouTube subscribers, or individuals such as activist Maxim Katz, who has more than 2 million subscribers. One major new initiative is the ground-breaking Svoboda Satellite Package launched by Reporters without Borders in March 2024, which broadcasts up to 25 independent Russian radio and television channels to territories including Russia, occupied Ukraine, and the Baltic states. It hosts media outlets such as Echo (formerly Echo of Moscow) and Radio Sakharov, and video blogs by Dimitry Gordon, Irina Shikhman, *Novaya Gazeta Europe* and many more.

In such regards, the joint working of European governments and independent civil society with Russian civil society and journalism in exile is crucial. If its members are serious about reforming Russia one day, the democratic community abroad will need to find ways to inspire and lead anti-war Russians – and to win over the remaining neutral or apathetic Russians at home. However, it is also important for Europeans to know who to engage with in the Russian political diaspora, to understand the nuances and even divisions among democrats in exile, and to help address practical issues relating to money and technical standards that affect what Russian civil society activists are able to do.

European approaches

Representatives of the EU and its member states have regularly met with multiple Russian

democratic leaders since the start of the full-scale invasion. The meetings serve as an important platform to exchange views and maintain a working relationship with the representatives of democratic Russia, with some held behind closed doors and others in public. In spring 2023, a Russian shadow delegation to the Munich Security Conference was represented by Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Garry Kasparov, Dmitry Gudkov, and Anastasia Burakova. EU foreign ministers also met Kasparov in the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels in February 2023 at the initiative of Lithuania and Poland. And some member states host annual events with the Russian opposition. For example, Lithuania has hosted the Vilnius Russia Forum every spring since 2014. Its foreign minister, Gabrielius Landsbergis, has stressed the development of an active internal opposition to Vladimir Putin's regime as a viable mechanism to change Russia.

The European Parliament has promoted its role as a platform for discussion and dialogue with Russians and Russia-related issues. It has urged member states to offer protection and asylum to Russians who face persecution for their opposition to the war, including conscientious objectors. The parliament also advocates engagement between EU institutions and Russian democrats. In 2022, the parliament's president met with representatives of the Russian opposition. In addition, its subcommittee on human rights has been actively engaged in dialogue with Russian independent journalists, members of civil society, and opposition figures. In March 2024, Estonian MEP Andrus Ansip hosted the opening event of the Svoboda Satellite Package at the European Parliament, which was attended by Vera Jourova, vice-president of the European Commission.

There are clearly organisations and individuals within the EU and its member states that wish to pursue deeper engagement with Russian democrats. However, this dialogue is neither systemic nor systematic. The activities of different groups can potentially overlap, contributing to the fragmentation of, and biases in, views and opinions on Russia. EU policymakers will also be better placed to help if they can understand different aspects of the Russian democratic diaspora, including generational differences.

Generational divides

The Russian opposition abroad is politically fragmented. The divisions can be personal – between individual politicians or their supporters; organisational – with people employed in different and sometimes competing initiatives; and ideological – over political goals and how to achieve them. This limits the opposition's coherence and undermines the story its members can tell about the future of Russia.

Different experiences contribute to cross-cutting generational differences between younger

Russians and senior political leaders. Older politicians had experience of working with or for the Kremlin in the 1990s or early 2000s; they may have been business tycoons or even officials in the early Putin years. And for the most part they spent their formative years in Soviet times and rose to prominence in the early stages of Russia's rapprochement with the West.

The younger generation have none of this experience. They were educated in the 2000s, never experienced communism, were surrounded by Western culture from birth, and at least some were able to travel to Europe as exchange students or through civil society programmes. They may have never seen Putin in real life or worked for the government or government-affiliated businesses. As a result, members of the younger generation are more likely to accept Western norms and standards by default, like their European counterparts.

The arrival in Europe of new political activists after February 2022 strengthened the role of Russian political leaders already in exile, who had long developed extensive networks in the West. They gave support to help activists relocate, provided employment in local projects, and offered grant opportunities. In such ways, this wave of migration strengthened these leaders as important and prominent gatekeepers between the newly arrived and the host governments. However, among the diaspora there is bitterness towards those leaders who left Russia long ago. The recent immigrants, with their experience of very recent oppression at home, sometimes accuse senior political leaders in exile of failing to understand today's Russia and providing misguided advice to the West. Activists feel especially irked by such politicians who, in their view, have done little for Russian citizens but make grand statements about the future collapse of Russia or the national responsibility of all Russians for the crimes of the Russian state. Older leaders also often struggle to relate to matters important to young political migrants: gender equality, the fight against systemic racism, and other intersectional injustices.

In this sense, the provision of financial and other support, including from European organisations and governments, to the younger generation with the help of established politicians does not always help resolve internal divisions in the Russian political diaspora – in fact, it can make them even worse. On the individual level, some established political leaders may expect loyalty to them precisely because of the funding they make available to younger activists. Interviewees for this paper remark on the authoritarian shades of this behaviour and worry about it entrenching positions among the opposition. They also suggest that some of these issues could be addressed through the creation of appropriate outlets for internal dialogue to lessen the disconnect between senior politicians and their activists. There remains appetite among the younger generation to learn from the experience of those who went before them – but the diaspora is yet to establish effective ways to enable this. Similarly, advice and support from European governments and non-governmental organisations can go

some way to helping mainstream solutions to intersectional issues in the policy programmes of Russian pro-democracy organisations.

A place to talk

Another feature of the Russian political community in Europe is the unhappy sight of personal attacks among diaspora members played out across social media. Individual comments or actions may grab the momentary attention of supporters and opponents, but they also demoralise activists and can cause Western onlookers to query the seriousness and professionalism of the Russian diaspora. While the Russian government is waging the biggest war in Europe since 1945, public scuffles among Russian politicians and civil society activists are pointless and morally questionable. Moreover, any visible sign of disagreement is a gift to the Kremlin, which has long built its strategy on the principle of divide and conquer. Moscow undoubtedly seizes on such spats to further degrade the democratic diaspora and promote its own interests domestically and abroad.

This is exacerbated by the absence of shared platforms for equal and moderated dialogue. The opposition's reliance on using personal media such as YouTube creates echo chambers that insulate diaspora leaders from unwanted criticism. The situation is not helped by the tendency of Russian democrats in Europe to spend time with compatriots who share similar political views (for example, working on similar projects or for the same organisation) –as confirmed by Outrush research. Ultimately, this limits the opposition's ability to engage in meaningful and pragmatic dialogue. It causes its members to look like carping content producers or political media in exile rather than forward-looking political leaders accountable to their followers in Russia and abroad.

Attempts to bring multiple opposition actors together have taken place, such as at major meetings in Berlin in 2022 and Brussels in 2023. In Berlin, attendees adopted the Declaration of Russian Democratic Forces. In Brussels, Russian civil society and opposition groups came together to discuss European strategy towards Russia with members of the European Parliament and officials from the European Commission. These sorts of platforms have the potential to consolidate activity and further Russian-led efforts in this direction are taking place. For example, the Ark project and the True Russia Foundation each list hundreds of anti-war and democratic initiatives organised by Russians. But many activists are unaware of them and may be duplicating their work rather than reinforcing each other. This wastes resources. Moreover, the lack of a common platform naturally incentivises each group to develop its own parallel social media narrative, which may not be shared by the rest. Without the kind of moderated dialogue that is possible in democratic parliaments and free media newsrooms, arguments quickly devolve into vanity fairs, undermining the cohesion of the opposition.

Money matters

Structural and organisational factors also contribute to the disorganisation of the Russian opposition. Interviewees relate that opposition groups are heavily dependent on grants from Western donors. This discourages cooperation among the groups, as grants tend not to promote collaboration among the opposition. Each organisation is responsible only for its own grants to sustain its work. This also fosters inequality between groups, as experienced politicians have already achieved a more stable flow of funding thanks to their extended networks and reputation.

Some projects funded by European donors are especially large, involving cross-border collaboration across a number of countries. But in such cases, activists face challenges in working across regions and online, including organising budgeting processes and managerial structures. On the financing side, activists' lack of access to donor networks can prevent them from elevating innovative and unconventional ideas – which Yulia Navalnaya recently called for. Bureaucratic obstacles can prevent them from being considered at all, such as applicant organisations needing to have been in existence for a certain number of years, which is a major hindrance to newly established Russian organisations. Moreover, a lack of awareness among members of the diaspora about the standards required by international actors can also contribute to the lack of trust between Russian anti-war initiatives and non-Russian donors. Greater cooperation with established European organisations, which have years of experience and trust-based relationships with many European actors, including donors, can address some or all of these issues and help Russian organisations to integrate more fully into the European civil society landscape.

Challenges ahead

The problems Russian political migrants are facing have been experienced by others before them. For example, the diverse Iranian diaspora has faced a number of similar challenges. It found that ethnic, class, religious, and political differences undermined collective action and joint political initiatives. Moreover, the leadership from the 1979 generation held views that were in stark contrast to those of newer generations of emigrants. Iranians in exile also faced discrimination and negative stereotyping triggered by the geopolitical tensions between revolutionary Iran and the West. Similar to the Russians abroad, first-generation political refugees have actively continued to engage in anti-regime activism. Their children became European citizens and their influence over Iran's future diminishes by the year. This outcome is unfortunate but not inevitable for Russians today.

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Fragmentation within the Russian diaspora, which is marked by personal, organisational, ideological, and generational divisions, undermines its coherence and thus the impact of its members' work. To capitalise on the real potential that Russian exiles offer, the EU must adopt a nuanced strategy that promotes unity, fosters professional dialogue, and helps bridge generational and ideological divides within the diaspora. Such an approach would strengthen the diaspora's capacity to contribute to democratic reform in Russia – and align more closely with the EU's goals of promoting democracy and countering authoritarian influence globally.

European and Russian democracy: A future together

European decision-makers' under-developed approach towards Russian democrats is hampering their response to a revanchist Russia. German chancellor Olaf Scholz has argued that Russian citizens at large are uninvolved in the war against Ukraine and should not face sanctions. Polish intellectual and dissident Adam Michnik maintains that the conflict is predominantly driven by the Putin autocracy's attempts to crush democratic forces in Ukraine. In contrast, Czech president Petr Pavel claimed that Russian citizens should be subject to heightened security measures and proposed increased surveillance of all Russian citizens residing in the EU.

Formally speaking, the democratisation of Russia is not an EU objective. However, the bloc's enlargement and eastern neighbourhood policies encourage democratic reforms in participating countries, and the European External Action Service (EEAS) promotes democracy and human rights. Working closely with Russian democrats should be central to these efforts, even if the ultimate end goal is not expressly articulated.

Many European intellectuals and politicians have always held the democratisation of Russia to be central to European security and prosperity. Indeed, they argue that Russia's defeat in Ukraine can trigger political transformations and bring about a re-examination of Russian national identity – something which could help Russia democratise if political leaders seize the moment when it arises. These politicians are ideologically similar to those who rejected the recognition of the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states, promoted the reunification of Germany, and supported Soviet dissidents' resistance.

A recent European Parliament report sits within this tradition. It encourages European politicians not to fear potential regime change in Russia and to be ready to support the transition to democracy. Yet the report is unsparing in identifying the inconsistency of the EU's support for the Russian democratic movement, which it contrasts with the Kremlin's erosion of rights and freedoms in Russia and the relationship between authoritarian rule in Russia and aggression against Ukraine. It calls for Europeans to maintain regular political dialogue with Russian democratic forces. This must include those Russian democrats within the EU.

Embarking more determinedly along this path would strengthen the EU's place in the world. Russian political migrants share the same goals as the EU and its member states: the defence of Ukraine's sovereignty, its European integration, and greater stability and prosperity within the EU. On the political level, achieving these goals would help democratise Russia; on a

personal level, the migrants would be able to return home where they have relatives, friends, and better opportunities for personal and political growth. However, these goals are yet to fully align, especially as consensus on Ukrainian victory erodes the more that 2024 advances.

The following table displays the shared interests and goals between the EU's geopolitical goals and the objectives of the Russian political diaspora. The EU's policy on Ukraine's future is more clear-cut than it is on Russia's future – but what happens with the latter will naturally heavily influence the former.

Building blocks for a new European approach towards the Russian political diaspora in Europe

Goal: Peace, stability, and prosperity in Europe and its neighbourhood

■ Active ■ Can be improved

	For the European Union	For the Russian political diaspora
Objective	Security on its eastern borders	Democratisation of Russia
	Integration of Ukraine in its internationally recognised borders	Growth and unity of the political diaspora, including support for its members' happiness and security while abroad
	Economic and social well-being in the EU	To be able to return home – and to improve economic and social well-being within Russian society
Activities	Providing support to Ukraine via political, economic, and military means	Generating future-orientated, anti-war, and pro-democracy content for Russian-speakers
	Enforcing sanctions on Russia, including macroeconomic, financial, and personal restrictions	Organising anti-government events in Russia, supporting the Russian domestic anti-war movement and anti-Putin sanctions in Europe (personal sanctions)
	Assisting Russian civil society organisations and independent media via grants, recognition, and networking	Maintaining a sense of community among diaspora members across regions and improving their cohesion
	Maintaining European political support for current foreign policy on Russia and Ukraine	Working with the EU and its member states on local and foreign policy issues
	Producing objective and balanced information about the EU and its foreign and domestic policies	
Outcomes	A sovereign Ukraine on track to European integration	A democratic Russia on track to a federal republican regime
	A stable and cohesive European approach to Russia and Ukraine	The return home of the Russian political diaspora and release of political prisoners
	Secure eastern borders and a peaceful European neighbourhood	Peaceful relations with Russia's neighbours
Result	A peaceful, stable, and prosperous Europe, including Russia, Ukraine, and other countries	

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In pursuit of these goals, EU institutions and member states already, to a degree, work with the Russian diaspora. But they can and should work even more closely together. To unlock this, policymakers across the EU must develop a stronger understanding of the situation of Russian political migrants. They can then tailor policies to help them settle, build stronger links among themselves, and travel easily to undertake their political activities.

All parties should create more consistent channels for dialogue, including to help draw up a vision for a future democratic Russia. Political migrants must find new ways to express their needs and desires and learn to work cohesively together, both within member states and the EU and across borders. European decision-makers will feel much more ready and able to assist Russians who share their values if political migrants can focus their energies on productive and deliverable projects. The Russian opposition – numerically small, repressed, and far from home – cannot afford to quarrel while the rest of Europe needs unity to challenge Putin’s dictatorship.

Better coordination between the European approach to Russia and the activities of the Russian diaspora requires only small investments and modest changes to existing policies. Recommendations for how to do this are set out below, and are in line with European Parliamentary Research Service [ideas](#) on improving the integration of third-country nationals in the EU.

At root, Europeans should maintain a *laissez-faire* approach to the political diaspora in terms of democrats’ activities in Russia and their efforts to influence fellow Russians. But leaving Russian political migrants unintegrated would mean the EU and its member states miss out on important opportunities to enhance their own policy by supporting the democratic-minded Russian community and resolving the systemic problems faced by the diaspora.

Moreover, with the United States’ commitment to international agreements and principles in question, Europeans should be ready to make their continent the heart of the global democracy and human rights movement. Doing so will create positive spillover effects in transitional states such as Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia, which are not yet stable democracies but aspire to be so.

To achieve this, European decision-makers and members of the Russian political diaspora should consider the following practical steps.

Recommendations for European decision-makers

Develop a coordinated EU and member state approach towards Russian political migrants – including introducing a modern-day ‘Nansen passport’

The EU and its member states should more explicitly recognise the phenomenon of Russian immigration in the wake of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Member states should begin to issue humanitarian visas to Russian applicants based on a unified set of criteria and procedures that ensure equal treatment of applicants in all member states. The current ad hoc policy towards Russian democrats undermines the security of the bloc, as Russia and its allies exploit gaps in individual member states’ approaches. At the same time, there is both short-term and long-term value to investing in relations with Russian political immigrants. This can come through ensuring more systematic dialogue with Russian democratic groups in all their ideological diversity and integrating their initiatives into the European civil society and media landscape.

In the short term, building a positive image of member states and the EU will improve their standing among Russian democrats as well as among the latter’s followers in Russia. Migrants’ trust in host governments is currently far from assured. They want to know they can stay: this will provide a sense of security, bring stability to their lives, and foster their activism. EU member states should thus help Russian democrats feel safe and welcome in Europe.

In the longer term, a more coordinated policy among member states in regard to the democratic diaspora would better prepare Europeans for possible political change in Russia. Russian civil society, media, and political organisations in Europe are ideologically democratic and have proven their pro-European stance multiple times. Their networks in Russia and with European governments will be a strategic asset when the opportunity to improve relations returns. It is time to give up on business and political groups such as the Valdai Discussion Club and similar outfits, which are populated by supposedly pro-Western figures who, as the war in Ukraine has shown, exert little influence over the Kremlin. Instead, European decision-makers should signally recognise the true Russia, which has paid a price for the regime’s ideological fixations. Russian political migrants can help rebuild Russian-European relations.

Russia is not alone in repressing its civil society and waging unjust wars, but the EU still stands as a values-based actor in the eyes of human rights activists and democratic forces worldwide. And this is not the first time that events in Russia could trigger changes beyond its

borders. The first dedicated refugee travel document was the Nansen passport, which was recognised by the League of Nations and originally created for the victims of the Russian civil war who became refugees in Europe and north America. The concept of the Nansen passport later became part of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Similarly bold steps should not be shunned by Europeans. The EU should adopt a modern-day Nansen passport by revising its policy on humanitarian visas to standardise the rules – and send a message of welcome to Russian democrats everywhere.

Create a values-based discussion platform for Russian political and civil society groups abroad

Properly developed and applied, European policy at both EU and member-state level could help set up a series of scheduled meetings as a neutral and independent platform for mediating relations between Russian opposition groups. This platform can expand on previous efforts by the European Parliament and introduce biannual plenary meetings and online steering group calls between sessions. The platform should involve the broadest spectrum possible of Russian representatives engaged in political and media projects outside Russia. The organisational and mediating role should be strictly on the European side, with perhaps the EEAS providing administrative support and the involvement of MEPs as key figureheads to endow the process with political status. The platform could help plan ad hoc events such as meetings with member state representatives organised around the plenaries. As with the Brussels Dialogue, this would help decision-makers in the EU improve their cooperation with Russians in exile as well as their mutual understanding.

European mediators should also use their role to address the concerns of those parts of Russian civil society that seek greater gender equality and sensitivity to intersectional injustices – issues which are already firmly on European agendas. Interviewees for this paper suggested European politicians, acting as impartial chairs, could nudge Russian participants towards more inclusive, pragmatic, and horizontal negotiations in the spirit of European values. This approach would help overcome the superficial disagreements that plague diaspora debate and would foster result-orientated discussions on critical issues. It would also ensure that European interests, including those of Ukraine, become a consistent part of Russian democratic discourse.

Provide standard quality and support measures to Russian civil society organisations

Europeans can use existing learning and civic engagement mechanisms to support Russian

migrants. They should encourage and enable young Russians to participate in Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, and other European, regional, and national programmes.

Exchanging experiences and views with European partners will improve the financial and organisational sustainability of Russian diaspora organisations and gradually integrate them into Europe's civil society ecosystem.

European national authorities and civil society organisations can also support Russian civil society organisations to receive greater attention from international donors and help them develop European management practices. They can do this by integrating diaspora groups into national volunteering and civil society schemes. These are crucial because they serve as a quality label for European partners and international donors. Widening partnership opportunities in this way will also help Russian organisations become less dependent on monopolist donors and Russian politicians who may knowingly or inadvertently capture their activities.

Let Russian political migrants in third countries visit the EU for work and study

The EU and national governments should examine how they can better facilitate contact between Russian political migrants outside the bloc and those living in the EU. Member states should intensify existing efforts to educate embassy and migration front desk officials about the domestic political situation in Russia and its implications for applicants' ability to receive entry documents. The European Commission should streamline its Communication C(2022) 7111 with regard to the provision of visas to Russian citizens in third countries on humanitarian grounds by including the option of issuing short-term visit visas for human rights defenders, activists, and journalists who wish to visit the EU for conferences, educational reasons, or other purposes related to their political activity. These members of the Russian political diaspora have already settled in third countries and do not wish to relocate to Europe but the option of multiple-entry visas could transform their work. This measure would also benefit the cohesion of the Russian diaspora and improve Europe's position as the main hub for democratic activists.

Recommendations for the Russian political diaspora

Appoint 'foreign policy representatives' to work with European and other Western politicians, governments, and civil society

The Russian political diaspora in Europe has two key audiences it needs to influence in

pursuit of its dream of democracy. The first is the Russian domestic audience (as well as non-political Russians in the EU). The second is made up of European governments, EU institutions, and other bodies with a role in foreign policy and the future of Russia, including the US as well as other powers such as Turkey, India, and more.

To maximise the impact of communicating with these high-level organisations, members of the political diaspora should come together to appoint a small group of professional representatives to lead on engaging with this audience.

These ‘foreign policy representatives’ should become boundary-spanners, communicating separate (but complementary) narratives for Russian and European audiences and maintaining stable channels with European decision-makers, including via the discussion platform proposed above. Their mission should be to build reliable and trusting relationships by sharing the aspirations of Russian democratic politicians with foreign partners, listening to what they hear, and taking this back to the wider diaspora. These representatives should be relatively apolitical and implement the decisions made by the leaders of their organisations. They should stay out of arguments and squabbles within the diaspora.

In the short term, these foreign policy representatives can contribute to European discussions around this year’s Russian presidential ‘election’, developments in Russian society, and Russian elite dynamics. A large number of elections are taking place in European countries and for the European Parliament in 2024. Establishing personal contact and sharing agendas with both incumbent governments and their potential successors would facilitate dialogue between the diaspora groups and European governments and EU institutions. European politicians and diplomats have expressed an interest in having such points of contact. This change should be part of the general professionalisation of Russian political and civil society groups abroad described next.

Professionalise the management of Russian political, civil society, and media organisations

Russian political and civil society leaders and media managers should formalise their management structures and establish rules for internal monitoring, feedback, and promotion. They should aim to make their organisations more efficient and effective and bridge the gap between different ideological and generational cohorts within them. In this respect, the Russian democratic diaspora can learn from its European civil society counterparts, which generally have more established systems and processes. As with the counterpart recommendation above to European decision-makers, Russians should look to the [Erasmus+](#) and the [European Solidarity Corps](#) quality labels, which mandate particular

rules for participating organisations. National agencies managing these programmes should ensure that the organisations take full responsibility for the quality, financial management, and outcomes of the activities. The requirements include high levels of transparency with clear arrangements for services paid for with EU funds, including quality control and delivery outcomes.

The professionalisation of some of the political functions of Russian diaspora groups would also help them prepare for engagement in politics back home, and even for exercising power one day, should that become possible. This will help diaspora leaders gain new skills, expand their knowledge of European politics and external affairs, and build trusted networks in the West.

Communicate a future-orientated political dream that inspires audiences at home and helps European stakeholders understand what Russian democrats want

Democratic activists should engage in substantive debates focusing on key issues such as Russia's future economy, education, healthcare, culture, defence, and foreign policy. These debates should answer three key questions: Where should responsibility for different areas of policy sit (such as between the president, ministers, regions, and municipalities)? What do they want to achieve? And how will they go about it? They should then turn the answers to these questions into a compelling narrative that goes beyond routine criticism of Putin and other Russian politicians and members of the elite. It should ultimately form the basis of a shared vision of the future that Russians desire. It should assume that the thousands of people who occupy positions in the current Russian administrative machinery could at some point become supporters of Russia's eventual democratisation and would have to implement it in practice.

A shared vision of Russia's future would be of interest not only to the Russian public but also to the European public as well as European governments, civil society, and scholars, and international organisations. The importance of Russia to numerous European interests means that many in Europe want to learn what Russian democrats are seeking and how they believe they can get there. This would strengthen Europeans' own policymaking on Russia. Needless to say, Moscow is making comparable investments, favourable to itself.

Prepare for known unknowns

In parallel to the creation of this strategic vision, Russian democratic leaders and intellectuals

should prepare for ‘known unknowns’ – moments when domestic dynamics in Russia suddenly shift, such as the Wagner mutiny, or the collapse of the Russian front lines or the death of Putin. While specific plans should remain confidential, the development of a stronger and more detailed understanding of what might happen and how to respond would spark more substantive debates and potentially bring more clarity to democratic actors in Russia and in the diaspora. The plans should include general shared political priorities, mapping of the Kremlin’s potential actions, including repressive responses, and preparatory measures to prevent or counter anti-democratic actions by the Russian government.

Avoid personal attacks on social media

Encouraging positive and constructive discussion on social media is crucial to maintaining meaningful dialogue. To improve the quality of the debate, the Russian diaspora should consider recognising a dedicated media channel for constructive discussion. In contrast to displays of spontaneous attacks on social media, more structured dialogue would adhere to established rules and norms during debate; this would promote a more productive discourse. As the earlier recommendation to the EU and member states suggested, European stakeholders could consider moderating the platform and even participating in it to interact with Russian democratic audiences. *Novaya Gazeta Europe* has already set up such a [channel](#), which can be further enhanced by the wider participation of the members of the Russian political diaspora and greater involvement of European actors, including representatives of European civil society. If Russian democratic politicians in exile ever come to power, this experience would be transferable to the Russian context, improving the prospects for a more coherent, policy-orientated dialogue and communication with the Russian people.

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Methodology

The methodology for this paper included desk research, depth interviews, and the use of survey data.

Desk research included research into publications on political diasporas and migration, Eurostat migration statistics, and Russian independent media articles.

The authors conducted interviews with nine European politicians, Russian opposition members, and civil society activists. Topics ranged over the situation in host countries, the relationship between migrants and national and European politicians, and attitudes within the Russian opposition abroad.

The authors also used survey findings from Outrush, a leading research programme on Russian immigration. Researchers from Outrush kindly provided the authors with the data from the three waves of survey research they conducted in March 2022, September 2022, and July-August 2023. Some of the questions were asked only in the first two waves. The sample involved 694 respondents in the first wave, 1,060 respondents in the second, and 2,632 respondents in the third. The average age of respondents is 33, and they are by and large well educated: 73 per cent have at least one higher education degree. All left Russia after the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. It is currently impossible to know the socio-economic and biographical characteristics of the full population of this cohort of Russian migrants. This means that the survey results may skew towards people who were more willing to take part in the study and had access to online means of communication.

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