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**THE NORMAL RUSSIA
OF THE FUTURE**

**YES,
WE CAN**

COMMON FEATURES
OF THE FUTURE FREE RUSSIA

FREE RUSSIA FOUNDATION
2023

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Is it Fundamentally Possible to Democratize Russia?	4
How Will Putin's System Collapse?	6
How not to Repeat the Mistakes of the Past?	8
How Should the New Russian Statehood be Built?	12
How to Overcome the Heavy Legacy of Putinism and War?	14
Which Transformations are the Most Important?	18
Practical Process and Stages of Transition to the New System	21
Subjects of the Federation and the Principle of Their Formation	25
Self-determination of National Minorities	26
Principles of Ethno-Cultural Policy of the New Russia	27
Eradication of Corruption as a Phenomenon in the New Russian State	30
What's Going to Happen to the Economy?	31
Future Russia in the World	37
The Role of Emigration in the Future of Russia	41
Name and Symbols of the New Free Russia	45
Conclusion	48

Do Russian democratic and anti-war forces possess a clear vision for the country's post-Putin future? Is it feasible to establish a functioning democratic state in Russia without repeating the errors made during the democratic experiment of the 1990s?

These questions are frequently posed by both Russian advocates of democratic change and our allies in the democratic West. The uncertainty surrounding the prospects of a free Russia significantly diminishes the drive to engage in the struggle (as well as Western support for Russian democratic forces) and plays into the hands of Putin's propaganda. Russians, as well as the international community, are being intimidated by the prospect of chaos following the fall of Putin's regime. They are attempting to dissuade support for opposition forces by depicting them as feeble and incapable of assuming the country's leadership. One of the most pervasive clichés in recent years is the assertion that "the opposition lacks a constructive program."

It's important to highlight just how flawed this assertion is. Alexei Navalny's presidential election program from 2017 holds particular relevance today in 2023. If a genuinely competitive presidential election had taken place in 2018, and Navalny had been given the opportunity to run for the presidency, Russia could have not only avoided war but also reestablished normal relations with its neighbors and the entire civilized world, thus fostering rapid economic development. This program was entirely feasible, and the fact that Russia took a different path stands as a great tragedy. Numerous efforts have been made to envision the future among the Russian independent public, not limited to politicians. Consider Sergei Guriev's books and his video series on his own YouTube channel titled "What (to) do?" which explores various crucial directions for transformations in Russia's future. Such endeavors have been undertaken by many politicians, experts, and publicists, from Mikhail Khodorkovsky to the authors of this piece.

In this paper, we endeavor to encapsulate our vision of the fundamental ideas for building a future Russia within the realms of politics, the economy, and the development of social relations. We kindly request that our ideas not be regarded as exclusive, and we do not insist on the infallibility of everything articulated below. The text at hand serves as a proactive summary of the numerous ideas that we have actively debated with colleagues. Despite the wealth of concrete ideas and texts concerning Russia's transformation and the growing consensus within Russian independent and democratic circles on foundational elements of future Russian governance, such as parliamentarism, federalism, independent courts, or robust local self-government, there remains a notable absence of comprehensive texts that synthesize these ideas. We have attempted to address this gap. We view our text as an invitation to discussion rather than a "reform bible." Nonetheless, we believe that the contours of a future free Russia are articulated here with a high degree of clarity.

Building such a Russia is entirely feasible, given the requisite experience, resources, and substantial demand from the country's population. Moreover, a window of opportunity for this endeavor exists. Our hope is that the ideas we have put forth will serve as an inspiration to those who have, at

present, fallen into pessimism regarding the future of our nation. These ideas should demonstrate that constructing a functional democratic state is well within reach, presenting a realistic possibility. We and our colleagues are well-acquainted with the necessary steps to make this vision a reality.

Here are the primary concepts, as we see them, for crafting a future free Russia.

Is it Fundamentally Possible to Democratize Russia?

The authors of this text not only believe it is possible but also see no other viable options for the nation's progress. Present discussions regarding Russia's future are heavily burdened by the "status quo." Putin's control over both society and the political system appears so all-encompassing and unyielding that it becomes exceptionally challenging for observers to envision any alternative future beyond perpetual authoritarianism, where only the names of rulers change, not the core of the system.

However, Russia's political-economic structure is inherently unstable and is merely kept afloat through a significant expenditure of resources, with limits to its sustainability. A prime example of this is the episode involving the announcement of a second wave of compulsory mobilization: following the initial wave in September 2022, it was widely anticipated that a second wave would be necessary for Putin to reverse the tide on the military front. Yet, a year later, despite Putin's urgent need for it, no such announcement has been made. This past year has revealed how constrained Putin is in this matter due to the reaction of Russian public opinion. Although many experts argue that Western sanctions have not hit the Russian economy as severely as anticipated, the statements and actions of Russian authorities on the economic front betray unease and a lack of a clear vision. No one wishes to become solely reliant on China for raw materials, and Putin's isolation leaves few alternatives.

Discussions about the idea of "genetic slavery" among Russians, suggesting they are willing to endure dictatorship indefinitely, are not substantiated by factual evidence. Recent history in our country clearly demonstrates that whenever there is even a slight relaxation of totalitarian control, society promptly begins to demand freedom. This pattern was evident during the Khrushchev thaw and Gorbachev's perestroika. In contrast, historical attempts to establish a system grounded in strict discipline and obedience have consistently faltered, from Stalin to Andropov to the GKChP. The same fate awaits Putin's system. A model reliant on complete control, discipline, and fear may endure for a time, but in the long run, it is fundamentally incompatible with the Russian spirit.

Looking back at public opinion polls from two decades ago, you won't find even a hint of widespread anti-Western sentiment or sympathy for Stalin. Russians' perspectives on the world were considerably more rational and balanced. It's imperative not to dismiss arguments concerning society's "inherent inclination" towards dictatorship and a strong-handed rule without considering the influence of decades of powerful propaganda. Undoubtedly, Putin's propaganda is formidable, adaptable, and effective, tapping into tribalist and egoistic instincts. Overcoming the consequences of prolonged indoctrination will necessitate considerable efforts, and there should be no illusions in this regard.

However, it's vital to accurately diagnose the issue: it's not a matter of Russians being genetically predisposed to servitude but rather a result of conscious manipulation through disinformation and propaganda. Not too long ago, Russian society was quite rational and balanced, and that can be reclaimed.

Russian democratic instincts, though somewhat unrefined, have persisted over the years. The infrequent instances when genuine opposition was allowed to participate in elections and the emergence of real electoral competition sparked significant interest in various regions of Russia. This demonstrated that there is a strong grassroots demand for democracy across the country. Examples of actual changes in power through regional elections generated enthusiasm among Russians. For instance, the word "Khabarovsk" is now recognized even by individuals outside Russia who are somewhat removed from its realities. The proponents of retrogression and authoritarianism have not come close to mobilizing the same level of robust grassroots support witnessed during the 2017-2021 period in the form of Alexei Navalny's rallies. The potential for support of democratic change far surpasses that of all imperial and conservative movements combined. As Russian history illustrates, advocates of authoritarianism are typically less politically active, primarily driven by conformism to their superiors rather than firm convictions or a clear vision of an authoritarian future (which, in the context of the 21st century, is inherently implausible, as the future leans toward freedom and progress).

The weakening of the political regime will inevitably give rise to new demonstrations by a broad cross-section of Russians demanding political liberalization. This could range from nationwide protests for a return to democracy to regional movements aimed at resisting and safeguarding their rights, even if only pertaining to living standards or environmental protection (many national independence movements in former Soviet republics originated from environmental protests in the late 1980s). This opportunity can and should be seized to further democratize the nation. Russians desire freedom, peace, and normalcy. The only factor impeding a potent public movement for democratic change is exceptionally harsh repression.

How Will Putin's System Collapse?

Here, too, there is no need for illusions: while the rapid collapse of authoritarian regimes is quite common, it is difficult to predict. It's incorrect to entertain such hopes as they foster unnecessary inflated expectations. Nevertheless, several things are evident. First, the costs of continuing Putin's aggressive isolationist policies and repression are exorbitant, while the benefits of reversing the political course are undeniable. In today's world, brutal authoritarian regimes can only maintain power at the expense of immense strain and constantly face tests of their resilience. The incentives for Putin's nomenklatura to radically change course are substantial.

Second, as emphasized earlier, there is a strong demand for normalcy and democratic change in Russia. Today, it is suppressed by the most brutal repressions (repressions of this magnitude have not occurred since the 1950s). However, as it has occurred in our history before, with the weakening of

the political regime, these sentiments will undoubtedly resurface. It will be necessary to act according to the situation, persistently preparing public opinion for the necessity of democratic change, and refraining from grasping for various “magic wands” supposedly capable of swiftly pulling Russia out of the authoritarian pit. It’s worth recalling, for example, the experience of Romania after the fall of Ceausescu’s dictatorship or South Korea after the dictator Jeon Doo-hwan left power. We believe these are some of the most relevant examples of democratic transition for Russia. In both cases, after a long-standing authoritarian ruler left power, a certain group of nomenklatura representatives attempted to retain power, but under the growing civil pressure from below, they were compelled to undertake genuine democratic reforms.

This will also be the case in Russia. It is necessary to work diligently toward this moment, weakening the strength and capabilities of authoritarian power, and preparing public opinion for future advocacy of democratic change. This is precisely what the Russian opposition is engaged in today. As past experiences demonstrate, at some point, these processes will yield results, but the exact timing remains uncertain, making attempts at prediction futile. What is genuinely needed is a clear action plan for the moment when the window of opportunity for change actually emerges.

Russian society should not rely on the hope of a “good reformist tsar” replacing Putin and instigating change. Any new government will face the temptation to make superficial alterations while retaining all the old mechanisms of control over society. In fact, this is precisely what Mikhail Gorbachev attempted in the 1980s, and it was only widespread public pressure from below that forced him to implement more decisive changes. Organizing this pressure is imperative. The foundations for it were laid by Alexei Navalny’s nationwide network of supporters between 2017 and 2021 before it was dismantled by the authorities. However, the broad network of supporters advocating for democratic change in all regions of Russia remains intact. It is open to any Russians who share the common principles of building a free country—a federalist, democratic Russia where human rights and dignity are safeguarded by law and where the state serves solely as a tool for progress and improving the well-being of its citizens.

For instance, in the 1984 elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR - the last elections fully controlled by the Soviet authorities - more than 99.9 percent of ballots were cast in favor of official candidates, and a hundredth of a percent were cast against them. It might seem that everything was calm; censorship was widespread, political prisoners were incarcerated, and no change appeared feasible. However, three years later, mass demonstrations with the slogan “Down with the CPSU” swept across the country. On one hand, this was feasible because in 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev announced a course of perestroika. On the other hand, he likely wouldn’t have done so if there hadn’t been a robust grassroots demand for change emerging from all over the country - this is evident, for example, in the films and anecdotes of that era. The CPSU top leadership had no choice but to respond to it.

Today, we must:

- Intensify internal and external pressure on Putin’s system to induce significant disruptions in its operation.

- Prepare public opinion for widespread advocacy of democratic change as the sole means of resolving the systemic problems facing the country, once such advocacy becomes feasible again (which is certain to occur) and the problems of Putin’s system become so acute that maintaining control becomes challenging. As Russian history has consistently shown, this is an inevitable outcome for political systems that are incompatible with progress and development.
- Attempting to predict specific timelines for future developments is futile; what truly matters is preparedness to take decisive action when a window of opportunity arises. In fact, this text significantly serves that purpose. It will be essential to put forth simple demands with a high likelihood of garnering support from a broad cross-section of society:
- Recognizing the authoritarian model as inadequate for fostering the country’s development and progress.
- Conducting fair and free elections.
- Shifting from a hyper-centralized power system to a new type of state founded on a genuine separation of powers, parliamentary governance, and federalism.
- Establishing a government of the people’s trust with the authority to lead the transition to such a system.

How not to Repeat the Mistakes of the Past?

While it is now common to critique the democratic experiment of the 1990s, often with justifiable criticisms, future transformations in Russia will benefit from the fact that we have already traversed the painful yet practical experience of attempting to build a democratic state. We now possess a deeper understanding of the challenges and dilemmas we will encounter.

This is a significant advantage, as in the early 1990s, such experience was lacking, and society was immersed in romantic illusions that merely holding free elections and implementing rudimentary market capitalism institutions would suffice, with the belief that “the market will set everything right” (a highly popular phrase during the perestroika era). It was only later, with the loss of political and civil liberties, that the realization dawned that democracy is a complex mechanism demanding constant attention and the careful maintenance of a delicate balance of checks and balances.

It is essential to dispel fatalistic assessments of the 1990s experience. The attempts to construct democratic statehood were not immediate successes in the vast majority of modern developed democracies. Almost all of them passed through some form of imperfect democracy, internal strife, or even a return to authoritarianism. Therefore, adopting fatalism and determinism regarding the failures of Russia’s democratic experiment in the 1990s is entirely unwarranted. Other nations also made multiple attempts, and most of them didn’t succeed on their first try. To achieve success, one must persist, endeavor to draw as many valuable lessons as possible from the failures, and transform that experience into a positive force.

What went awry in the 1990s and 2000s? In reality, there were no concerted efforts to build a fully-fledged democratic state with a genuine balance of institutions and a clear separation of powers during that period. The political process rapidly devolved into a contest of personalities: reform supporters coalesced around the president (who himself was gradually veering towards an anti-democratic model of governance), while opponents openly championed a return to outdated orders. There was no sincere endeavor to construct a well-balanced political system. Although politics remained reasonably competitive even in the early 2000s, it turned into a “winner-takes-all” struggle. While Yeltsin’s 1993 Constitution is often criticized today for its excessive concentration of power in the hands of the president, the alternative drafts from the Supreme Soviet were not significantly more democratic. Neither were Yeltsin’s 1996 election rival Zyuganov, who made little effort to conceal his desire to reinstate a Soviet-style order, nor his subsequent opponents Primakov and Luzhkov. At the time, all of them were vying for power, without a clear commitment to enhancing democratic principles.

For instance, there has never been an earnest attempt to establish functioning local self-government. Since the early 1990s, federal and regional authorities have shared a common urge to swiftly dismantle independent municipalities and place them under the umbrella of the administrative hierarchy. The 1993 Constitution had little to say about local self-governance, save for a few very general statements. Regions were left with the vague phrase “possess full power beyond the jurisdiction of the federal center and joint jurisdiction” in the country’s Basic Law, which, in essence, amounted to very little. The gaps and ambiguities in the Constitution concerning the convening of the Federation Council, the election of governors and mayors, among other issues, contributed to the rapid centralization and consolidation of power in the 2000s. The judicial system initially leaned toward executive branch control through presidential appointments of judges, a vulnerability that Putin swiftly exploited.

The lack of parliamentary participation in government formation was a significant issue. While one can debate the balance of powers between the legislative and executive branches (the authors of these lines concur on the necessity of moving towards a parliamentary model of government, an idea widely supported among Russian democratic forces, although not a guaranteed solution to authoritarianism in itself), in the 1990s, the parliament was left with nothing but a somewhat demeaning procedure of prime minister approval (under the threat of dissolution in case of refusal), without any influence over the composition of the government. This eroded the role of political parties as influential actors in the political system, rendering party building a competition for access to high offices.

The key problem of the 1990s, which undermined public trust in democracy as a concept, was the recurrent use of institutions and resources by the ruling group to address their own issues outside of a fair and transparent democratic process. This encompasses a wide range of phenomena, from the allocation of significant property and television channels to “loyal” individuals to the absence of precedents for the peaceful transfer of federal power through elections. For instance, we hold reservations about Zyuganov’s actual victory in the 1996 elections, but Yeltsin’s win was achieved through methods that severely tainted the democratic election process.

Despite the relatively open political climate of the 1990s, the authorities, who ostensibly

represented the democratic segment of society, did not genuinely aim to devolve power to the people, municipalities, and regions. Instead, they strived to centralize management mechanisms to the utmost extent possible (at the time, this was portrayed as a prerequisite for reforms, but later excessive centralization served different purposes entirely). They emphasized that they were unprepared for a truly competitive democratic process, and general elections were not employed to resolve political conflicts. The first parliamentary and local government elections took place only two years after the collapse of the USSR, by which time the framework of the personalist political system had already solidified, but full-fledged democratic institutions had not been established. State-controlled television and oligarch-owned media outlets were actively exploited to manipulate public opinion.

Additionally, there was a glaring absence of a system for public oversight of the security services. Acting with virtually unchecked authority and lacking any restraining mechanisms, the security services rapidly transformed into a practical tool for seizing political power.

The primary lessons drawn from the 1990s experience can be concisely summarized as follows:

- The construction of a sophisticated balance of democratic and legal institutions, along with checks and balances, should be approached meticulously from the earliest stages of reforms. Otherwise, the process of state-building may degenerate into a power struggle between individuals and factions, laying the groundwork for a recurring takeover of power by any of them.
- The authority of centralized power should be strictly and specifically limited. The foundation of the new Russia should be built on a broad mandate of popular representation emanating from municipalities and regions.
- Parliament and political parties should possess substantial influence in shaping the executive branch.
- Regions and municipalities should be granted clearly defined and inalienable extensive powers along with their own financial resources. Conversely, the powers of the central government should be rigorously restricted and delegated from lower levels. The central government should not be viewed as the ultimate arbiter of all aspects of public life but should solely fulfill its limited functions in a “compact state” mode.
- Legislative and practical safeguards must be established to prevent the monopolization of the major media by narrow interest groups.
- Judicial reform should be initiated promptly when the democratic window of opportunity emerges. The judiciary should be entirely insulated from everyday control by other branches of government, and the executive’s involvement in the formation and management of the judiciary should be eradicated.
- A system for public oversight of the security services and lustration should be established.

Considering the adverse experience of the early 2000s when Putin’s group rapidly leveraged the loose institutional base of the 1990s to seize power (altering the appointment process for senators, judges, taking control of TV channels, and more), Russia must not only establish the most comprehensive system of checks and balances to impede power consolidation, including parliamentarism, federalism,

independent courts, robust regions, municipalities, and an independent major press but also develop a specific defense mechanism against any anti-democratic measures. It will always be possible to present any action aimed at consolidating power, such as altering the judge appointment process, as an effort to “enhance” the system’s operation. Nevertheless, a safeguard mechanism should be in place to scrutinize all such proposals rigorously and with great scrutiny.

In Europe, institutions like the Venice Commission or the European Commission for Democracy through Law, an advisory body on constitutional law to the Council of Europe, serve as such mechanisms. They conduct preliminary reviews of draft laws with the potential to infringe on human rights and democratic institutions. Such laws cannot be adopted without the Commission’s opinion, and its findings undergo extensive public scrutiny. In contrast, Putin’s legislative amendments, which consolidated power in the 2000s, were swiftly pushed through behind the scenes, without broad public discussion. In future Russia, legislative changes that could threaten human rights and the foundations of democracy must undergo meticulous scrutiny and be subjected to widespread public debate before being put to a vote.

Moreover, we will require extensive, mass, and ongoing citizen participation in the workings of democratic institutions. Treating democracy as a self-adjusting mechanism, where all that’s necessary is electing the “right” president, and then going about one’s business while expecting everything to sort itself out, is an erroneous perspective. The harsh experiences of the 1990s and 2000s underscore that citizens must engage in the daily governance of the country, including at regional and local levels, to prevent a mafia-like power from seizing control and depriving them of this opportunity. This responsibility should be treated with the same seriousness and care as finding employment or raising children.

The active and daily participation of citizens is indispensable to prevent the newborn Russian democracy from once again becoming a tool in the hands of politicians and bureaucrats seeking to tailor the system of governance to their own preferences.

Furthermore, a far more substantial focus must be placed on building political parties from the grassroots. One of the shortcomings of the failed democratic experiment in the past is the absence of robust reformist political parties—voluntary associations of citizens who are committed to constructive reforms and willing to demand adjustments when necessary. In the 1990s, the only grassroots-built democratic party was Yabloko, but it traditionally adopted a staunchly obstructionist stance toward other political participants, limiting its capacity to influence changes in state policy. Strong, grassroots-based democratic reformist parties are crucial, even if they lack a large number of supporters. They can engage in government coalitions, effectively shape the political and economic course, and prevent power-grabs. In our view, the electoral threshold for parliamentary elections should be lowered to at least 3%, and possibly even lower. The proliferation of small parties is not a significant concern; Russia’s experience has shown that it is far more problematic when only one political party dominates the country. Competition is consistently preferable to a monopoly.

How Should the New Russian Statehood be Built?

Our vision of Russia’s future state structure, which is increasingly gaining public consensus, draws heavily from the principles of West Germany’s postwar constitution, the Grundgesetz. The cornerstone of these ideas and the entire German state system is human and civil dignity, as well as the inalienable rights of citizens (Grundrechte). There should be no “black hole” akin to the current Article 55 of the Russian Constitution, which allows the state to arbitrarily restrict citizens’ rights in the name of “ensuring national defense and security,” hiding behind other deceptive language.

The German system of governance is founded on the concept of building the state “from below,” starting with strong regions and municipalities that only delegate certain limited powers to a compact federal government. In contrast, the traditional Russian system operates in the opposite manner, with an immense, all-powerful federal government, leaving regions and municipalities to scavenge for morsels from this system.

For instance, the 1993 Russian Constitution (excluding the illegitimate amendments made during the Putin era) dedicates 22 articles to the president and the government, while only four, primarily general and declarative in nature, address local self-government. In the “Federal Structure” section, an exhaustive list details the 32 subjects of federal jurisdiction and the matters falling under joint federal-regional jurisdiction (covering fundamental aspects of state governance). However, the regional powers are virtually nonexistent there, constrained by the mocking phrase we’ve previously noted: “Outside the limits of the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation and the powers of the Russian Federation... the subjects of the Russian Federation possess the entirety of state power.” Essentially, regions are left to search for whatever they can find outside the clearly defined and extensive federal framework.

The revenue structure of the consolidated budget of the Russian Federation currently relies on approximately 35% of revenues coming from the consolidated budgets of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, with municipalities contributing less than 5% of revenues. In Russia, municipalities are generally deprived of their own revenue base.

In the new Russia, the system of governance should be organized in an opposite manner. The primary powers and financial resources should be concentrated at the local and regional levels, while the central government should operate on the principle of delegated powers (in defense, security, national infrastructure development, and the preservation of economic and legal unity) and should function as a “compact state” that can only exercise the duties explicitly delegated by law.

Various trappings of hyper-centralized power from the past must be abolished, including:

- The institution of the super-presidency, where the president should only perform technical roles to facilitate the formation of a parliamentary majority government and to serve representative functions both domestically and internationally.
- The federal government should be constituted by a coalition of parliamentary parties. The president’s role in this process should be limited to formal instructions to hand over the mandate

for forming the cabinet to the leaders of parliamentary factions in an order established by law.

- Abolishing all kinds of “presidential administrations” and “government apparatuses” as executive management bodies, with a strict limitation of the top officials’ apparatus to technical secretariat functions.
- Prohibiting the federal government from mediating in the resolution of disputes among other authorities and structures. Any arising contradictions should be settled strictly in accordance with the law, including through legal procedures, without bestowing the informal function of “chief decision-maker” on the federal government. The federal government should only oversee the adherence to the rule of law at regional and local levels (further details provided below).

To ensure the priority steps in building a new Russia “from below,” it is imperative to initiate the establishment of state institutions through the conduct of general elections for local governments. These elections will subsequently delegate a necessary portion of authority upwards but will primarily serve as the source of legitimacy in the country, shaping the framework of federal power, rather than the reverse (more on this topic below).

It appears that a significant error during the transformations of the 1980s and 1990s was Russia’s intuitive alignment with the American and French models of governance, characterized by strong presidential power. Instead, Russia should have taken a cue from the German model of a “compact state,” which prioritizes the rights and dignity of individual citizens, federalism, robust local self-government, and parliamentarism. A detailed discussion of these aspects will follow.

How to overcome the heavy legacy of Putinism and war?

Putin’s war against Ukraine has inflicted significant and lasting damage upon Russia, the effects of which may persist for decades. Many Russian citizens have yet to fully grasp the extent of human suffering and destruction resulting from Ukraine’s invasion. These invasive imperial policies, pursued not only by the Putin regime but also by preceding generations of authoritarian leaders, have had far-reaching consequences. Russians must come to terms with the fact that egoism, chauvinism, and attempts to fulfill their ambitions at the expense of the rights and interests of others are unacceptable in the modern world.

Dictatorial powers have historically nurtured these instincts among the Russian people for self-interest. However, going forward, such behavior should be strongly discouraged. In past decades, society tolerated imperial revanchist forces, allowing them to propagate their aggressive ideologies and propaganda. The state and its propaganda machinery cultivated the cult of national exceptionalism and normalized the use of forceful methods to achieve selfish objectives in both domestic and foreign policy.

Russia is in need of a profound cleansing from the decades of this indoctrination. Toxic imperial ideologies and their proponents must be excluded from public and political spheres, education, and everyday life. In this regard, the experiences of post-war Germany can provide valuable insights.

We do not advocate for perpetuating an endless cycle of repentance within Russian society. Russia has much to be remorseful about in its history, including its recent past, and all of these issues should be openly discussed. War criminals and those complicit in repression must be rigorously prosecuted, setting a standard for what not to do in the years to come.

It is crucial to acknowledge that Russian history is far from a simplistic journey of submission to dictators and imperialistic thinking. Throughout centuries and decades, vast numbers of Russians have ardently fought against dictatorship, often making significant sacrifices. Claims about the existence of “slave” and “villein” genes within the Russian populace are unfounded falsehoods. In addition to the collective shame for the mass crimes of our fellow countrymen, there is much for us to take pride in, particularly our unwavering and often uneven struggle for freedom. Many millions of Russians have demonstrated respect and genuine affection for neighboring nations, their rights, choices, and sovereignty. This was particularly evident in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Russians lost their lives on the night of August 20-21, 1991, on the Garden Ring in Moscow, fighting for, among other things, the freedom of neighboring countries, which subsequently declared their independence following our triumph over the GKChP coup attempt. The largest rally in the history of the Russian state occurred in January 1991 on Manezh Square, as Russians gathered to show support for Lithuania’s struggle for independence. In December 1991, after the peaceful dissolution of the USSR, Russians recognized the sovereignty of neighboring nations, with protests against the independence of the new sovereign states being of minimal scale. Individuals with an imperialistic mindset represent only a small segment of the Russian population; such a segment exists in any society. We possess the ability to love and respect our neighboring peoples.

A few words about Ukraine: Russia has been incredibly fortunate to have such a vibrant and talented nation as its neighbor for many centuries. With the exception of a small group of “professional imperialists,” Russians have consistently held deep affection and respect for Ukrainians, their sovereignty, and their right to choose. We officially recognized Ukraine’s independence and sovereignty in 1991, and over the years, we have solidified this recognition through a series of agreements with Ukraine, which were ratified by various sessions of the Russian parliament. Before Putin’s military actions in Ukraine, a significant majority of Russians supported Ukraine’s status as an independent state, with only 16% expressing a desire for its unification with Russia. This roughly aligns with the current proportion of die-hard imperialists who advocate for conquering Ukraine. According to Fedorov, the head of the pro-Kremlin VTsIOM, such individuals represent a maximum of 10-15% of the population, while “the majority of Russians do not seek to take Kiev or Odessa. They do not derive pleasure from conflict. If it were up to them, a military operation would not have been initiated.” Following the attack on Ukraine and the events of 2014, when Crimea and Donbass were taken and the conflict escalated, tens of thousands of Russians took to the streets, displaying Ukrainian flags in mass “peace marches.” Prior to Putin’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, only 5% of Russians considered a war between Russia and Ukraine to be “inevitable,” while more than half of

our country's population was deeply apprehensive about such a possibility.

It is crucial to remember that the Russian nation is not a group of fervent imperialists seeking to conquer and subjugate neighboring countries and peoples. Such individuals constitute a minority within our nation, and they have imposed their will on the broader population through methods of coercion, intimidation, and propaganda. Russia seeks peaceful and cooperative coexistence with Ukraine and other nations and peoples.

As a nation, Russia bears full responsibility for the crimes and damage caused by the Putin regime in Ukraine. We have a duty to extradite all war criminals involved in the aggression against Ukraine, return all territories to their internationally recognized 1991 borders, and provide Ukraine with the full reparations owed for the harm inflicted upon their country. It is possible to achieve this without placing an undue burden on the Russian economy, with the aim of avoiding a repetition of the unfortunate experience of imposing excessive reparations on Germany after World War I, which contributed to the rise of revanchist forces.

However, it is essential to emphasize that the principle of collective responsibility for Putin's aggression against Ukraine is fundamentally unacceptable. Specific crimes must be thoroughly investigated, and individual perpetrators should be held accountable. Arguments promoting "collective guilt" are unjustifiable as they dilute the responsibility of particular wrongdoers and run counter to the core tenets of modern democratic law and values, which reject the punishment of the innocent and the imposition of "collective guilt." The Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, established on August 12, 1949, unequivocally settled the issue of whether civilians not participating in the war could be held responsible for the actions of the military.

However, while we vehemently oppose the principle of collective responsibility, it is important to acknowledge that, since Soviet times and even earlier, certain damaging beliefs have been deeply ingrained in the minds of many Russians. These include the cult of national exceptionalism, disregard for the rights and legitimate interests of others in the name of vaguely defined "national interests," militarism, and the military-mobilization model for societal development. Chauvinism, egoism, and militarism, compounded by deficiencies in humanitarian education and a lack of understanding of how a modern, developed, and humanistic society should function in the 21st century, represent a significant challenge for a portion of Russian society. Individuals holding such views have repeatedly constituted the support base and "cannon fodder" for archaic regimes, including Putin's.

Significant efforts in education and the establishment of the foundations of public discourse in Russia will be necessary to render militaristic and egoistic views taboo in modern society. Similar to the post-World War II era in Germany, perspectives that exalt militarism and imperialism should be widely stigmatized in society, and those who espouse such ideas should bear the full weight of historical responsibility for the immense hardships caused by imperial and dictatorial actions within Russia. For instance, today, imperialists and militarists, realizing their impending political defeat, are attempting to lay the groundwork for future retribution, seeking to shift the responsibility for substantial post-war reparations to Ukraine onto future reformers. It is imperative that we make this point unequivocally clear: the complete responsibility for reparations, sanctions, losses, and other damages that Russia

incurs today and in the future as a consequence of the aggression against Ukraine must rest upon those who initiated the war and propagated imperial and militaristic policies, as well as the concept of a totalitarian, hypercentralized state. This is not the first time that such elements have led our nation to utter collapse, following a recurring pattern from the time of Ivan the Terrible to the Romanov dynasty, through the era of the CPSU and Putin. The route to political and public engagement for proponents of these inhumane views should be permanently sealed. Post-war Germany serves as a positive example of how this can be practically accomplished.

Russia will indeed require a process of transitional justice and a national "truth and reconciliation commission," akin to several other nations that have successfully transitioned from dictatorship to democracy. This commission should openly address the culpability of specific individuals involved in establishing an authoritarian regime, undemocratic usurpation of power, propagandizing and manipulating the Russian populace, and instigating wars. It should constitute a comprehensive initiative to uncover historical truths beyond the pursuit and extradition of war criminals. This endeavor must encompass the entire spectrum of individuals and mechanisms that facilitated the inhumane and aggressive dictatorship, with a focus on holding those responsible accountable and disclosing all aspects of the acquisition of power and the coercion of society toward aggression. The aim is to prevent the recurrence of such events in the future. For those who voluntarily acknowledge their actions, express remorse, and contribute to the investigation into the crimes of the authoritarian regime, leniency and amnesty may be considered, contingent upon the gravity of the offense and the extent of their assistance.

The education system and state support for culture and sports should undergo a thorough transformation, free from any glorification of an ethnocentric and militaristic past. Simultaneously, it is essential to avoid the error of cultivating a permanent sense of guilt among the population. Russian history offers ample sources of pride, primarily through the actions of ordinary Russians – freedom fighters, creative individuals, scientists, and explorers. The nation possesses a rich heritage that can evoke national pride spanning a whole continent. It is imperative to challenge the tradition in which Russians predominantly revered the cult of power and militarism. The concept of patriotism should be associated with the desire for freedom, creativity, and peaceful coexistence with neighboring peoples, rather than power, violence, and aggression. This approach extends to the realm of foreign policy: Russians should take pride in assisting our neighboring countries in achieving freedom and celebrating their progress, rather than lamenting the loss of territories. Our focus should be on bringing order to our legitimate 17 million square kilometers.

We remain confident that the majority of the Russian population is not wedded to archaic beliefs and is open to such changes. Even the Kremlin's own sociologists, as noted in the interview with VCIOM head Fedorov, estimate that the most aggressive and imperial-minded Russians comprise no more than 10-15% of the population. It is evident that the majority of people have been influenced by propaganda and held different opinions two decades ago, as discussed earlier. While detoxifying Russian society will undoubtedly be a challenging process, other nations have successfully undergone similar transformative journeys, and it is indeed possible, albeit not without difficulty. We maintain faith in the potential for success.

Furthermore, we draw inspiration from the younger generation of Russians, who clearly do not harbor the archaic, statist, and imperialist views of their elders. A substantial portion of younger Russians holds emigrant sentiments, as they find it difficult to envision Putin's Russia as a place for self-realization and a promising future. It is crucial that we take every possible step to instill hope in the young generation of Russians regarding the prospects of a new, free Russia and to encourage them to remain in the country. The transformations we advocate for are designed with this objective in mind.

It's a valid point that significant socio-political transformations in post-war Germany occurred under conditions of external occupation, a scenario that's unlikely for Russia. However, the example of post-war Japan provides a compelling alternative. In Japan, the American occupation was largely symbolic, and the nation was compelled to renounce its imperial past and sign the San Francisco Peace Treaty not through military occupation, but by presenting a clear historical crossroads: the choice to break free from isolation and embrace the opportunity for development through reforms, the abandonment of imperialist legacies, and integration into the modern democratic world. Japan successfully made this choice and thrived. Russia, too, has the potential to embark on a similar path. The prospect of lifting sanctions and ending international isolation can serve as a powerful incentive for reform.

Which Transformations are the Most Important?

Undoubtedly, Russia should transform itself into a parliamentary republic, eliminating space for a hypercentralized executive branch. The government should be formed by a coalition of parliamentary majorities, as is the case in almost all European Union (EU) countries. The coalition-based system for government formation will encourage political parties to engage in political dialogue and reduce contradictions. This stands in contrast to the American system, which, due to its inflexibility, often leads to violent confrontations between political factions.

At the same time, we would like to caution proponents of the parliamentary model of government not to view parliamentarism as the sole remedy for all of Russia's problems. Presently, there are views suggesting that transitioning to a parliamentary system alone will automatically resolve all the country's issues. This is reminiscent of the 1980s when many perestroika enthusiasts believed that replacing the planned economy with market relations would lead to automatic fixes, with "the market itself putting everything in its place." While the parliamentary system offers numerous advantages, it alone does not guarantee protection against power grabs. One need only recall Hungary and several other European nations, as well as Russia's own experience in the early 1990s when the Congress of People's Deputies became a hub for retrograde and anti-democratic forces, disproportionately represented compared to society as a whole.

It appears to be of greater importance to establish a comprehensive system of checks and balances, encompassing regions, municipalities, courts, and safeguards for press independence and the political opposition, rather than simply swinging between "presidential and parliamentary"

models. We will delve into these mechanisms in more detail below, with the parliamentary system fitting well within the framework of a thorough separation of powers and functions.

Reforming the security forces and implementing lustration will be of paramount importance. Parliamentary defense and security committees will be granted extensive authority to oversee the activities of all security agencies. The concept of the executive's unilateral "right of the first night" in determining secrecy levels will be eliminated, and the leadership of the parliament and its committees will play a decisive role in this process. 99% of the budgets of security agencies will be declassified, with the exception of the most recent developments. A wide-scale recruitment effort for qualified, capable Russians not associated with Putin's regime will be initiated.

The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation will undergo disbandment and be replaced by a new Russian Self-Defense Force, thoroughly screened to exclude any war criminals. Russia's military expenditures will be subject to constitutional limitations, aiming to demilitarize the country. In return, Russia will seek support from NATO and other allies for its essential defense against potential threats originating from the South and East (more details on this to follow).

The Ministry of Internal Affairs will be dissolved, and the unwieldy police generalship will be eliminated. Instead, municipal police forces will be established, tasked with upholding law and order and reducing crime rates in their respective territories. They will be accountable to municipalities, and police chiefs will be elected by local deputies or directly by the local populace, based on local decisions. The battle against organized crime will be entrusted to a streamlined agency specialized in this field.

The Federal Security Service will be permanently disbanded, and the FSB headquarters on Lubyanka Square will be dismantled, replaced by a memorial park commemorating the victims of political repression. A newly created compact anti-terrorism committee, strictly regulated by law and under parliamentary supervision, will manage counter-terrorism matters. The General Prosecutor's Office will also be dissolved and replaced by an institution dedicated to supporting state prosecution in the courts.

Judicial reform will play an exceedingly significant role in shaping Russia's future. In the 1990s, we failed to establish an independent judiciary branch. Under the 1993 Constitution, the judiciary was effectively subordinated to the presidential hierarchy through the appointment of judges, and under Putin, this bias has only intensified. This has been a major past misstep that requires correction. The absence of an independent judiciary undermines the bedrock of a democratic society and discourages potential investors, thereby harming the country's economic prospects. The professional legal community has long outlined the foundational principles for future judicial reform. These principles include the complete exclusion of the executive from the process of appointing judges and from qualification boards responsible for decisions on judicial status. Furthermore, it necessitates the elimination of administrative roles within the judicial system, such as the position of court presidents, the expansion of the use of jury trials, and amendments to budget legislation to establish an independent financial foundation with minimum statutory allocations for funding the judiciary. Creating an autonomous judicial system is also essential. The judiciary will undergo a comprehensive recertification process,

with the new judiciary primarily recruited from legal professionals, including the bar, academic legal circles, private practitioners, and human rights activists, rather than from government bureaucrats or law enforcement, as has been the case under Putin. Various options for appointing judges will be considered, including by the parliament (both national and regional) and the judicial community. The specific procedure will be subject to open and democratic debate, but it is imperative that the executive branch be excluded from this process to ensure judicial independence.

It will be necessary to establish strict boundaries for interactions between the judiciary, the executive branch, and business in order to prevent improper influence on court decisions. The law will require that any such incidents be publicly investigated, and during the investigation, judges' ability to preside over pending cases should be suspended. In cases where evidence of inadmissible influence on the court is revealed, consideration of the removal of judicial status should be on the table.

Furthermore, there's a need for comprehensive reform of criminal and administrative law to realign it with the protection of citizens' rights and fundamental democratic institutions, as opposed to bolstering the state apparatus. For instance, the most severe penalties are currently imposed under Section X of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, which pertains to "Crimes against State Power," while penalties for acts such as torture, illegal entry into homes, and election fraud remain minimal. This balance should be reversed. From the very outset of the new, free Russia, a dedicated commission of legal experts should promptly work on crafting the necessary amendments to the criminal and administrative codes. The aim should be to eliminate artificially concocted penalties for expressing dissent or opposition to those in power. Conversely, there should be a strengthening of the penalties for infringing upon citizens' rights and undermining democratic institutions, such as significantly harsher punishments for election fraud, even for ordinary participants in such activities.

It is of utmost importance to undertake profound reforms of Russian social institutions. Presently, these institutions do not effectively contribute to the development of human capital or the cultivation of a social consciousness aligned with the progressive humanistic trends of the 21st century. Russia requires an entirely different model for primary education, one that provides the new generation with a comprehensive understanding of the structure of the contemporary world, as opposed to emphasizing rote learning and "mushtra," and without promoting indoctrination or the cult of a "strong state." In addition, higher education must be integrated into the global educational framework to ensure that Russians can compete effectively in the modern world.

It is imperative to establish a minimum level of state funding for education and healthcare within budget legislation to eliminate the chronic underfunding that has escalated in recent years. Medicine should no longer be the "neglected Cinderella" of the budget, and the same applies to primary education. Teachers and healthcare professionals, rather than government officials and the military, should be recognized as the central pillars of the state system, with a high priority in terms of budget allocations. The health of the nation and its future should not be subjected to cost-cutting measures.

Practical Process and Stages of Transition to the New System

Is it possible to prescribe a plan for the gradual but inevitable transformation of power for many years to come and get its implementation from the politicians of the future, among whom there may be people with completely different beliefs? In theory, yes; in the real conditions of Russia, probably not. What will not be changed and canceled immediately or in the coming months will most likely become a consolidation point for all the forces of anti-democratic revenge or a lever in their hands. Therefore, we must act quickly and decisively, not merely dismantling the old organs of power but also uprooting the very foundations upon which they rested, and the very principles that underpinned the mechanisms of power in Putin's Russia. It is necessary to change the rules of the game as swiftly and radically as possible to disorient and deprive the managerial stratum that has emerged under Putin of all privileges and to prevent the old elites from seizing the initiative or simply positioning themselves as indispensable experts in the economic and political life of Russia.

Putin's state is founded on the principles of unitarism, one-man rule, and the concentration of maximum powers in the hands of the regime's top leadership. Therefore, the path to change is evident: federalism, the constitutional prohibition of any one-man rule, and the transfer of maximum powers to a maximum number of authorities elected by citizens - at the municipal, regional, and, not least, federal levels.

Democracy in Russia should not only have a broad base of active supporters but also as many beneficiaries of the new order as possible. These should be citizens involved in the governance of the country through municipal and other elections. It is desirable that they have not previously participated in the government and owe their political careers to the changes that have begun. This way, they will be vigilant to ensure that Putin's cadres do not return to power.

Russia must rapidly and irrevocably transform itself; this is the best defense against any potential retaliation. Putin's reconstructed Soviet vertical of power must not only be dismantled, but the very possibility of its re-creation must be eliminated, and the components that could be used to reassemble it must be destroyed.

So, what are the problems and solutions along the way?

First, there's the need for parliamentarism at all levels. The transition to parliamentary democracy should be officially declared as a goal of political reforms and should happen unconditionally and swiftly. Wherever possible, a single leader directly elected by citizens should be dispensed with. The principle of rejecting one-man rule in all structures, except for the security apparatus (and even then, with clearly defined and transparent legal guidelines), should become a fundamental aspect of state formation. Executive power should always be collegial and accountable to the legislative branch, and no other way.

During Putin's tenure, the perception developed that the election of governors and mayors by popular vote equates to democracy. These ideas have gained popularity among the people in Russia.

However, in a country with a history of authoritarianism and power usurpation, the political elites need to counter these populist slogans. In theory, governors and mayors popularly elected by the people might seem to be the primary defenders of democracy. In the real Russia, though, it was Soviet bureaucrats who assumed these positions in the early 1990s, paving the way for the rise of Putinism and the dismantling of democratic elements within just a few years. It's essential to remember that none of the "political heavyweights" in regional politics during the 1990s went into opposition or voiced objections against the creeping usurpation that was underway. The regional leaders of the 1990s made significant efforts to establish power structures in their regions, which, in effect, led to the erosion or weakening of local self-governance even before Putin's assault on democracy began. In numerous cases, including Moscow, Putin had a pre-existing autocratic mechanism at his disposal – he simply had to replace the incumbent regional head with his protege.

Therefore, when reforming Russia, it is crucial to establish that governance should be vested in parliaments at all levels – federal, regional, and local. Only small settlements (e.g., those with populations up to 30,000-50,000, although this should be discussed in detail and possibly at the regional level, taking into account local specificities) should be considered as exceptions where direct elections of local leaders and town heads can be retained.

Instead of the vertical unitary power structure (president-governor-mayor) recreated by Putin, Russia should adopt a system of parliaments operating within their designated jurisdictions, with the authority to elect city managers, heads of regional governments, and the head of the federal government. It's imperative to draw from the experiences of European federations, particularly the Federal Republic of Germany, where parliamentarism and federalism serve as the cornerstone of democracy. Notably, the structure of regional and local self-government in Germany was reestablished by the occupying authorities even before the formation of the FRG, setting a new course for the country's existence. Perhaps Russia should consider following a similar path – first establishing municipal and regional authorities before transitioning from a provisional government to a permanent one, constituted under a new Constitution. Crucially, even within this temporary framework, it's essential for the provisional federal government to promptly align itself with the new municipal government, which will provide support for both entities and the new regime.

Following the transition to a state system under the new Constitution, the federal prime minister should not have the authority to interfere in the operations of regional or municipal authorities, except in strictly defined emergency situations. Any attempts by higher authorities to meddle in the affairs of lower authorities without clearly defined and transparent conditions and procedures should be considered an attack on the constitutional order and should be repressed.

Direct communication between executive authorities of different levels should be formalized and treated as an exceptional and even suspicious occurrence. Such direct interactions should be limited to exceptional cases, primarily in emergency situations and when human rights violations by local authorities are confirmed. In this context, we must not forget the regrettable example of the village of Kushchevskaya, where local authorities were essentially taken over by a criminal gang and acted in its interests for many years. Such scenarios could occur in numerous places, and the methods for

addressing such issues should be incorporated into the Constitution.

To intervene effectively in such situations, it is essential to maintain the system of federal bodies. Their primary functions should include coordinating the efforts of all agencies during emergency situations, safeguarding human rights, and overseeing the rule of law at all levels. To protect human rights from arbitrary actions by local governments and democracy from organized crime, there is also a need for federal security agencies, such as a federal criminal police (working in parallel with municipal police and sharing powers with it as defined by transparent and clear legislation), a federal constitutional protection service, and the necessary counter-intelligence agencies.

Moreover, the establishment of robust local self-governance is critical. When launching democratic reforms and announcing elections, it's important to recognize that winning elections to federal or regional parliaments can be quite challenging, as campaign costs are often prohibitively high for ordinary activists and small business representatives. Single-mandate district elections, in particular, tend to favor resource-based candidates. It's evident that in the post-Putin era, the most resourceful candidates will likely come from the former elite, at least during the initial election cycles.

Additionally, until the Constitution is amended, the nature of federal and regional parliaments remains somewhat unclear. Nonetheless, delaying elections is not a viable option; society's energy must be promptly channeled into a constructive direction before the window of opportunity closes.

A potential solution could involve a swift reorganization of the most grassroots level of power, the municipal level, which, for a paradigm shift, could be renamed as "zemstvo" or called local self-government. Holding general elections for local authorities will not only rejuvenate local power structures but also introduce tens of thousands of new individuals to the political arena who may later transition into regional and federal roles as politicians and deputies. It is important to consider an increase in the number of municipal assemblies, particularly in larger cities where one deputy should not represent more than 10,000-20,000 people. This approach would, on one hand, reduce the cost for new entrants to politics and, on the other hand, make it more challenging for established elites to corrupt new deputies. It is much easier to influence the votes of 30-40 deputies than to purchase the support of dozens or even hundreds of elected representatives without triggering public scandals. To prevent an excessive proliferation of municipal assemblies, an upper limit could be introduced for the population of a single municipality, for instance, no more than 1 million people with a quota of "one deputy per 20,000 people at most." In modern Russia, large municipalities (such as all cities with populations exceeding 1 million people) should be transformed into urban federations, where there is a nominal City and its surrounding municipalities.

To impede the possibility of revenge, it should be imperative to prohibit the entire current leadership from participating in new local elections, at least during the initial rounds. This would create a favorable environment for a maximum number of businessmen and activists who had previously refrained from engaging in politics to enter the political arena. Furthermore, all Russian citizens, including those with second and third citizenships, residence permits from other countries, individuals with criminal records related to "political" charges, and those who have lived in other regions and countries for many years, should be permitted to participate in local elections without restrictions. The objective of these

measures is to reintegrate a broad spectrum of opposition figures, emigrants, and those who had been excluded from politics in recent years into the Russian political landscape.

Simultaneously, it is vital to announce the immediate transfer of power and financial resources to the new local authorities. Regional parliaments should be replaced by assemblies comprising representatives of the newly elected local authorities before determining the system of their formation. This approach would help neutralize Putin's regional elite. It is from the grassroots level that all interim power in Russia should be constituted: beginning with local bodies, then extending to the interim regional entities, and culminating at an All-Russian congress with the formation of interim federal authorities. It may be prudent for regional parliaments to function as assemblies of representatives of municipal authorities.

Municipal power should be elevated to become the most substantial political structure in Russia, with such influence that it can effectively prevent any potential usurpation and supply all higher levels of government with well-trained, democratically-oriented personnel. Consequently, the interim transitional government should explicitly express its commitment to transferring power downwards and take extensive measures to ensure that both power and financial resources are genuinely under the control of municipalities. This approach will make the newly elected bodies and their deputies allies of federalism, democracy, and democratic federal governance – perhaps not universally, but in many regions.

There should be no fear that local authorities might end up being controlled by obscure, unsavory, or even dangerous individuals in some areas. Russia has many thousands of municipalities, and the control of a few by revanchists cannot significantly impact the overall situation. Furthermore, this serves as an important mobilizing factor: the adversaries of democracy should be visible on the playing field, rather than pushed underground.

It's important to reiterate that the failure of past attempts to establish federalism in Russia stemmed from the fact that federalism has consistently been imposed from above, without a solid foundation at the grassroots level. Both federal and regional levels of government have historically regarded municipal power as a source of disobedience and problems, deeming it unnecessary and merely decorative. Regional authorities, particularly in regions lacking distinct ethnic and cultural identities, often felt subordinate to federal power, existing somewhat in a vacuum. This mindset needs to be shattered: a municipal deputy should perceive themselves as a guardian of the bedrock of democracy and federalism, not merely an appendage of a vertical structure leading to the Kremlin.

Subjects of the Federation and the Principle of Their Formation

The principles governing the formation of Russia's regions are indeed a complex and multifaceted topic. Historically, there hasn't been a consistent logic behind their creation. While the majority of federation subjects are organized based on territorial considerations and are often assumed to be primarily populated by ethnic Russians, some federation subjects are designated as autonomies for indigenous peoples. This duality characterizes Russia as both a federation of equal regions and a federation of ethno-national proto-states. It's worth noting that in many ethnic autonomies, the titular ethnic group is not in the majority and may never become so due to demographic factors.

Representation of regions presents another challenge. On one hand, all regions should have representation in federal authorities to ensure inclusivity and balance. On the other hand, giving equal representation to small federal subjects with populations in the tens of thousands and major cities like Moscow or St. Petersburg would inevitably lead to a crisis. In a democratic and free speech environment, these complex issues cannot be simply prohibited from discussion, as they might have been during times of Soviet or Putin's dictatorship.

Consequently, the question that arises is: What principles should guide the formation of Russia's regions? Which principles should be retained, which should be expanded, and according to what criteria?

First, it should be officially declared that the goal of the country's policy is to establish the primary objective of fostering self-sufficiency within its regions and municipalities. At a minimum, each region should have the capability to finance the maintenance of its transportation and administrative infrastructure through the revenue generated from local taxes.

Second, the boundaries of a federal subject should be rational and economically justifiable, while also considering the perspectives of its constituent municipalities. From a democratic societal standpoint, it is entirely reasonable for each municipality to be affiliated with the region whose center is closer, and where inclusion aligns with the economic, logistical, cultural, and political interests of its residents. Therefore, before finalizing the regional boundaries within the renewed federation, it is imperative to conduct local referendums and seek the preferences of municipal residents regarding their desired region. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that the process of voluntary boundary adjustment may lead to numerous local conflicts. Conversely, modern communication technologies make it feasible to establish a network of enclaves and exclaves, which may have political and cultural affiliation with one region while having economic and infrastructural ties to another. Hence, it appears advantageous to incorporate into the new Constitution, or at least its transitional provisions for the first 10-20 years, the option to modify the borders of federal subjects based on referendum outcomes or decisions made by local authorities. Such an approach could resolve the challenge of restructuring the federation's subjects in a practical manner. Regions that are economically and infrastructurally attractive can expand as municipalities opt to affiliate with them, while less attractive

subjects may naturally phase out from the country's map.

Large cities are poised to be the catalysts of development in Russia, as well as on a global scale, in the 21st century. Therefore, when reorganizing the federation's entities, it is imperative to prioritize the creation of conditions that are highly conducive to the growth of prospective urban agglomerations. Rather than dividing cities located within a range of 200-300 kilometers from each other into separate federation subjects, it is advantageous to unify them under a single entity and focus on their synergistic development.

It is crucial to depart from the existing situation where sparsely populated regions have an excessive representation in the federation's legislative bodies, while large cities are underrepresented. Simultaneously, a truly democratic federation should offer extensive opportunities for regions to assert their rights. The foundation for the country's development should be established through a mutually beneficial compromise, clearly defined in legal and political documents, among the federal center (effectively the most populous agglomeration in Russia), regions, and municipalities.

Self-determination of National Minorities

A crucial aspect of shaping the future of Russia involves cultivating harmonious relations with its ethnic minorities. Recently, discontent among many of these minorities has grown. They have not endorsed imperialistic, aggressive, or repressive policies, yet they often suffer from these issues as much, if not more, than the majority ethnic group. Discussions about the self-determination of ethnic minorities, including the prospect of secession from Russia, have become more prominent.

Engaging in these discussions is entirely valid. Russia stands to gain from viewing ethnic minorities as equal partners whose presence enriches the nation, whether they reside within Russia's borders or not. We should take pride in the instances in our history when we granted ethnic minorities the right to make free choices, such as after 1917 and after 1991. Conversely, we should feel ashamed of those times when we sought to suppress their aspirations by force. There are numerous examples of nations that, having gained their independence from Russia, subsequently became valuable friends and partners, enriching our nation (Finland being a prime example). We should not fear the self-determination of the nations currently within Russia.

It's important to acknowledge that contemporary Russia differs from our country in 1917 or 1991. During those times, as empires crumbled, genuine decolonization occurred. For instance, in the late USSR, ethnic Russians comprised just 50% of the population, with the other half being various ethnic groups. Presently, over 80% of Russia's population is of ethnic Russian origin, and they inhabit more than 80% of the nation's territory. Even if all ethnic minorities were to seek secession, it would not result in the disintegration of the country, as regions predominantly inhabited by Russians do not desire secession. Consequently, the concept of "Russia disintegrating along ethnic lines" is often overstated today.

Nonetheless, the self-determination of ethnic minorities remains a highly significant topic, and the right policy in this regard will demonstrate to both our citizens and the international community that we are no longer a "prison of nations" and are prepared to uphold the rights and choices of all. Many nations may opt to remain within a free, secular, democratic, federalized, and decentralized Russia, and we wholeheartedly welcome this, ensuring that their rights and culture are respected within our nation. For those desiring secession, we will ensure a peaceful separation, following the highest standards of recent decades, such as the amicable separation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993. This decision should be made through open, democratic processes, in accordance with democratic principles, secularism, and representative democracy, and under international oversight.

Principles of Ethno-Cultural Policy of the New Russia

The ethno-national policy of the new Russian state should be based on addressing the maximum number of interests.

First, the interests of all the peoples of Russia must be taken into account. However, it's worth noting that the interests of ethnic groups are not necessarily synonymous with those who govern in Putin's Russia on their behalf. Dividing people into "bad" and "good" categories based on ethnicity is ineffective. This is primarily because the elites in ethnic regions are not only loyal to the dictator and his policies, but they also actively promote these policies. It seems appropriate to consider a substantial reform of the entire system for representing ethnic groups in the new federal state, drawing from various global experiences.

Second, the majority of Russia's population identifies as the Russian people today, and it's likely that the Russian ethnos will remain the largest nation in Russia for the foreseeable future. Building a robust democratic government cannot disregard the interests of the majority while solely focusing on various minorities. Nevertheless, it is equally unacceptable to ignore the interests of other ethnic groups, which would be not only unjust but also unlawful.

Thirdly, Russia is home to individuals from various ethnic backgrounds who may not be considered "indigenous" in the legal sense, but who are de facto and de jure our fellow citizens. This includes Ukrainians, Belarusians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and other peoples. The question arises: should these individuals be automatically considered part of the Russian majority, or should they be granted rights akin to those of the indigenous peoples of Russia? Furthermore, what will be the status of individuals from these communities if their native regions were to secede from the Russian Federation? Politicians in the new Russia will have to provide answers to these significant questions.

Fourth, the inherited system of national-territorial divisions from the Soviet era presents its own set of challenges. For instance, why are the Karachais grouped together with the Circassians, and the Kabardins with the Balkars? How did the Buryats end up in different regions? What about communities that reside not only in regions where they are the titular ethnic group but also in regions where they

are in the minority? Moreover, how can we preserve the cultures and languages of Russia's diverse peoples in the face of increasing urbanization, where members of various ethnic groups coexist, often far from their original homelands?

Is it possible to address these issues in a manner that satisfies the majority, if not all, of the people? While we may not have all the answers at hand, we can identify several guiding principles for shaping a new state and its ethno-cultural policies that should help in resolving these dilemmas.

First and foremost, it is vital to uphold the absolute priority of the rights and freedoms of each individual and the inviolability of their dignity. The interests of the state, all of Russia's citizens, its diverse ethnic groups, and regions cannot be realized and protected at the expense of human rights and freedoms. No one should face humiliation or suppression due to their origins, language, or culture throughout Russia. This principle should be at the core of Russia's future policies. All authorities must be committed to defending human rights in every conflict.

Secondly, democracy is another critical aspect. Contrary to common misconceptions, democracy is not solely, or even primarily, about elections. It centers on a citizen's ability to influence the governance of the state and have representation in its structures. Beyond participating in elections, citizens should engage in political parties, associations, initiatives, serve as jurors through a random selection process, freely access and disseminate information, have the opportunity to voice their concerns and seek justice through the courts. These principles are equally applicable to ethno-national policies. It should not be confined to designating a region with an ethnic reference in its name, governed by a representative of the titular ethnic group. People should have the freedom to establish ethnic public organizations, political parties, and media where they reside, rather than entrusting the fate of their language and culture to the leadership of a region, often geographically distant from them.

Thirdly, federalism and local self-government play a pivotal role. We propose interpreting both of these concepts in a broader context. On one hand, devolving significant rights, powers, and resources to local self-government can establish municipalities as the foundation for a new ethno-cultural policy. Within any region in Russia, each municipality should have the authority to determine if it contains a specific ethno-cultural component. In matters related to education, language, culture, and youth policy, it should have the option to align itself with one of Russia's existing ethno-cultural communities. It's worth noting that the issue of the official language's use should be decided at the municipal level. This approach will bolster the presence of the languages of Russia's diverse peoples in the areas where they actually reside. Additionally, it will prevent arbitrary impositions at the regional level, where the language of one local ethnic group, even if it is the dominant one, is forced upon communities with significant populations of other ethnic groups. However, if a specific ethnic group and its language predominate within a region, as determined by municipal decisions, that language can be officially recognized at the regional level, but not vice versa.

Conversely, the issues surrounding ethno-cultural policy should be elevated to a new tier of federal relations, specifically the level of the aforementioned ethno-cultural communities. It is important to underscore that these communities, their rights and obligations, and the secured funding for their activities should be enshrined in the Russian Constitution. This ensures that they are not marginalized

or powerless entities that any official can disregard. Furthermore, representatives of ethno-cultural communities should establish the Third Chamber of the Federal Parliament, supplementing the existing representation of citizens and regions.

An instructive model in this regard is Belgium, which features a territorial division into regions and provinces and a parallel scheme of division into ethno-linguistic communities. Each of these communities (the French-speaking community, Flemish community, and German community) possesses its own parliament and executive bodies responsible for matters related to education, culture, media, and youth policy.

In Russia, the scale is indeed quite different, and the situation is more intricate. However, the concept of elevating the preservation of languages and cultures to a supra-regional level holds promise. Let's examine how this might work in practice, using the Tatar ethnos as an example. Tatars live not only in Tatarstan, and this means that many Tatars lack political representation since they don't participate in regional elections where they do not reside. Additionally, Tatarstan is a multi-ethnic region where various ethnic groups coexist, and the parliament of Tatarstan primarily serves as the parliament of a diverse region, rather than the parliament of the Tatar ethnos. Thus, the only constitutionally significant body that seems to represent the Tatars is the parliament of Tatarstan, which, as mentioned earlier, cannot effectively represent all Tatars throughout Russia.

One potential solution could involve creating representative bodies for the Tatar ethno-cultural community, supplementing the parliament of Tatarstan. This new parliament could consist of deputies from Tatar municipalities, Tatar representatives from the parliament of the Republic of Tatarstan, and elected delegates from Tatar associations in the rest of Russia. Such a setup would offer political representation and the opportunity to participate in formulating ethno-cultural policy not only to Tatars living in Tatarstan but to all Tatars in Russia. Importantly, no alteration in regional boundaries would be necessary. Parliaments for other ethno-cultural communities and ethnic groups could be established following a similar framework.

It's undeniable that the addition of a new tier of federalism would complicate the system of democracy and governance. The introduction of a chamber for the peoples of Russia alongside the chamber of deputies elected directly by the population and the chamber of regions will introduce new dynamics into the country's political landscape. However, in the context of modern Russia, tying ethnic groups solely to administrative regions doesn't ensure their genuine representation. It essentially leaves language and culture matters to regional bureaucracies, which should primarily focus on economic, infrastructural, and social policy issues.

Eradication of corruption as a phenomenon in the new Russian state

Many individuals, beginning with Alexei Navalny and his associates at the Anti-Corruption Foundation, rightfully emphasize that widespread corruption has led to a multitude of issues in our nation. The pursuit of power and the violation of the rights and freedoms of Russian citizens were, in part, driven by the ruling group's unchecked greed for personal gain through corrupt practices. Additionally, a significant contributor to the aggressive foreign policy (although not the sole factor) is the ambition to control the resources of neighboring nations and reap the benefits. Anatoly Chubais once imprudently voiced the notion of establishing a "liberal empire" by acquiring strategic economic assets in neighboring countries as part of this agenda.

Numerous detailed strategies exist for combatting corruption, drawing from the successful experiences of developed countries with low levels of corruption. Key approaches in this field include:

- Significantly reducing the state's role in the economy and wealth redistribution. By decreasing the public sector's share of GDP to 30% or less and implementing economic demonopolization, including the elimination of large state monopolies (see the following section on "Economic Implications"), opportunities for officials and state managers to engage in corrupt practices will be greatly diminished.
- Implementing radical transparency in public administration. All actions and expenditures of government bodies should be subject to parliamentary and public oversight. Comprehensive disclosure, including public access to income and asset declarations of officials and state managers, should be mandated, with concealment strictly prohibited. Anti-corruption non-governmental organizations should be granted the authority to conduct audits of government agencies on par with the Audit Chamber and other regulatory bodies.
- Maintaining ongoing scrutiny of the wealth and lifestyles of officials and state managers. Deviations from standards of living exceeding their official income should be subject to immediate public scrutiny. The same accountability standards should apply to their relatives and associates.
- Enacting laws on lobbying and conflicts of interest, regulating lobbying within a transparent framework and prohibiting decision-making by individuals with economic interests, including those held through relatives and associates.
- Cultivating a culture of zero tolerance for corruption within society. Journalists should be recognized and rewarded by the state, including financially, for successful anti-corruption investigations that lead to real convictions. Being related to a corrupt official should be a source of shame, rather than prestige. Society should be educated to perceive corrupt officials not as "masters of life" and "paragons of success," but as individuals who shamelessly steal from others.

While many additional measures are crucial in the fight against corruption, the aforementioned steps represent the most fundamental systemic changes without which the establishment of an honest democratic government is unattainable.

What's going to happen to the economy?

Contrary to common perceptions, implementing economic reforms in Russia will not be a formidable task with the presence of political determination. The Russian economy boasts significant growth potential. According to the World Economic Forum's global competitiveness rankings, Russia is appealing to investors due to its market size and the quality of its labor force. The primary obstacles to development lie in the subpar quality of institutions, excessive police and bureaucratic interference in the economy, and the favoritism extended to officials. There are few examples today of such a large economy being simultaneously closed to investors and yet inherently attractive. The end of war, reconciliation with Ukraine and the international community, withdrawal from the occupied territories in Ukraine, and the reduction of state interference in the economy could lead to an unprecedented influx of capital. This influx would serve as the foundation for a future economic resurgence.

A similar scenario unfolded in the early 2000s when Kasyanov's government implemented relatively successful economic reforms by historical standards. However, these gains were curtailed by a sudden shift towards bureaucratic control over the economy. Under a different economic model, one founded on private initiative and limited government intervention, economic growth rates could potentially skyrocket.

The payment of post-war reparations to Ukraine, if handled correctly, need not impede economic development. Various approaches can be employed to fulfill reparations to Ukraine without overburdening the Russian economy, considering the historical precedent of Weimar Germany in the 1920s and the potential for destabilizing economic consequences.

First, one feasible method would involve implementing mandatory contributions from Russia's primary exports, with these funds directed towards international initiatives for the reconstruction of Ukraine, a proposal put forth by Alexei Navalny.

Second, efforts should be made to locate and confiscate the assets of Putin's oligarchy that were moved abroad in past years. Some estimates suggest that the cumulative value of these assets exceeds one trillion dollars, a figure roughly equivalent to the reparations owed to Ukraine. This capital has long been removed from the domestic economy, and it is generally perceived by Russian society as irretrievably lost. However, these assets may prove indispensable in financing Ukraine's rebuilding efforts. The loss of this capital could be offset by increased investments in Russia following reconciliation with Ukraine.

Russia should not prolong the process of reparations. Instead, it should swiftly agree to provide Ukraine with the necessary funds for reconstructing the country. This represents an unequivocal moral obligation, backed by available financial resources. Protracted disputes on this issue could hinder the normalization of international relations, potentially slowing the inflow of investments into Russia, causing a net loss in the long run.

Political reforms and reconciliation with democratic nations will be pivotal in reshaping Russia into an economically prosperous nation. Without these steps, it will be challenging to attract investors.

The primary prerequisites for capital inflow to the country are political in nature and encompass the removal of sanctions, the establishment of a streamlined government that does not interfere with markets, and the establishment of a genuine separation of powers, notably an independent judiciary.

Simultaneously, economic reforms are essential. Foremost among them is the need for a substantial reduction in regulatory constraints on the markets, the demonopolization of the economy, and the development of competitive markets to replace the large monopolies that currently dominate entire sectors. For instance, in the United States, a country that has long surpassed Russia in oil and gas production, not to mention technological advancements in the sector, there are no counterparts to entities like Rosneft and Gazprom. The most prominent oil and gas producers in the United States account for only 3-4% of national production volumes, fostering robust competition.

Presently, in the banking sector, a striking 68% of assets are under the control of the five largest state-owned banks, a significant increase from 40% in 2007. Moreover, four of these state-owned banks hold 63% of those assets. In total, the share of the 20 largest banks, either directly or indirectly controlled by the state and state-affiliated structures, represents a significant 76% of the banking system's assets. This high level of state involvement in the sector exists in a banking landscape characterized by intense competition. In such a competitive environment, the presence of the state, particularly in the form of monopolies, is unwarranted. The process of demonopolizing the banking system could serve as a potent catalyst for economic growth. This would result in more affordable loans and banking services, in contrast to the current scenario where the banking oligopoly is reaping record profits within a struggling economy through exorbitant interest rates and fees.

Economic demonopolization would be a crucial step towards reducing the concentration of wealth in the hands of a select few individuals and addressing the issue of oligarchy. The current extreme wealth concentration in Russia can be attributed in large part to the monopolistic structure of the economy. Even after Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and some reductions in oligarchic fortunes, seven Russians still rank among the top 100 wealthiest people globally, according to Forbes, and 23 appear in the list of the world's 500 richest individuals. In stark contrast, South Korea, with a comparable GDP, lacks a single billionaire among the world's 100 richest people and only has three in the top 500. Italy, another economy of comparable size, has only one person in the list of the world's 100 richest individuals and eight in the list of the top 500. Spain, another comparative nation, has one and two individuals in those respective lists. Poland, while having a smaller economy, ranks among the world's 25 largest economies and has undergone a post-communist transformation similar to Russia's. Remarkably, Poland features no individuals among the world's 100 richest people and only one in the top 500.

The process of oligarchization in Russia can be attributed to the high degree of economic monopolization, limited competition, and preferential treatment of officials. To dismantle this system, it is imperative to introduce measures that promote open competition and enact legal prohibitions against the entanglement of officials with businesses. Establishing an impenetrable firewall in this regard is crucial. By reducing the state's presence in the economy, the private sector's share of GDP could surge from its current range of 30-50% (various estimates exist) to over 70%. Likewise, the share

of investment in fixed capital as a percentage of GDP could rise to 25-30%. This was a goal set in the early 2000s but was never realized. In recent years, this figure has remained stagnant at around 17-19% of GDP, which has been insufficient to drive significant economic growth. Achieving higher investment levels is critical for substantial economic expansion.

For several years, discussions have centered on the need to alleviate the excessive regulatory burdens on businesses. Here are specific proposals. Firstly, it is suggested that small businesses, typically those with revenues up to one billion rubles (with the exact threshold subject to negotiation), should be granted exemption from all taxes except for the simplest one. Small-scale entrepreneurs should be permitted to consolidate all tax obligations into a single payment of personal income tax categorized as "Income from small-scale entrepreneurial activity" at a standard rate. Additionally, tax audits for small businesses could be restricted, provided that a minimum percentage of their annual revenue, for example, 5%, is contributed to the budget, rendering it sufficient. It's important to note that concerns about tax evasion are unfounded, as modern technologies allow for the monitoring of genuine economic relationships, making fraudulent schemes involving the creation of fictitious "small" enterprises easily detectable. The tax administration system should transition from post-Soviet formalistic principles to ones that emphasize tracing the actual economic significance of transactions. This transition will make tax avoidance schemes more challenging and less viable.

Another crucial aspect is the elimination of the potential for regulatory authorities to exert undue pressure on businesses through unannounced inspections. Such inspections should be entirely prohibited, except when ordered by courts based on serious grounds to suspect a legal violation. Regulatory bodies seeking to assess a business's operations should be obligated to coordinate with entrepreneurs to arrange convenient times and methods for reviewing documentation and premises. This would prevent unwarranted surprise visits and the disruption of business activities due to extortion attempts.

To further safeguard against administrative abuses directed at businesses, a nationwide hotline will be established to report potential misconduct independently of relevant regulatory bodies. This hotline will transmit the received signals to anti-corruption bodies for thorough examination and verification.

It is important to note that Russia currently imposes six separate taxes on small businesses, collectively contributing less than 0.5% of GDP to the budget. Yet, the administration and inspection systems for these taxes are complex and burdensome. It is advisable to eliminate these taxes, as the returns do not justify the administrative overhead.

Implementing these reforms would enable a reduction in the overstuffed tax official workforce in Russia, which currently exceeds 150,000 people. This is twice the number of employees in the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, which administers roughly six times the tax revenue. This vast disparity in labor productivity underscores the need for change. A substantial portion of the Federal Tax Service's workforce is primarily engaged in exhaustive and unnecessary tax audits. With the automation of transaction monitoring, a large number of inspectors are effectively involved in extortion attempts, making such a reduction in staff size a reasonable move.

The customs service in Russia, comprising up to 50,000 employees, serves as a significant lever

for bribery and creates numerous challenges for entrepreneurs. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report, Russia scores 100 or below on various indicators such as the complexity of customs tariffs, the prevalence of non-tariff barriers, and the efficiency of customs clearance. Ineffectiveness and corruption within the customs service represent substantial impediments to economic development, foreign investment, and access to global export markets.

The Customs Service should be abolished altogether. VAT on imported goods could effectively be managed by the standard tax service, given that the importation of goods is recorded by the border service and supply chains are automatically tracked. This comprises approximately half of the current revenues overseen by customs officers. The other half consists of export duties on commodities, which should be completely eliminated and replaced with taxes levied "at the source." Import duties, constituting about 10% of customs duties, should be gradually phased out as markets open up, with their administration transferred to the tax service.

These are just a couple of instances illustrating how we can significantly reduce administrative burdens on businesses. Many more practical ideas exist in this regard, which we have refrained from overwhelming this text with.

A critical prerequisite for Russia's successful development is the accessibility of developed countries' markets for Russian exports. Currently, Russia primarily exports raw materials and low-value-added goods. To foster the production of high-tech, non-resource goods with significant added value, Russia must gain entry to foreign markets, as the domestic market's size alone won't be adequate to support sales of these new industries' products. However, at present, foreign markets remain inaccessible to Russia, primarily due to both sanctions and Russia's non-participation in free trade agreements with developed nations during Putin's leadership.

We aim to secure access to Western markets for contemporary Russian products. The lack of progress in this regard during the 1990s was a substantial oversight on the part of Western countries and negatively impacted Russia's economic circumstances, among other factors. The importance of future democratic Russia's access to developed countries' markets is recognized in the West. Recently, we extensively discussed this necessity in a joint report on future relations between Russia and the European Union, alongside several prominent European politicians and experts.

The formalization of market opening can be achieved through regional free trade agreements with the EU and other major international players, which may incorporate essential human rights clauses within trade agreements. Under these clauses, the free trade arrangement could be suspended if the human rights situation in a signatory country deteriorates. Such provisions could serve as a deterrent against the possible resurgence of autocracy in Russia, as any deterioration in governance would result in a loss of market access.

The current green energy revolution presents significant opportunities. According to estimates by the International Energy Agency, the market for green energy equipment and technologies is projected to exceed 1 trillion dollars annually by 2050, equivalent to today's oil market. Russia is well-positioned to participate in this market, given our production experience and a skilled workforce. The global expansion of the green energy industry is remarkable, constituting 8% of global primary

energy consumption, while, for comparison, nuclear power accounts for only 4%. The number of new solar and wind power facilities commissioned worldwide annually surpasses the entire energy infrastructure of Russia.

Green energy plays a fundamentally distinct socio-economic role compared to hydrocarbon energy. It doesn't yield the same magnitude of rent and superprofits, which often lead to corruption and administrative control over society. Instead, the majority of added value in the green energy sector goes toward salaries and skilled labor. By entering the global market for green energy equipment and technologies, Russia could generate 5-7 million well-compensated jobs. In contrast, the present extractive industry, which employs just 1.7 million individuals, doesn't have the same job creation potential.

Participating in the global shift towards green energy presents Russia with the opportunity to finally break free from its longstanding reliance on commodities. Paradoxically, Western energy sanctions can be seen as a valuable catalyst in this regard. These sanctions relieve us from the onerous task of overcoming significant obstacles to regain access to Western energy markets and recreating the oil and gas profits that enrich oligarchs and concentrate power. Instead, we can immediately direct our efforts towards entering green markets, where there will be no profits or oligarchic control, but rather an abundance of well-paying, skilled jobs. This shift away from hydrocarbon dependency and active involvement in the green energy transition will usher in a completely new socio-economic and political landscape in Russia: one marked by greater social equality, reduced oligarchy, and a more equitable distribution of wealth.

Another promising sector of the economy is agriculture. The Russian agricultural sector possesses substantial untapped potential in terms of unused agricultural land, with estimates indicating nearly 44 million hectares lying fallow, offering a substantial resource for a significant increase in productivity. However, competition in this sector is restricted by agrarian monopolies closely connected to the bureaucracy, such as Miratorg and Tkachev's agroholding. The small-scale farming sector faces constraints due to the predominance of large agro-monopolies, low wholesale and procurement prices, and the persistent escalation of expenses for energy resources, fertilizers, and agricultural machinery. Much of this is attributed to the monopolistic and oligarchic structure of the Russian economy. The poor investment climate and the reluctance of investors to commit to sectors with extended investment cycles, especially in meat and dairy cattle breeding, have led to a continual decline in livestock numbers.

The demonopolization of the economy, opening up the agricultural market to competition and private farms, and reducing administrative burdens on investors can potentially position Russia as a global leader in the agricultural industry, unlocking its substantial untapped potential in this sphere. Crucial to this endeavor will be securing agreements with Western countries to open their markets to Russian agricultural products, an achievement well within our reach.

There are other promising areas, capitalizing on Russia's competitive advantages – a skilled workforce and a unique geographic expanse, that can give rise to new sectors of the economy, allowing us to move beyond the primitive and antiquated raw materials model. For example, Russia

doesn't even rank among the top 30 countries in terms of international tourism revenues, despite the vast potential for growth in this sector. In contrast, leaders in this field generate revenues in the tens and even hundreds of billions (the United States, for instance, earns over 200 billion dollars annually). It is evident why tourists have reservations about visiting Russia under Putin's leadership.

It's also clear why Russia is experiencing a significant brain drain. Specialists of Russian origin are pivotal in driving advancements in new technologies worldwide, spanning fields like IT, space, biotechnology, and additive technologies (3D printing), yet they are doing so abroad. There's little need to reiterate why Putin's Russia lacks appeal for the most competitive and highly skilled segment of the Russian population. This minority, however, possesses the potential to spearhead Russia's rapid development but is currently contributing to progress in other countries.

A radical transformation of Russia, shifting its focus from a country serving bureaucrats and the oligarchy to a nation prioritizing its people, may not bring back all those who have left, but it will undoubtedly help stem the tide of further brain drain. We anticipate that with the transformation of a future Russia into a functional and inviting country, characterized by effective laws and the absence of bureaucratic and police pressures, specialists in advanced technologies may begin to consider returning. There will be no need to worry about one's future, and the cost of living will be considerably lower than that in the United States or Western Europe.

Future Russia in the World

The unequivocal rejection of any inclination towards imperial ambitions and the desire to exert influence over other nations must serve as the bedrock of future Russian politics, forming the very essence of the new Russia's identity. Our goal should be to evolve into a nation that adheres to established international norms. It's imperative that we reassess our historical narrative, recognizing that the relentless expansion into foreign territories, presented by authoritarian rulers as "compensation" for consolidating absolute power and curtailing the political and civil rights of Russians since the late 18th century, has only served to bring suffering and considerable social and economic adversity to both our people and our neighboring nations. This was when, notably, Crimea and numerous regions of Ukraine and other countries, our eastern neighbors, were initially annexed.

The argument that militarism, imperial expansion, and a hypercentralized structure can be attributed to territorial and climatic idiosyncrasies of our country holds no water. A comparable nation to Russia is Canada, the second-largest country globally in terms of landmass, covering approximately 10 million square kilometers. Canada, much like Russia, boasts a vast expanse, a federal system, a cold climate, and an economy largely reliant on natural resources. However, Canada has never engaged in hostilities with other nations and stands as a model of a prosperous state with high living standards and well-developed social institutions. In the United Nations Human Development Index, Canada ranks 15th, with a mere 3% deficit behind the top spot. In contrast, Russia stands at 52nd place, trailing behind countries such as Brunei, Kuwait, and Qatar.

We're not suggesting that we should replicate Canada's political-economic system in its entirety, though there are certainly valuable lessons we can draw from it. The key takeaway here is that there's a striking example of a nation similar to ours, one that opted for a path of peaceful development, prioritizing the well-being of its citizens and fostering peaceful coexistence with other Western nations, and it ultimately succeeded. The contrast with Russia is stark, where a significant portion of the population still lacks access to basic amenities like hot water and sewage, and our healthcare system's vulnerabilities were glaringly exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Much of this neglect in Russia can be attributed to the cost of imperialism and the harmful notion of pursuing "global influence at any cost." Our focus should shift toward advancing our nation and improving the quality of life for our own citizens, rather than chasing the illusions of imperial expansion and militarism.

Restoring international trust in Russia after the actions of Putin poses a formidable challenge, but it remains within the realm of possibility. Currently, there is extensive discourse abroad about the feasibility of a democratic future for Russia. Many politicians and experts worldwide, including those in Ukraine, are willing to engage in serious discussions regarding such a prospect and reintegrating our nation into the global community. For many, there appear to be no viable alternatives because an isolated authoritarian Russia is likely to persist in pursuing imperial ambitions and continue to threaten its neighboring countries. Nonetheless, Russia must undertake an immense endeavor to rebuild its credibility. The predicament lies in the fact that our country had received substantial trust and goodwill in the late 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, but Putin's policies have squandered these assets significantly. This has bolstered the ranks of international skeptics who argue that aggressive imperialism is Russia's inherent state, and that past opportunities for a transition to democracy and harmonious coexistence with the West were merely used as a ruse to fortify Russian strength for further imperial endeavors.

To demonstrate the opposite, our nation will need to make significant efforts. Merely embracing, making promises, and signing memoranda, as Gorbachev and Yeltsin did, will not suffice. We must exhibit a fundamental transformation of our entire system, one that establishes trust. Superficial changes won't meet the requirement. Additionally, it is imperative that we begin the process by acknowledging our responsibility to Ukraine. This begins with the extradition of war criminals to an international tribunal and the provision of the necessary reparations for the harm inflicted upon Ukraine.

The issue of reparations is currently a topic of heated debate among Russians. It's understandable that citizens in a country with an already modest standard of living may be hesitant about the prospect of additional financial burdens. However, the payment of reparations and compensation for the harm caused to Ukraine is primarily essential for the future moral well-being of our nation. Think of it in terms of the widespread notion that Russians should pay all their taxes directly from their pockets (bypassing the accounting department) to truly feel the weight of the obligations that the state should uphold towards its citizens. Similarly, in this case, Russians won't fully grasp the consequences of imperialist policies until the nation takes responsibility for them in terms of financial compensation. Furthermore, it is both inhumane and morally unacceptable to simply witness the suffering imposed by Russia on its neighboring people without offering compensation at our own expense. The moral rehabilitation of Russia hinges on this very act.

Moreover, as elucidated in the economic section of our report, there are viable methods for discharging reparations that would not unduly burden the populace and the economy. This includes deductions from export revenues and the seizure of assets that have long remained dormant abroad, yielding no benefit for Russia. Nonetheless, addressing the reparations issue will be pivotal for the normalization of Russia's relations with the free world. The new Russian leadership must promptly agree on a definitive figure for confirmed damages and enshrine it in international agreements.

Russia must unequivocally declare that it rejects any attempts to impose its vision of with whom and how neighboring countries, or any others, should forge ties or shape their domestic and foreign policies. This notion should be considered off-limits and criminal. Russia should undertake measures to dissolve various unwieldy bureaucratic and military organizations, such as EurAsEC, CSTO, the "Union State" with Lukashenko's regime, and even the CIS, all of which were essentially established to maintain dominance over neighboring nations. We should not perceive European integration and the aspirations of our neighboring countries to join NATO or the EU as threats. It's important to note that NATO expansion has not led to the deployment of missile weaponry or strike groups on the territories of new member states—this needs to be clarified. Russia should collaborate with NATO based on the principles outlined in the 2002 Rome Declaration (a document still signed by Putin) or in the spirit of contributing to NATO's operations against the Taliban in Afghanistan, as it has done previously.

Collaborating with NATO on joint global security is the sole viable option to safeguard Russia from potential threats originating in the East. Regrettably, Putin has effectively transformed our nation into a highly dependent vassal of the Chinese Communist Party. It may not be long before China exerts such extensive control over our domestic and foreign policies that a military takeover of Russia by China becomes unnecessary. Given the substantial demographic contrast, there is no need to engage in a competition with China in terms of the mobilization capacity of our armed forces and the capability to conscript citizens. The Chinese army boasts a mobilization potential of 130-140 million people. Without the support of the West and NATO, we remain exposed to potential threats from this direction.

Should Russia aspire to join NATO and the EU? While these entities represent our country's most natural partners in terms of values and geography, Russia's vast territory presents a challenge to the inherent logic of these regional alliances. Vladivostok neither falls within Europe nor within the Euro-Atlantic sphere. Nevertheless, direct membership is not essential. Instead, we can establish a shared legal, defense, and economic framework through separate agreements focusing on opening markets, promoting freedom of movement, and enhancing defense cooperation. This approach is akin to the strategies employed by countries such as Japan and South Korea.

In addition to addressing reconciliation concerns with Ukraine, Russia will need to:

- Wholeheartedly acknowledge the sovereignty of our neighboring countries, respecting the internationally recognized borders as of 1991, and return all currently occupied territories, which includes Crimea, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, and the regions of Southern and Eastern Ukraine.
- Implement comprehensive legislative guarantees, including those integrated into the new

Constitution, to renounce imperialist policies and any actions aimed at coercing other states into pursuing specific domestic and foreign policies dictated from Moscow.

- Pursue demilitarization and establish compact Self-Defense Forces, departing from the militaristic traditions of the past. This should extend to demilitarizing consciousness, education, and social life.

The proposed decentralization of our nation will, in itself, foster an environment where aggressive tendencies are curbed by robust institutions. This will prevent any scenario in which an irrational and disconnected leader can unilaterally order an attack on any party. Numerous institutions and checks and balances will be in place to deter such actions.

Russia must incorporate the fundamental principles of international treaties and human rights instruments into its Constitution to eliminate any ambiguity regarding the alignment of international obligations with domestic laws. It is essential to recognize that domestic power grabs can directly invite external aggression, including the use of wartime laws to control one's own population.

Agreements with democratic countries on free trade and investment must include clauses related to human rights, non-aggression, and the respect for the sovereignty of other nations. In the event of a return to dictatorship and an aggressive foreign policy, it should be clearly understood that access to these markets, as previously mentioned, will be promptly restricted, and sanctions will be reinstated.

Regarding China and other non-democratic regimes that have become allies of Putin in recent years, our policy should be as follows: We bear no animosity toward the citizens of these nations who, like us today, find themselves under the rule of dictatorships they did not choose. We acknowledge that the people of China, Iran, and other dictatorial countries genuinely desire freedom. We sympathize with their yearning for freedom, democracy, and normal relations with the outside world, free from blockades and sanctions. We stand in support of their aspirations. However, undemocratic regimes pose a threat to peace, civilization, and other nations, from Ukraine to Israel, and from Taiwan to South Korea. A collective effort by the free world to promote the democratization of authoritarian societies can foster global stability and freedom while mitigating threats and conflicts. Russia should incorporate provisions into its fundamental legislative acts to prohibit the subsidization and support of non-democratic regimes.

We should also instigate a global renegotiation of the unfavorable binding agreements made during the Putin era with China and other undemocratic regimes that have inflicted economic losses and harm on Russia.

Will Russians accept a significant shift in foreign policy? To begin with, there are no insurmountable barriers to this. During Putin's first presidential term, approximately 70% of Russians held favorable views of the United States, nearly 60% expressed a desire for EU membership, and more than 60% supported the Rome Declaration on cooperation with NATO. All of this changed significantly due to the influence of propaganda. Secondly, Russians will soon recognize that coexisting with the rest of the world under a democratic order is advantageous, as it fosters stability, generates new economic opportunities, and raises living standards. The illusion of imperialism, which has brought hardship

and suffering to our people, will become a thing of the past. Russians will recall that they are indeed a European nation, one that could have adopted a constitution, parliament, rights, and freedoms even two centuries ago (for which generations of our predecessors struggled). We took a divergent path from the principal trajectory of European civilization. It is now time to return to the European community of nations.

The Role of Emigration in the Future of Russia

When discussing the future of Russia, we cannot evade the question of emigration's fate. That pertains to the hundreds of thousands of individuals who departed Putin's Russia following the onset of the repressive campaign of 2020-2021 and the criminal war against Ukraine. This group includes nearly all activists from opposition parties and movements, regional and environmental advocates, journalists, human rights activists, scientists, and artists. Do they still wield influence over Russian society, and can they continue to do so in the future? What role might they play in the transition from Putin's or post-Putin's autocracy to democracy?

It's crucial to recall that during the Cold War, the West invested significant resources not only in supporting the anti-Soviet opposition and emigration but also in establishing an entire broadcasting system directed at the USSR. This was done to convey an alternative perspective to the population. Every expression of dissatisfaction with Soviet authority, every declaration, arrest, or hunger strike became a news event. No one suggested that Soviet citizens refrained from protesting the communist dictatorship due to genetic inferiority or universal agreement with it. Similarly, no one proposed analyzing the results of Soviet elections as a means to gauge the true level of support for the CPSU dictatorship.

Meanwhile, the actual influence of dissident and emigrant groups during that era on public opinion in the USSR remained minimal, even when amplified by Western voices. Nevertheless, the Soviet government's initial reform attempt in the mid-1980s promptly created a window of opportunity. The once marginal anti-Soviet stance became the viewpoint of an active segment of society. For several years, a democratic, pro-Western political orientation prevailed in Russia, but the missteps of the "reformers" in the 1990s caused a significant portion of Russian citizens to veer away from the pro-Western course and its supporters.

Today's Russian opposition is not confined to a handful of dissidents, although some may tend to view it that way. Many of us, now in political exile, have gone through an extensive training ground in Russian public politics. We've successfully participated in elections, even emerging as victors, conducted nationwide political campaigns, organized large-scale protests, and engaged in legal human rights, educational, and environmental work. Consequently, we assert with all due responsibility that our experience is incomparable to that of Soviet dissidents, who were destined to operate from the depths of the underground and isolation from society, and often in deliberate opposition to the majority loyal to the Soviet regime.

Here, it appears to us, lies the origin of many preconceived notions. The section of observers who, either consciously or out of habit, assesses the contemporary Russian opposition through the lens of the history of the dissident movement in the USSR reasonably raises the question of the futility of expending resources to support marginalized individuals. Consequently, their suggestion is to allow Russian emigrants to live tranquilly in safety without recognizing them as a substantial force or involving them in expert discussions on Russia's present and future.

To those who hold this viewpoint, I'd like to convey the following: You are correct in one aspect — there's no purpose in assisting or engaging with those who willingly position themselves as marginalized, openly oppose the Russian populace, resort to curses and broad derogatory labels for all Russian citizens, indiscriminately label them as Putin's collaborators, and promote radical ideas that are met with understandable disapproval, not only among those residing in Russia but also among a significant portion of the emigrant community. These individuals are steering themselves toward a position similar to the most marginalized Soviet dissidents and are likely to retrace their trajectory. Even if a window of opportunity were to arise in Russia in the foreseeable future, they would remain on the fringes of political transformations, never securing election to any office or wielding any influence.

The contemporary Russian political emigration, particularly those who were actively involved in political and public endeavors in Russia from the early 2000s until their departure, represents the true leaders of the future. They possess the capability to lead millions of people if provided with an opportunity to return to Russia. This assertion is substantiated by the combined viewership of opposition media catering to the Russian audience and various pre-war and pre-repressive stage Putinism polls, conducted prior to the second half of 2020.

The year 2020 holds even more significance for comprehending the situation within Russia compared to 2022. During that year, the mounting pressure exerted by the opposition on the government, particularly amidst the backdrop of the mass protests that erupted in Belarus, deeply perturbed Putin. This led to his directive for the assassination of Alexei Navalny and several other prominent opposition figures. When this matter escalated into an international scandal, Putin abandoned all norms and decorum, systematically dismantling all significant opposition structures in Russia even prior to the full-scale aggression against Ukraine.

It's possible that by as early as 2020-2021, all of these actions were taken with an eye toward a planned war of aggression against Ukraine. The absence of a robust anti-war movement emerging in Russia at the onset of the war doesn't stem from the unpopularity of an anti-war stance but rather from the scarcity of leaders and seasoned organizers of mass protests in Russia or abroad at the commencement of the war.

We would like to emphasize the importance of engaging with the Russian population through media outlets. Despite significant budgets allocated by Western governments to their official Russian-language broadcasters, the quality of their content and their influence on Russian society often falls short of that of opposition broadcasters operating in exile. While there may be legitimate concerns about the quality of media products produced by emigrants, it's evident that due to their diversity and the personal investment of their authors, they are more effective at reaching Russian citizens than

foreign broadcasts in the Russian language. Notably, Western broadcasting materials in Russian tend to gain popularity when emigrant broadcasting leaders or opposition commentators are involved in their production, bringing their own audiences with them.

Based on our assessments, the collective reach of independent opposition emigrant social and political media, along with blogs aimed at the Russian audience, encompasses approximately 30-35 million unique users per month, of which 10-15 million constitute a relatively regular audience. These numbers are far from small or marginal. Furthermore, this presents a solution to how the prevailing sentiment in Russia can be promptly and substantially transformed: opinion leaders and entire editorial teams who are well-versed in a new approach and share the fundamental values of European civilization can return from emigration.

Contemporary Russian emigration encompasses not just a handful, but hundreds of thousands of individuals, predominantly young, well-educated, and dynamic. A significant portion of them departed Russia not solely due to the immediate threat of repression or conscription, but because of a profound internal disapproval of the ongoing developments within the country, notably the war against Ukraine initiated by Putin's regime. These individuals are dispersed across various regions, including the European Union, North and South America, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Asian countries. They remain actively engaged, striving to maintain connections with one another, as well as with friends and family who remain in Russia. They are actively participating in numerous grassroots anti-war organizations and initiatives, projects dedicated to aiding Ukraine and its refugees, mutual support networks, and solidarity efforts for political prisoners and activists still based in Russia. It's noteworthy that they undertake these endeavors on their own accord, despite the challenging material and living conditions that many of them find themselves in. Many still retain the ability to visit Russia, a crucial means of gaining firsthand insights into the situation within the country.

To dismiss or underestimate these individuals and their contributions is to inadvertently aid Putin's regime in isolating Russian society from alternative information sources, thereby helping to sever the millions of threads connecting the people of Russia with the rest of the world. We firmly believe that these individuals constitute an essential part of Russia's future human resources. Naturally, we are not suggesting that emigrants should or could become the majority within the new elite of the country. However, we wish to avoid a repetition of the situation that unfolded at the end of the USSR when the new Russia was primarily constructed by former Soviet bureaucrats who lacked an understanding of life in the West, had no experience with free discourse, and harbored no genuine desire to break free from their cherished and familiar Soviet past.

It's apparent that nations in Central and Eastern Europe that have welcomed recent emigrants and staunch critics of Soviet regimes into their political elite have made greater strides in their democratization efforts than countries where emigration was not a significant factor or where an invitation to engage in real politics was simply not extended.

With each passing year of war and emigration, the likelihood of some individuals never returning to Russia increases. The cautious or even negative attitudes towards Russian citizens projected by certain speakers are continually reinforced by Russian propaganda. This, in turn, contributes to the

rise of apathy, hopelessness, and marginalization within the Russian emigrant community. These developments hold no benefits for the West, for those who persist in striving for a democratic, European future for Russia, nor for Russia itself.

Russian emigration is not a monolithic entity but rather a diverse community comprising a wide array of individuals. Such diversity is entirely normal given the vast scale of Russia. However, within this polyphony, there exist substantial opportunities for engaging with people in Russia both now and in the future.

It's important to acknowledge that there's no need to expend efforts in a bid to consolidate Russian political emigration. On practical matters, different emigrant groups maintain excellent communication among themselves and with the outside world. Pretending that individuals with differing programs and perspectives on Russia's past, present, and future can coalesce into a single organizational structure is an exercise in self-deception. Furthermore, we believe it is constructive to encourage discourse on varied political programs and even to lay the groundwork for potential parties in the future. Democracy thrives on diverse approaches, not unity under a single leader, and not ignoring existing contradictions for the dubious pleasure of gathering around the same table at a conference. The Russia of the future will require a variety of parties, leaders, and programs — be they left, right, centrist, conservative, progressive, liberal, or socialist. This is the time to ensure that the return to Russia is not undertaken empty-handed. In a sense, our work represents one of the variants of a program for Russia's normalization, crafted from a moderate, liberal-centrist standpoint.

Sooner or later, there's little doubt that Putin's regime will crumble, a sentiment shared both inside and outside of Russia. Western elites should pose a critical question to themselves: do they possess any other avenues to shape Russia's future beyond collaborating with those Russians residing in emigration or who constitute the audience for emigrant politicians and journalists within Russia, and how effective are these alternatives? We must bear in mind that no one will act on our behalf, and if we fail to shape a new Russia, then Putin's officials will step in, and we shouldn't be shocked if their "new Russia" closely resembles Putin's old one.

The gravest scenario would be for Western elites, upon Putin's regime's collapse, to reiterate their mistake from the 1990s by unconditionally endorsing some hastily rebranded Putin-era bureaucrats as "reformers." This would forfeit the opportunity to support the return of an ideologically prepared, well-resourced, and personnel-equipped elite that represents the authentic political opposition to Putinism in exile, along with their support networks within Russia. Unfortunately, this outcome is a distinct possibility, which is why the primary responsibility falls on us.

Name and Symbols of the New Free Russia

The re-establishment of the Russian state raises a number of questions concerning symbolism, some of which may initially appear secondary or insignificant.

The primary question revolves around the country's name. It is evident that retaining the name "Russian Federation" is no longer tenable, as it has been tarnished by the actions of Putin's regime. Despite its political neutrality, it will now inevitably be associated solely with him.

The founders of West Germany encountered similar challenges. Prior to World War II, Germany was officially known as the "Deutsches Reich" (German State) since 1871. However, following the war and the atrocities committed under Hitler's rule, this name became tainted. Even the previously neutral term "Reich," which was part of the names of various positions and organizations such as "Reichspräsident" (head of state), "Reichskanzler" (head of government), "Reichstag" (parliament), and "Reichswehr" (armed forces), had lost its innocence. Not even the Nazi authorities' renaming of the country to the "Great German State" (Grossdeutsches Reich) in 1943 managed to salvage the situation. Given the evident collapse of the Nazi state between 1943 and 1945, this renaming went relatively unnoticed, and today, only specialists recall it. However, in the global perception, "Deutsches Reich" had become inextricably linked with Hitler's regime rather than the state created by Bismarck or the Weimar Republic. In the case of Russia, the situation is considerably more challenging. The country officially adopted the name "Russian Federation" only in 1993, which is just three decades ago. For 24 of these 30 years, Putin has held power in some capacity, making it all the more problematic to disassociate the nation from his regime.

In Germany, the issue was resolved by incorporating the word "Deutschland" (Germany) into the official name of the country, a term that had not previously served as the official name for any state. Swiss-style derivatives of the word "Bund" (union) were used to signify the federal structure of the nation and the new character of all its offices and agencies. Thus, the country came to be known as the "Bundesrepublik Deutschland" (Federal Republic of Germany), and all governmental entities and positions were assigned new names, free from any undesirable connotations. This resulted in designations such as "Bundespräsident" (Federal President), "Bundeskanzler" (Federal Chancellor), "Bundestag" (Federal Parliament), "Bundeswehr" (Federal Armed Forces), and so forth.

Regrettably, Russia lacks an alternative name to use. Consequently, it becomes imperative to replace the term "Federation" in the country's name and construct an entirely new identity for the government and regime around it.

One possible option is to harken back to 1917 and name the nation the "Russian Republic." This would necessitate amending the Constitution to emphasize its parliamentary and federal character, while avoiding an overly cumbersome name like the "Russian Federative Democratic Republic." Subsequently, the names of all government bodies and positions should be fashioned with a focus on the term "Republic" and its derivatives, giving rise to entities like the "Government of the Russian Republic," the "Parliament of the Russian Republic," and the "Bank of the Russian Republic." Alternatively, another approach could involve using "Russian Republican" to shape the names of

government bodies and positions, such as the "Russian Republican Government" and the "Russian Republican Prosecutor's Office."

The issue with the first option is the potential for confusion due to pre-existing entities within Russia already bearing the word "republic" in their names.

The second option involves substituting "Federation" with the similar term "Union," resulting in the country being known as the "Russian Union." This approach does simplify the development of updated terminology. Nevertheless, it's important to note that both the term "Union" and the adjective "Union" have been tainted by associations with the Soviet regime.

The third option, making the official name of the country the "Russian State" and using "State" as the foundational adjective for all positions and entities, like the "State Council," "State Government," and "State Bank," etc.

The question regarding the flag is indeed challenging, as there are limited historical flag options apart from the tricolor. Creating a new flag from scratch in a hastily organized contest may not be the best approach. A potential compromise could involve adjusting the shades of the flag's colors, returning to the softer colors reminiscent of the Yeltsin era. This could provide a symbolic change while maintaining continuity with the past. As for the coat of arms and the national anthem, it may be prudent to postpone decisions on these aspects. A future open contest, conducted with broad participation, could help determine the best choices. The German experience demonstrates that even a traditional emblem like an eagle can be redesigned to appear non-threatening and serve as a symbol of state institutions or adorn the cover of passports, rather than evoke negative connotations.

The question of the capital city is indeed significant, and the concept of dispersing capital functions has been a longstanding idea. The re-establishment of the state presents an opportune moment to implement this concept. While Moscow will likely continue as the economic capital of Russia, whether it should remain the political capital is a substantial consideration. One approach could involve designating Moscow as the residence of the head of state in a new context while relocating the operational government bodies to other cities. Determining which authorities should be placed in which cities is a matter that warrants careful examination. It's essential to consider that establishing a federal center of power (parliamentary, executive, judicial) in any city will significantly alter its status and foster its development in new ways. The distribution of these functions across various cities can contribute to a more balanced and decentralized governance structure.

Addressing the role of the head of state in the new federal parliamentary republic is a critical issue. The goal should be to ensure that this position is both functional for the system's operation and devoid of any potential for the usurpation of power, while also avoiding any reminders of the past status of the President of the Russian Federation. In terms of the head of state's functions and responsibilities, the position in a parliamentary republic is akin to that of a monarch in contemporary European monarchies. The head of state reigns but does not rule. Given the negative connotations associated with the term "president" in the context of Russia, it's prudent to avoid using this word. Instead, alternative titles like "Head of State (Republic, Union)" could be considered. At the very least, the word "president" should be accompanied by explanatory terms, such as "Constitutional

President” or “Union President.” Another approach could involve adopting the singularly acceptable term, “President of the Republic,” while entirely discarding the use of the phrase “President of Russia.” This approach aligns with the idea that the position represents the constitutional head of state, the formal leader of the nation’s political structures, rather than the leader of the broader concept of Russia.

Engaging philologists and, perhaps, marketing experts is a prudent approach to redefine the names of all public authorities. Cumbersome and convoluted names like “Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation” or “Municipal entity of the city of Yekaterinburg” can be simplified to ensure clarity and user-friendliness. Regions, localities, educational institutions, and authorities should have straightforward and easily understood names, with their legally correct names reserved for specific, formal correspondence but not used as official titles. For example, “the city of Chelyabinsk,” “the village of Pavlovka,” “aul Dzherokai,” “school No. 1,” and so on. The removal of unwieldy names that stem from bureaucratic jargon, such as “Department of Education of Municipal Education,” and other complex acronyms like MOU and MBOU, should be a priority. Establishing a commission that leverages naming experiences from historical Russian states and the contemporary world is a commendable idea. This commission can actively combat the legacy of Soviet and Putiner-era bureaucracy, ushering in a fresh narrative where new authorities are connected to the citizens they serve, fostering transparency and simplicity in public administration.

Conclusion

All of the above are not mere abstract dreams. These are concrete measures, entirely achievable with the right political will. They have been discussed in detail with numerous experts and professionals in the field of public administration on multiple occasions. This is the work that we should have undertaken in the 1990s. Unfortunately, we were sidetracked by our own concerns, aspirations of greatness, corruption, and illusions of a “strong state.”

Russians should recall that they are a European nation. They once had a European future, for which they’ve been fighting for the past two centuries. Regrettably, it was taken away from them, first by obscurantists who promoted “autocracy and nationality,” and later by the Communists. As the famous song goes, “it is time to take back this land.”

There’s no reason to believe that there’s something insurmountable preventing Russians from achieving the same standard of living as Canada or the Scandinavian countries. We have the capability to do it all. The key is to overcome the legacy of imperial thinking and the fixation on a “strong state,” as well as the servility to the “bosses.” In the new Russia, there will be no “bosses.” This concept will be abolished. Power, operating under the Constitution and through specific mechanisms of separation and delegation of powers, will change its role. It will become an instrument for realizing Russians’ aspirations for a better life, rather than a mechanism of governance. Russians will manage their affairs independently.

Once again, let’s remember that whenever authorities sought the opinion of the Russian people - from the elections for the Constituent Assembly to the Khrushchev thaw and Gorbachev’s perestroika - our citizens consistently opted for a more lenient regime, the expansion of civil and political rights, a socially oriented policy, and reconciliation with other nations. The resurgence of dictatorship and aggression resulted from the unlawful seizure of power and the influence of propaganda, not the deliberate choice of the Russian populace.

The opportunity for such a choice will arise once more. The process of transforming our nation will not be straightforward; it will be exceptionally challenging. The burden of historical legacy is substantial, democratic governance experience remains limited, and the mindset of many Russians is still influenced by the notions of a “strong hand” and “global supremacy.”

Nevertheless, as the experiences of the 1980s and 1990s have demonstrated, Russians are capable of listening, absorbing information, and harboring a fundamental yearning for freedom, progress, and a sense of normalcy. If we had not committed errors in the recent past, our development would not have veered off course. Now that we understand where we went wrong, we have every chance to avoid repeating those mistakes.

We opened our report with a quote from John F. Kennedy, highlighting the essential role of dreams in constructing a successful free society. Dreams of a bright democratic future are not mere idealistic fantasies detached from reality. Many prosperous developed nations achieved their status because they possessed a forward-thinking citizenry with the ability to dream and the determination and education to realize those dreams. All of these countries were once mired in dictatorship, poverty, and underdevelopment. To attain prosperity and progress demands diligent effort and a clear vision of the future.

We are fully confident that Russians can indeed build a normal, free, and peaceful nation. However, to do so, it is imperative to have a clear goal, to work diligently, to respect the rights and interests of others, and to learn from our own mistakes.

Russia will undoubtedly emerge as a free and prosperous nation!

Authors



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In 2020, he faced persecution in Russia and was compelled to leave the country. Subsequently, in 2022, the Russian Ministry of Justice labeled Fyodor Krasheninnikov as a “foreign agent.”

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Free Russia Foundation is an independent nonprofit organization with a 501 (c) 3 status registered in the U.S. in 2014.

The work of Free Russia Foundation is focused in three key mission areas:

1. Advancing the vision of a democratic, prosperous and peaceful Russia governed by the rule of law by educating the next generation of Russian leaders committed to these ideals;
2. Strengthening civil society in Russia and defending human rights activists persecuted by the Russian government; and
3. Supporting formulation of an effective and sustainable Russia policy in the United States and Europe by educating policy makers and informing public debate.

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