
Journalists, intellectuals, artists, clerics, ordinary people: the multifaceted world of Russia's anti-war dissidents

Vladimir Putin sits atop an increasingly crumbling fortress, which risks collapsing. Not only under the blows of sanctions, but also because of the isolation into which it has been confined by the worlds of sport, cinema, culture, art and science. *The people of Russia are voicing their dissent:* not in suburban districts, where State TV remains the primary source of information, but in Moscow and in large cities, where independent online news outlets can still be accessed, where *dissidence is spreading and an internal opposition front is gaining ground.* People took to the streets on February 24, the first day of the attack, in a spontaneous and large-scale protest. Since it is illegal to stage protests without giving 10 days' notice protesters were stopped and arrested by the police. *OVD-Info reported over 7,600 arrests as of 3 March 2022, with 2,800 people arrested on Sunday 28 February alone.* Those who can't afford the risk but are determined to distance themselves, either take evening "walks" along Moscow's central Tverskaya Street, or stay put, without saying anything, and sometimes hang protest flyers on trees and walk away. "Little can be done by the dissenters," several sources told us from Moscow. The people arrested (and beaten up) include some renowned personalities such as sociologist Grigory Yudin, Maria Alyokina of Pussy Riot, who was arrested for 15 days, as well as the deputy chairman of Moscow's Yabloko opposition party branch Kirill Goncharov, detained for 10 days and charged with "organising" an anti-war initiative. The Party is planning to make another attempt on March 12. As required by law - reads a statement on the Party's website - Yabloko has notified the mayor's office in Moscow ten days in advance that a march will be held to express "the position of Muscovites in the face of a special military operation" - according to the definition given by Russian authorities to the war between Russia and Ukraine. Thirty thousand people are expected to participate. Speaking from inside the prison where he is detained, Aleksei Navalny appealed to Russians via social media not to be "cowards who pretend not to see the violent war unleashed by our insane Tsar against Ukraine." He urged everyone to take to the streets and fight for peace: every day at 7 p.m. and over the weekend at 2 p.m. "We must, gritting our teeth and overcoming fear, come out and demand an end to the war." Each arrested person must be replaced by two newcomers, Navalny declared, "if in order to stop the war we have to fill prisons and paddy wagons with ourselves, we will fill prisons and paddy wagons with ourselves." *Journalists and newspapers are also being monitored and searched.* The censors' axe fell on two popular independent radio stations on March 1st: Radio Echo in Moscow was silenced (although it can still be heard on Youtube or on its website) while the website of Dozhd (Rain), already marked as a "foreign agent", was blacked out. The online news outlet Doxa, an independent academic journal, was censored the previous day. *Their common "sin" was criticism of the attack on Ukraine.* Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta, whose editor-in-chief Dmitry Muratov was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, reported that the director of the Duma's Security and Anti-Corruption Commission, Vasily Piskarev, has proposed new criminal charges against whoever "misrepresents the purpose, function and duties of the Russian Federation's military." Penalties of up to 15 years in prison could be imposed. The proposal has already been approved by State Duma President Vyacheslav Volodin and may soon be voted on by the State Duma. Valery Fadeev, who heads the Human Rights Council, suggested blocking Facebook throughout the entire duration of the "special operation", as the aggression against Ukraine has been termed, to prevent the "dissemination of fake news." *In the meantime, petitions against the war have started to appear on the Internet.* The Russian Mathematicians Society wrote on 28 February: "Our long-standing efforts to strengthen the reputation of Russia as a leading mathematical centre have been completely devalued in consequence of unprovoked military aggression initiated by our country." It is worth noting that Russia was scheduled to host the International Mathematical Congress in the summer of 2022, but it was cancelled by the International Mathematical Union. *Russian scientists and scientific journalists wrote an "open letter*

against the war with Ukraine" on February 24 in which they claim: "there is no rational explanation for this war." They said the Donbas was used as a "pretext for launching a military operation", and that the war against Ukraine is "unjust and absurd", a "step towards nowhere". It went on to note: "Unleashing a war to serve the geopolitical ambitions of the leadership of the Russian Federation, driven by dubious historiographic fantasies, constitutes a cynical betrayal of our historical memory." On the same day, some 300 correspondents of Russian media and foreign policy experts condemned the military operation: "War has never been and will never be a way to resolve conflicts, and there is absolutely no justification for it." The statement was published by Kommersant reporter Yelena Chernenko - expelled from the pool of journalists at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on February 25 on the grounds of "not being professional", according to the official text. She appealed to the director of the Foreign Ministry's Press and Information Department "not to intervene against other signatory colleagues." So far almost fifty professionals have been suspended for having written, spoken or endorsed anti-war statements. Dmitry Volkostrellov, artistic director of the Moscow State Theatre and Cultural Centre named after Vsevolod Meyerhold (TsIM), was fired for having posted critical remarks on Facebook. He was fired the day after Elena Kovalskaya resigned her position as director of the Cultural Centre in protest over Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The conductor of the Nizhny Novgorod Opera House Ivan Velikanov was also suspended after delivering a short speech against the war and performing Beethoven's Ode to Joy on the evening of 25 February, prior to the performance of the programmed opera. For that reason, he was prevented from conducting the "Marriage of Figaro" in Moscow on March 1 at the Golden Mask festival. "I would like to express my gratitude to those who tried to defend me and respect to my colleagues who agreed not to replace me", he wrote on his Facebook profile. Theatre director Lev Dodin, actress and TV host Julia Menshova, Anatoly Bely and Sergey Lazarev, actress Elizaveta Boyarskaya and opera singer Anna Netrebko have also spoken out against the war. Other suspensions are likely to follow in the next few days. "Activities for preparing the planned exhibitions will be suspended until the end of the human and political tragedy unfolding in Ukraine", wrote the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow on its website: "We cannot uphold the illusion of normality when these tragic events are taking place." Garage is an international institution open to a plurality of voices, and as such "we firmly oppose all actions that sow division and cause isolation." Some priests of the Russian Orthodox Church issued an appeal "calling for reconciliation and an end to the war." "We appeal to everyone on whom the cessation of the fratricidal war in Ukraine depends, with a call for reconciliation and an immediate ceasefire", reads the statement endorsed by some 200 signatories (mostly priests, deacons and other members of the clergy living outside Russia). "We mourn the ordeal to which our brothers and sisters in Ukraine were unfairly subjected - they write - We are bitterly thinking about the abyss that our children and grandchildren in Russia and Ukraine will have to overcome in order to start being friends with each other again, respect and love each other. We respect God-given human freedom, and we believe that the people of Ukraine should make their choice independently, not at gunpoint, without pressure from the West or the East."

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