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## **Kirill Martynov (Novaya Gazeta Europe): "The high numbers of dead prompt an increasing number of questions. And nobody believes there will be a happy ending"**

The partial mobilization of 300,000 reservists is yet to be completed, while 220,000 men have been drafted by the military so far. Vladimir Putin said the mobilisation will be completed in a fortnight. But families are already being notified of the deaths of those who were hastily sent to fight on the front lines, recognised as "heroes" by the Russian regime. According to independent Russian news outlet Important Stories, specialised in investigative journalism, a total of 90,000 people died and were wounded so far, sacrificed by Russia in the war. Data released by the NGO Ovd-Info shows that a total of 19,935 people were arrested in Russia for anti-war protests since February 24. Repression is continuing, while there are many cases of dissidents denounced to Russian authorities by informants. "Based on our experience, democracy and freedom of speech are of utmost importance for any country could plunge into the situation afflicting Russia today, which is terrible," Novaya Gazeta Europa chief editor **Kirill Martynov** told SIR at the end of a conversation on the situation in Russia.

**What is your analysis of Russia today?** It's a very fragile situation since national authorities and Putin himself have destroyed the social contract that had been in place for decades. Numerous incidents contribute to an overall very bleak picture. For example, just a few days ago, one of Russia's most prominent universities, the Perm High School of Economics, closed its Master's programme in Digital Humanities because of the anti-war stance its director Dinara Gagarina voiced on social media. There are dozens of such cases testifying to the extent to which Russian society is being destroyed, alongside the scientific, educational institutions, NGOs, human rights associations and so on. And at the moment it is practically impossible to stabilise the situation due to extremely high levels of violence, starting with domestic violence. And it is only bound to worsen further: acts of violence will escalate as the men come back from the war. Illegal activity is rife even among law enforcement authorities who basically do whatever they want, and there is a high level of corruption. I don't know whether there are grounds to believe that Putin's regime will collapse soon, but it's hard to imagine that people will continue with their ordinary lives in this situation.

**What are the possible scenarios?** I see two possibilities: either new regulations will be imposed on society, whereby for the next few decades Russia will become just like Iran, but bordering on the European Union; or the new rules will trigger a political crisis. And there will be attempts to find people capable of at least playing Putin's role somewhat more effectively. Perhaps in a few months we will see attempts at a new beginning.

**How strong are the opponents of the war or of Putin? Do they stand a chance?** Putin has been preparing this scenario for decades and no formal or informal institutions are functioning today. There are still small groups of people who despite their fears try to plan what can be done from day to day: whether they can oppose the war by remaining in the country or whether they should leave. There are no shared political plans, since media and political opposition were destroyed even before the war or in the first months after the attack. I still think that some of Putin's collaborators are unhappy with the situation. And there's only one possibility to change the situation from inside: a united front of people from grassroots level, along with those public figures who no longer want to see Putin in charge.

**Just a few days ago you wrote that Putin is losing the war: do people in Russia feel the same way?** Normal people, those who have not been enlisted, still believe that things are more or less going well and that there is still a chance of victory. But those who went to war, or saw what happens on the battlefields or in the context of military mobilisation, or people living on border zones like Belgorod, are very sceptical. The deaths on Russian Federation territory prompt an increasing number of questions. Nor does anyone believe that there will be a happy ending for the Russian Federation. But it all depends on each person's personal connection to the war. According to international observers, the morale of the Russian troops is very low and I think it depends on the fact that no one really thinks that this war can be won.

**Could the news of the Nobel Prize awarded to**

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**the NGO Memorial serve a purpose in this context?** Awarding Memorial the Prize means retaining the ability to resist and that its activity will not cease, it means to continue receiving support from people in Russia, as well as from international organisations and media outlets abroad. It is very encouraging. I guess awarding the prize to Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian organisations at the same time was a tough decision, but I think it was fair. I am glad that our Ukrainian colleagues in their statements referred to the other two winners as valuable friends and colleagues. This is more important than our passports: we share common values. **Are Europe and the world doing enough in this situation?** President Putin and the Russian army have created a situation that leaves no other option than defending the people in Ukraine. I actually think Europe is doing far better in this situation than anyone could have imagined. It might be time to start asking ourselves whether there is any room for tolerance of those who started the war and which European policymakers still support Putin. It is time to investigate the flow of Russian money into Europe, to stop accumulating capital from dictatorships. **Is there enough support for the dissidents?** We received plenty of solidarity from fellow journalists, NGOs, and even from European governments, but we also understand that Europe was not prepared for this conflict. The simplistic decision of treating anyone with a Russian passport as a danger and a threat is totally understandable, because obviously if there were millions of Russian tourists in Europe it could be dangerous, especially for smaller countries. At the same time, I think that specific measures should be taken for this extraordinary time and people should be judged not only by their passport. I am concerned about Russian students, for example, because strategically I think it would be better for them to receive their education in a European country. This issue should be the object of discussion and political agreements for the benefit of the Russians who are victims of this war. **What will you do if Putin's regime comes to an end?** I will return to Russia, the very same day.

Sarah Numico