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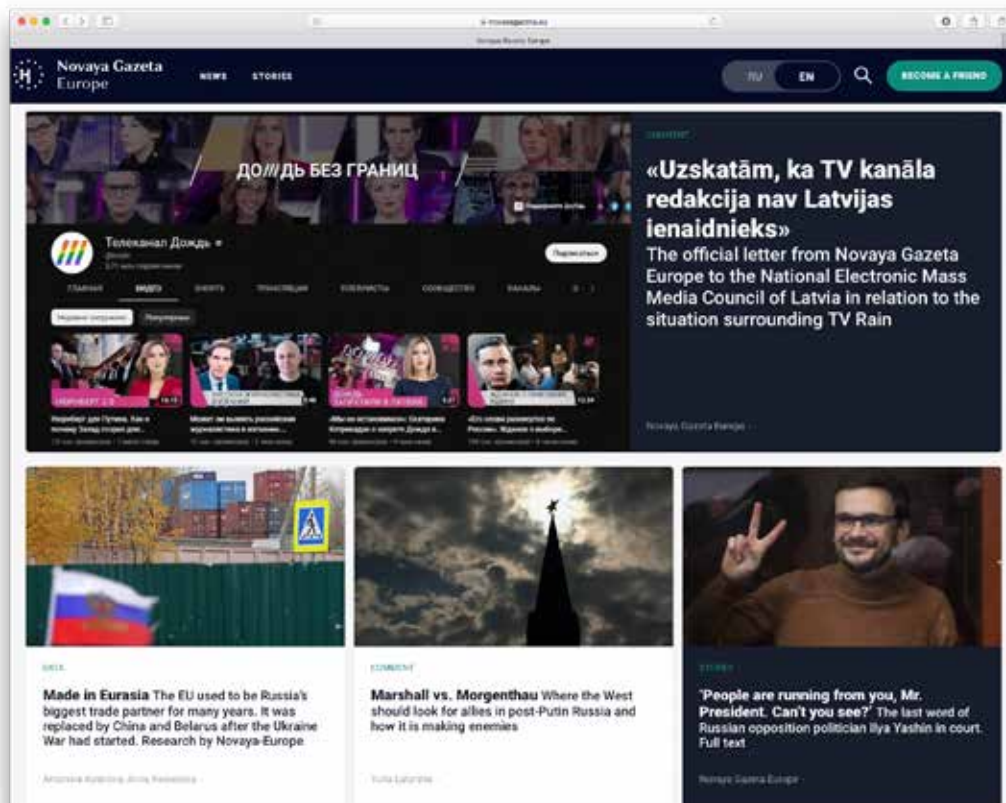
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Novaya Gazeta Europe is an independent newspaper online.

RUSSIAN JOURNALISM IN EXILE

A new chapter in *Novaya Gazeta's* life

by **Ninna Mörner**

The independent Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* is known for its critical and investigative coverage of Russian political and social affairs. Their former editor-in-chief, Dmitry Muratov, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021. Kirill Martynov is now editor-in-chief for *Novaya Gazeta Europe*, operating from Riga, Latvia. He is the newspaper's former political editor, a political scientist, and a former associate professor at Moscow State University. In an open lecture at Södertörn University

November 22, Kirill Martynov discussed Russian journalism in exile and the new chapter in *Novaya Gazeta's* life.

MARTYNOV ENJOYED being back at a university and speaking for an academic audience. The last time he held a lecture was at his former workplace, he tells us, on February 26 this year. In that lecture he talked, as scheduled, with his young students about Kant and ethics and Kantian views on moral issues; but all the examples he applied were related to the

ongoing criminal war that Russia had started two days before. The university administration fired him immediately for this.

It is not possible to talk about the war today in Russia, not from any perspective. Martynov gives an example: When the Russian army withdrew from occupied Kherson two weeks ago it was not possible to comment on this in a professional way without contravening regulations. If you stated that you were glad that they left Kherson, it was criticism of the war; if

Left: Kirill Martynov, editor-in-chief for *Novaya Gazeta Europe*.

Right: Dmitry Muratov received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021 for his efforts to safeguard the freedom of expression.

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



you saw it as negative that they withdrew from Kherson, it was criticism of the Russian army.

“I left Russia eight months ago when journalists were forced to be blind to reality, not able to write and see reality. Coverage of the war was not possible.”

PEOPLE WHO STAY in Russia must find a strategy to cope with life under an authoritarian regime. Social scientists try to conduct research without entangling themselves closely with any issues that might be sensitive, meaning that they focus on history rather than the present reality. Many “normal” citizens do not have any other information than the propaganda from the authorities. They follow state-controlled media and hear that all is good, Putin has a plan for everything, a secret but sure plan and everything is just fine. They can then continue life and feel rather comfortable. So many people do not want to question this version; it is too risky, they rather prefer going on sleepwalking, says Martynov. To do so, to question the official version, and take in the brutal reality, means that you also realize the danger you, your family, your workplace, and the whole country is encountering under this regime and the insane war, continues Martynov. With this follows fear, he emphasizes, making it understandable that many Russians still prefer to be blind to reality. The journalists employed by the state also have the same reasons for reporting in accordance with what the government allows: keeping safe and coping with everyday life.

Post-imperial trauma

Martynov shares a story about how to handle the risk of being drafted to the army. In sum, it is about another Russian journalist in Russia who published a chronicle about what to do if you were drafted: better strive to be placed in an aircraft division so you don’t need to kill anyone directly, he suggests to his readers. This chronicle led to strong reactions from Ukrainians and anti-war activists, and accusations such as, “Even those Ru-

“THERE ARE NO INSTITUTIONS OR NGOS LEFT TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS.”

sisans that say they are working for peace are ready to fight anyway”. The text was deleted quite soon (it should never have been published, comments Martynov). But this story shows that the mind-set for most Russians is that if your government calls you, you do your duty. This patriotic response is deeply rooted in the Russian people with its history of wars, he explains.

The next part of the story is that the very same journalist’s family are very upset with him when he comes home, giving him a suitcase and the advice to immediately leave for Kazakhstan. And so he does; he becomes a refugee, he takes the

step to not fight but to flee. This is a very big leap for many Russians, but nevertheless, many are doing that today.

PUTIN HAS BUILT this war on the Russian sense of some sort of injustice at being a small country, or at least not the great one it once was. There is a post-imperial trauma that Putin evokes. Martynov predicts that “when Putin loses this insane war, it will create an even greater trauma”.

However, Putin was well prepared for this war when it comes to the internal control of Russia, Martynov says and adds – but not prepared, however, for the Ukrainian army’s resistance. Gradually, since 2014 and the annexation of Crimea, Putin has erased independent institutions and introduced legislation to limit freedom of speech to make sure he had the power and means to keep control of Russia internally.

“After all, 20 million people voted against giving Putin more power, but they have no representation in parliament and could not influence the decisions around the war. In this way, the dictator has silenced all critical voices and there is no real functional opposition.”

Martynov continues:

“Limiting freedom of speech was the first step towards this dictatorship that prevails today. There are no institutions or NGOs left to defend human rights. The last one, the Civil Rights Defenders Memorial, vanished while everyone was reporting about the shelling of Ukrainian cities.”

This development can be seen as a warning for all countries that experience a regime that gradually introduces regulations for independent institutions and limitations of free media and the freedom of speech.

Killing of journalists

Novaya Gazeta was formed in 1993, when a high level of freedom of speech existed. Back then, the journal was printed and delivered as hard copy. They had advertisements from Apple Mac which was allowed in those days. In 1994, the war in Chechnya started and *Novaya Gazeta* did not support that war – they have not supported any wars or the annexation of Crimea, Martynov emphasized. This



Anna Politkovskaya covered the war in Chechnya for *Novaya Gazeta*. She was killed in 2006.

PHOTO: NOVAYA GAZETA



Demonstration in Helsinki, October 7, 2014, eight years after the murder of Anna Politkovskaya.

PHOTO: AMNESTY FINLAND/FLECKR CC

meant that they were isolated by the state and not able to sell advertising space or gain funding to pay salaries. They were, however, devoted to the idea of free independent media and therefore continued. But it is dangerous work, journalism, in a country like Russia.

ANNA POLITKOVSKAYA covered the war in Chechnya for *Novaya Gazeta*. She was a critic of Russian president Vladimir Putin whose reporting exposed high-level corruption in Russia and rights abuses in the North Caucasus republic of Chechnya. She was shot dead in the elevator of her apartment block in central Moscow on October 7, 2006. This killing is infamous, but five other journalists working for the journal have also been killed the last 20 years. Not to mention all threats.

“It is hard to understand how Dmitry Muratov endured all this, but he kept going”, notes Martynov and adds that Dmitry Muratov shared the money he received when he was given the Nobel Peace Prize:

“He gave away 90 percent to charity and the rest he shared with all 103 people that in some way have had something to do with *Novaya Gazeta*. Everyone got exactly the same amount, no matter what their role.”

Journalism in exile

After the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine this year, *Novaya Gazeta* suspend-

ed their online and print activities after several warnings from *Roskomnadzor*. In April the same year, Kirill Martynov launched *Novaya Gazeta Europe*, issuing the following statement:

“Russia has essentially banned professional journalism. The Russian government has ‘cancelled’ us right when Russian citizens and the whole world need us the most. [...] Here, we will tell the whole

“THE JOURNAL STILL HAS JOURNALISTS INSIDE RUSSIA THAT CONDUCT ‘SHADOW JOURNALISM.’”

truth about Russia and the war against Ukraine, regardless of what the Kremlin thinks about it.”

Today, *Novaya Gazeta Europe* is blocked in Russia but 3–4 million Russians each month still manage to find it online and read information about the war that is not propaganda.

The journal still has journalists inside Russia that conduct “shadow journalism” and send material; anonymously and without any credit or contract, they provide *Novaya Gazeta* with important in-

formation and stories. They are all around Russia and they risk a lot.

“It is crucial that we receive those reports from the inside. That we still are able to do this.”

MARTYNOV SHARES that he was given a hint of the next, final, step in the dictatorship from an encounter with Belarussian colleagues:

“They said: ‘Beware of the future that we know. Everything here is destroyed; there are no independent voices left. You say you have three shadow reporters there, five there – you sweet summer-child, we too once had that, before, but it is now all gone’ and silenced”.

Martynov stresses that gradually, step by step, freedom of speech has been threatened and silenced in Russia and this is a warning example; the situation in Belarus is another warning example. He is not optimistic about the future but says that *Novaya Gazeta Europe* will keep on reporting about the war, publishing investigating stories, and conducting independent journalism in exile.

“Many people need and seek information about reality and a token of that is that February 25 and 26, the days after the invasion, we had 3–4 million readers each day.” ✕

Ninna Mörner

Note: This text is based on an open lecture given by Kirill Martynov at Södertörn University, November 22, 2022.