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## The New Russian Diaspora Europe's Challenge and Opportunity



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# *Russie.Eurasie.Reports*

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# Abstract

This report assesses both the scale and the roots of the outward migration from the Russian Federation coinciding with Putin's turning of Russia into an aggressive authoritarian state. The authors analyze both the open sources and the data collected during a study of the Russian diaspora in European Union (EU) member states, conducted in April 2024 on behalf of the Center for Analysis and Strategies in Europe (CASE) by a team of researchers associated with the University of Nicosia (the findings and methodology of the research are available on the CASE website).<sup>1</sup> The authors argue that the Russians who have recently left their country represent substantial human capital that may be used almost exclusively in Europe or the Americas since both rich historical experience and recent cases of integrating Russians into non-Western societies show that they rarely became successful.

The authors make a clear distinction between classic "emigration" and the current condition of those Russians who left their country, which they prefer to call "relocation". Those who have relocated are more active and flexible than emigrants have traditionally been; the European authorities can determine the ways and means of their admission, but at the same time, most of them possess financial resources and competencies that can facilitate their future integration into European societies. Studying the Russian diasporas in a number of post-Soviet and Central European nations, the authors depict their positive economic influence on host societies and, using Cyprus as a case study, emphasize how significant it may be even for a developed European country if its authorities pursue a balanced policy aimed at admission and integration of the "relocants". Assessing the state of the Russian diasporas in Poland, Germany and France, they conclude that this strategy can be used by other EU member states.

The report emphasizes that the massive exodus of educated and self-made Russians presents a serious challenge to Putin's regime, comparable in its significance to the effect of Western economic sanctions imposed on Russia. Unlike the current sanction policies, which often backfire on Europeans, abatement of Russians' departure from their country can deliver noticeable economic benefits to the united Europe by creating a broad community of Russians who perceive Europe and the West in general as a close and appreciative ally rather than as an enemy, making little distinction between the Putin regime and the decent Russian people who became its hostages.

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1. Survey of Russian emigrants in European countries (Germany, France, Cyprus, Poland), Insights Market Research, University of Nicosia, May 2024, available at: [www.case.int](http://www.case.int).

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# Introduction

Russia is a very atypical European nation. For centuries, it expanded in the same way as Western European nation-states did. First, it domesticated vast and sparsely populated territories of Siberia through settler colonization; later, relying on its military superiority, it established its dominance over parts of the “global south” in the Caucasus and Central Asia.<sup>2</sup>

However, without dividing their vast possessions into metropolis, colonies and protectorates, the masters of both Muscovy and Russia preferred to treat the expansion of their empire as “internal colonization”.<sup>3</sup> Such an approach explains why the very concept of international migration, which had deeply transformed communities on both sides of the Atlantic from the start of the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, did not seem to exist for Russia for rather a long time; on the contrary, until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian empire remained the only European country experiencing an influx of population from other European states.

One may talk about the first waves of exodus only concerning the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – but even in this case, the migrations differed radically from the emigration from other European countries like the United Kingdom (UK), the German principalities, or Italy since it was mainly people of Western European ancestry who had left at that time (in particular, up to 2.2 million people originating from Germany and Austria-Hungary),<sup>4</sup> as well as those belonging to people who suffered from discrimination (2.5 million Jews)<sup>5</sup> or even extermination (according to some estimates, up to 1 million Circassians).<sup>6</sup> The emigration of ethnic Russians was a rare phenomenon (which might be explained by numerous obstacles to leaving the country and by the prospects of forced deprivation of citizenship if one decided to stay abroad for more than five years) and did not have much influence on Russian society at that time. We would even

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2. A. Abalov and V. Inozemcev, *Beskonečnâ imperiâ: Rossiâ v poiskah sebâ* [Infinite Empire: Russia in Search of Itself], Moscow: Alpina Publisher, 2021, pp. 125-199.

3. V. Klûčevskij, “Kurs russkoj istorii” [The Course of Russian History] in V. Klûčevskij (eds.), *Cočineniâ v 9 tomah* [Tsochinenie in 9 Volumes], Moscow: Thought, Vol. 1, 1987, p. 50; A. Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience*, Cambridge: Polity, 2011.

4. P. Polân, “Èmigraciâ: kto i kogda v HH veke pokidal Rossiû” [Emigration: Who and When in the Twentieth Century Left Russia] in P. Polân and O. Glezer (eds.), *Rossiâ i eë regiony v HH veke: territorîâ, rasselenie, migracii* [Russia and Its Regions in the XX<sup>th</sup> Century: Territory, Settlement, Migrations], Moscow: OGI, 2005.

5. R. Landau, *The Nazi Holocaust: Its History and Meaning*, London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016, p. 61.

6. A. Leitzinger, “The Circassian Genocide”, *The Eurasian Politician*, October 2000, available at: <http://users.jyu.fi>.

argue that the uniqueness of Russian emigration consists precisely in the fact that it did not start until emigration from the larger Western European countries was almost over – in the late 1910s and early 1920s.

However, over the next hundred years, Russia took a kind of revenge for the initial “somnia,” expelling three gigantic waves of immigrants – between 1918 and 1923, in 1988-1998, and then the one that started in 2012-2014 and continues to this day, intensifying after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. The total demographic losses from these exoduses are estimated by researchers at between 4 and 11 million people, and if the “unwilling” emigration resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union is added, the total number of people belonging to the “Russian world” living outside the Russian Federation might be estimated at close to 37 million, of whom at least 4 million reside in European Union (EU) member states.<sup>7</sup> The driving force for those three waves of migration differed: the first consisted of those whom the Bolshevik government declared as “class enemies” and later arbitrarily deprived of Soviet citizenship in 1922; the second wave was caused predominantly by economic and social factors (including the repatriation of Germans and Jews from the Soviet Union); the third, we strongly believe, was fueled by both ideological and economic circumstances, and therefore cannot be adequately compared to any of the previous ones.

A lot of books and articles depict and explain the development of pro-emigration sentiment in Russian society since 2012 and assess the scale and routes of departure, as well as the creation of various Russian associations and organizations outside Russia. Huge attention is paid to the political dimension of the emerging diaspora, which many authors consider to be the sprouting of a democratic and European Russia, capable of playing a significant role in transforming Russia into a modern Western state after the demise of Putin’s dictatorship.<sup>8</sup> While not rejecting completely such an approach, we soberly assess the composition of Russian migrants of the last decade and believe that the vast majority of them, although they left the country due to the discrepancy between its current course and their vision of a fair and open society, are not activists or politicians, but are driven by the search for a professional career, a quiet place to live and a country in which their children can be raised without being influenced by the culture of hatred created in today’s Russia. We would identify as “fighters against the regime” not more than around four to five thousand people out of close to one million of those who quit the Russian Federation in recent years. We should note that European countries are actively trying to assist them. Since the start of the war in February 2022, EU nations have issued more than

7. V. Inozemtsev, *Nesovremennâ strana: Rossiâ v mire XXI veka* [A Non-modern Country: Russia in the World of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century], Moscow: Alpina Publishers, 2018, p. 253.

8. K. Shamiev and K. Luchenko, “Life in Exile: A New Approach to Russian Democrats in Europe”, European Council on Foreign Relations, March 14, 2024, available at: <https://ecfr.eu>.

four thousand refugee permits, while Germany alone produced up to three thousand “humanitarian” visas, not only clearing the way for permanent residence in the EU but also providing financial support and services facilitating integration into the new societies.<sup>9</sup> However, the share of approved asylum applications for the Russians is still less than 20% compared, for example, to 97% for Palestinians.<sup>10</sup>

Much less attention is paid to those Russians who left their homeland without facing immediate threats to their safety – to professionals whose activities became difficult or impossible due to the new rules imposed by the regime; members of the ethnic, religious and sexual groups that have become targets of defamation and incitement to hatred by the authorities; scientists and artists, whose self-expression in today’s Russia has been continuously curtailed. All these people are part of the modern globalized community, they share basic Western values, are well educated, have proven themselves to be independent and entrepreneurial personalities, and most of them are relatively wealthy even by European standards. They, it seems to us, have good chances of integrating into European societies and can contribute to their dynamics without undermining their foundations. However, these people face profound difficulties since they are often associated with “Putin’s Russia” and become the subject of sweeping accusations of crimes its regime has committed. The purpose of our report is to highlight the benefits and opportunities that a change in attitude towards the “Russian Europeans” opens up for modern Europe.

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9. A. Ismailov, “U rossijskikh antivoennykh aktivistov vsë men’še šansov na ubežiše v Germanii” [Russian Anti-war Activists Have Fewer and Fewer Chances for Asylum in Germany], OpenDemocracy, October 29, 2023, available at: [www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net).

10. “Latest Asylum Trends”, EU Agency for Asylum, March 2024, available at: [www.euaa.europa.eu](http://www.euaa.europa.eu).



# Departure, “relocation”, emigration: some terminological remarks

When describing the process of citizens exiting Russia, 21st-century researchers tend to use terminology that was formed a long time ago and under very different circumstances, calling those who leave the country emigrants. In a number of cases, this approach is completely justified; this is what John Herbst and Sergey Erofeev called the Russians who moved either to the United States (US) or to Western European countries, starting from the early 2000s, in their fundamental study “Putin’s Exodus”.<sup>11</sup> Most of these people, leaving Russia in relatively “quiet” times – starting from Putin’s first term in the Kremlin and up to the “peaceful” annexation of Crimea – could be seen as potential emigrants. From the very start of their adventure, they perfectly understood their life strategies; they bought real estate in advance in their prospective countries of residence, launched new businesses abroad, built successful professional careers, and won contests for prestigious positions in Western corporations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Even those who did not achieve dizzying success went to new countries to work and live in them, hoping to become a natural part of these societies in due course. At that time, one of us called this group “the Russian professionals,” contrasting them with “professional Russians” who (residing mainly in the post-Soviet countries) were proud of belonging to the “Russian world”, praised “Mother Russia,” and did not strive for any kind of integration into their new societies.<sup>12</sup>

Russia’s continuous shift to confrontation with the West after 2014, and especially the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, has greatly changed both the nature and the dynamics of outward migration from Russia. When, almost immediately after Putin’s address to the nation, in February and March 2022, hundreds of thousands of Russians decided to flee their sweet and beloved homeland, they spontaneously began to label themselves not as emigrants but as “relocants”<sup>13</sup> – thereby emphasizing that their status came from unexpected circumstances and, according to their own calculations,

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11. J. Herbst and S. Erofeev, “The Putin Exodus: The New Russian Brain Drain”, *Atlantic Council*, February 21, 2019, available at: [www.atlanticcouncil.org](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org).

12. V. Inozemtsev, “Wer gehört zur ‚russischen Welt?’”, *Internationale Politik*, November 1, 2014, available at: <https://internationalepolitik.de>.

13. A. Berdy, “Let Me Introduce You to New Creatures in the World”, *Moscow Times*, October 13, 2023, available at: [www.themoscowtimes.com](http://www.themoscowtimes.com).

was temporary rather than permanent. We would argue that this seemingly insignificant issue points to one of the most important peculiarities of contemporary Russian migration: those leaving the country do not consider themselves to be excluded from it, and this determines the uncertain and dualistic nature of their position and their behavior abroad. On the one hand, they largely retain their Russian identity, which means that they react and will react in the future to all major events taking place in Russia, to the actions the West takes towards Russia (and Ukraine), and to changes in Russian public opinion, as well as to those actions the Russian authorities can take *vis-à-vis* either the “relocants” in general or groups of them. On the other hand, one may assume that, for a relatively long time, migrants will prefer not to integrate deeply into their new societies, assessing all the possible consequences of undertaking such a step and weighing both the rights that arise for them and the obligations caused by their prospective status (this is already quite noticeable in Israel, where many of those arriving from Russia and other post-Soviet states to acquire Israeli citizenship almost immediately leave for other countries as a permanent residence, not to say that many simply return to Russia).<sup>14</sup>

All this, as well as the uncertainty prevailing both among relocants and Western policymakers and political analysts concerning the prospects of today's Russia, suggests that, for at least the next two to three years, the aims and intentions of the newcomers will not become finally determined, which is what makes especially relevant a discussion about attitudes to them in Europe.

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14. “Izrail’ otmenâet èkstreñnuû repatriaciû dlâ rossiân i belorusov” [Israel Cancels Emergency Repatriation for Russians and Belarusians], Meduza, April 21, 2023, available at: <https://meduza.io>.

# The Russian diaspora: dynamics and peculiarities

Even though the largest number of departures from Russia coincided with the initial stage of the Kremlin's aggression against Ukraine (from February to November 2022), we believe it would be better to start in 2012 since soon after Putin's return to the Kremlin, the drive towards building a solid dictatorship became noticeable to many politically active Russians. Starting from that time, even official Russian statistics recorded a sharp surge in the number of people leaving Russia permanently – from 117,000 in 2010 to more than 200,000 by 2014.<sup>15</sup> The annexation of Crimea and the increased tensions between Russia and the West led to the continuation of the trend, so in total, around 2 million people left the country between 2012 and 2021. Together with the “grand exodus” of 2022, the figure could exceed 3 million, although comprehensive statistical data is not yet available.

A study commissioned by CASE in March 2024 clearly indicates that Russian diasporas in Europe, in their current form, have been formed since the start of Putin's wars in Ukraine: they consist of those who left Russia up to 2013 inclusive, amounting to a mere 19%, while 79% of those surveyed belong to the subsequent waves, and the pace of the process accelerated (35% left in the period 2014 to 2021, and 44% after the start of full-scale war in February 2022).<sup>16</sup> It should also be noted here that, with the passage of time and the increasing spontaneity of departure, the gender composition of relocants changes dramatically: while in the times of “classical emigration,” it fully corresponded to the internal Russian proportions (53 women and 46% men), with the advent of “mass relocation” the ratio changed to 37% to 63%. Emigrants and relocants also differ significantly in age: before 2013, among those leaving, 56% were aged between 18 and 44 years, but after 2022 their share exceeded 83%<sup>17</sup> (for comparison, as of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022, the share of 18 to 44 year-olds in the overall population of the Russian Federation stood at only 29.7%).<sup>18</sup> Such high intensity of departure coupled with the gender and age composition of relocants points to two important features of the current

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15. A. Tinčurin, T. Berlina, E. Âznevič and D. Rogackina “Èmigraciâ 2000-h: kuda i počemu uezzali iz Rossii” [Emigration of the 2000s: Where and Why People Left Russia], *Esli byt' točnym*, October 5, 2021, available at: <https://tochno.st>.

16. Survey of Russian emigrants in European countries (Germany, France, Cyprus, Poland), *op. cit.*

17. *Ibid.*

18. “Population of the Russian Federation by Sex and Age as of January 1<sup>st</sup>”, Rosstat, July 30, 2022, available at: <https://rosstat.gov.ru>.

wave of exodus: on the one hand, a dynamic character; on the other, a certain choice of places of residence available for the relocants.

All earlier emigration waves, we should note, appeared to be exclusively unidirectional and relatively short-lived. From the first emigration (1918-1922), no more than 4% of those who left returned to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and the lives of most of them ended tragically.<sup>19</sup> Of the late Soviet and early Russian emigration, only a few subsequently resettled in their homeland, most of them being of advanced age and returning to live in Russia on pensions and annuities received from the countries in which they had worked in previous years. Moreover, in both cases, the Russian émigrés formed a relatively “hermetic” environment in their new host countries, maintaining weak ties with Russia or not practicing them at all. On the contrary, migrants of the last decade largely consider themselves an integral part of Russian society (which is confirmed, in particular, but not only, by election participation),<sup>20</sup> maintain stable contacts with relatives and friends remaining in Russia, get a considerable share of information from Russian (specifically Russian, and not just “Russian-language”) media,<sup>21</sup> and – something that could not even be thought about in previous episodes – rely heavily on income and other receipts from the Russian Federation (although this is not always recognized in surveys).

What also looks extremely important is the fact that the relocants of the last decade – even as they move to other countries without an intention to return and as some of them accept new passports – almost never renounce their Russian citizenship (this process, unlike emigration, is well documented and involves around 3-4,000 procedures annually). Moreover, the huge increase in the number of departures in 2022-2023 had little effect on the surrender of Russian passports: the number of such cases in 2022 turned out to be slightly less than in 2019 (4,306 versus 4,356),<sup>22</sup> while for 2023 one may expect a 25-30% increase (4,400 Russians renounced their citizenship during the first nine months of last year).<sup>23</sup> This confirms that spontaneous departures are considered by few people as irrevocable

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19. S. Rogačëva, “Zvali i ne znali, kuda ih devat’: kak v Rossiû vozvrašali èmigrantov” [They Called and Did Not Know Where to Put Them], *Sever Realii*, October 12, 2021, available at: [www.severreal.org](http://www.severreal.org).

20. “Rossiâne vystroilis’ v očeredi na akcii ‘Polden’ protiv Putina’ za rubežom” [Russians Lined up for “Noon Against Putin” Rallies Abroad], *Moscow Times*, March 17, 2024, available at: [www.moscowtimes.ru](http://www.moscowtimes.ru).

21. E. Kamalov, “Poltora goda spustâ: progress i bar’ery v integracii rossijskih èmigrantov” [One and a Half Years Later: Progress and Barriers in the Integration of Russian Emigrants], *Out Rush*, January 2024, available at: <https://outrush.io>.

22. “V 2022 godu ot rossijskogo graždanstva otkazalis’ bol’še 4300 čelovek. Èto maksimum za tri goda” [More Than 4,300 People Renounced Russian Citizenship in 2022. This Is the Maximum for Three Years], *Meduza.io*, February 8, 2023, available at: <https://meduza.io>.

23. A. Fomina, “V MID RF nazvali čislo lûdej, kotorye poželali vyjti iz rossijskogo graždanstva” [The Russian Foreign Ministry Named the Number of People Who Wished to Renounce Russian Citizenship], *Gazeta.ru*, October 22, 2023, available at: [www.gazeta.ru](http://www.gazeta.ru).

exits. Many current relocants (except those political asylum-seekers who fear possible prosecution)<sup>24</sup> retain their Russian assets – and in many cases, people do not receive income from them but, on the contrary, maintain their apartments and pay all necessary taxes. Both circumstances indicate that most Russians do not consider the break with their homeland to be final; many still do not even admit the possibility that the authorities will apply arbitrary administrative procedures against them.

As a result, the current migration is not unidirectional. Along with the continuous outflow of people from Russia, there is also a process of return. Even sources that cannot be suspected of cooperation with the regime assess the share of relocants returning to Russia in 2022-2023 at 16-25%,<sup>25</sup> excluding those Russians living abroad who return from time to time for various reasons and for different periods of time. The pro-Kremlin experts insist that up to 40 or 50% of relocants have already returned,<sup>26</sup> and similar estimates are provided, for example, by Bloomberg, which recently reported that it was this backward migration that ensured high economic growth in Russia in 2023,<sup>27</sup> allowing Russia's gross domestic product (GDP) to exceed its pre-war levels. In our view, the return continues – and the authorities are doing everything to ensure it will continue; after the “mobilization” shock of the fall of 2022, the Kremlin is afraid to announce another mobilization and is doing its best to build up not even a contract army, but a mercenary one.<sup>28</sup> Despite growing concern in Russia about the ongoing redistribution of property, the latter still looks limited to confiscation from entrepreneurs who are disloyal to the authorities or decided to leave the country while still trying to manage their enterprises from abroad and is not believed to affect the larger number of relocants. Based on messages from colleagues and subscribers to our social networks, we would venture to say that the share of relocants returning varies significantly by country of temporary residence and may well reach half of the total number (including those who repeatedly return to Russia and leave again) in South-East Asia and many post-Soviet states, being somewhat lower in Turkey and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and falling to 10-15% and below in Western Europe or the US (the peculiarity of the American case is that, since February 2022, up to 50,000 Russians have entered the country illegally

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24. A. Strel'nikov, “Konfiskaciâ za ‘fejki’ — novaâ repressivnaâ norma v Rossii” [Confiscation for “Fakes” — A New Repressive Norm in Russia], *Deutsche Welle*, January 31, 2024, available at: [www.dw.com](http://www.dw.com).

25. T. Batyrov, “Issledovateli soobšili o vozvrašenii v Rossiû bol'she 15% relokantov” [Researchers Reported the Return to Russia of More Than 15% of Relocants], *Forbes*, October 25, 2023, available at: [www.forbes.ru](http://www.forbes.ru).

26. I. Zhandarova and E. Svinova, “Relokanty terâtû zarabotok i vozvrašaûtsâ v Rossiû” [Relocants Lose Their Earnings and Return to Russia], *Rossijskaâ Gazeta*, February 24, 2024, available at: <https://rg.ru>.

27. “Russians Who Fled Abroad Return in Boost for Putin's War Economy”, *Bloomberg*, May 2, 2024, available at: [www.bloomberg.com](http://www.bloomberg.com).

28. V. Inozemtsev, “Ždêt li Rossiû novaâ mobilizaciâ?” [Will Russia Face a New Mobilization?], *Riddle Russia*, April 11, 2024, available at: <https://ridl.io>.

through the Mexican border<sup>29</sup> and will not be able to travel internationally until their immigration cases are duly processed, which may take years, especially if the Republicans perform well in the upcoming November elections).

However, coping with the initial shock does not mean that Russians are no longer leaving the country. On the one hand, there is a prevailing anxiety in society due to the ongoing war and the tightening of internal repressions, which maintains the potential for a reversal of the trend. On the other hand, relatives of those who are establishing themselves abroad, who did not leave immediately with them, are now leaving the country, as are people aware of the growing obstacles to their professional activity in Russia, and members of new groups suffering from discrimination, the number of whom will only increase under Putin's rule. One way or another, we consider the ongoing migration to be “systaltic” – sometimes expanding, sometimes contracting – and this, apparently, will remain its basic feature for years, distinguishing it from earlier phenomena of the kind. Russia, striving to confront the entire world, nevertheless maintains open migration ties with it, something that is inherent in our times to many other non-Western countries.

Therefore, we believe that “systaltic” Russian migration will remain one of the most important features of the socio-political landscape of the country at least until the early 2030s, unless some tectonic changes occur in the structures of state power. By that time, if the dynamics of migration retain their current mode, many of those who intend to return or live “in two houses” will implement this strategy, and those who really intend to emigrate will adjust their life strategies to new countries of residence.

In addition, it is worth noting that, compared to the emigration of the 1920s, 1970s and 1990s, the destinations that Russians are going to have greatly diversified. The “first wave” of emigration was almost entirely “European”: by 1922-1923, more than 80% of those who had fled settled in Western Europe – from Paris to Prague and from Berlin to Riga.<sup>30</sup> Soon thereafter, the “transit bases” in Istanbul and Belgrade became almost empty, the Russian colonies in Dalian and Shanghai became less numerous, and no more than 5% of those who had left Russia settled either in the United States or in Latin American countries. At the same time, most of the emigrants rarely changed their chosen place of stay, being restrained by financial conditions. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the main destinations for departure were Israel, Germany, and the US – and, to a much lesser extent, some countries of the European Union. In both cases, the main

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29. M. Dul'neva, “Štatnye situacii. Rossiâne stali massovo prosit' ubežiše v SŠA” [State Situations. Russians Began to Massively Request Asylum in the United States], *The Insider*, November 10, 2023, available at: <https://theins.ru>.

30. Š. Ficpatrik, “Kak žili v Evrope russkie èmigranty pervoj volny” [How Russian Emigrants of the First Wave Lived in Europe], *Snob*, October 23, 2023, available at: <https://snob.ru>.

reasons for choosing the new country of residence (if we do not count the repatriation factor) were either the opportunity to earn money or the prospect of living on social welfare. In other words, the goal was either to increase or to secure one's income. In modern conditions, such a goal seems at least secondary: many relocants either possess significant assets or can work remotely from any place in the world; therefore, minimizing current expenses becomes more important than maximizing income, which multiplies the options. Relocation in the last decade (and especially during wartime) has been very diversified in this regard: while just over a quarter of relocants settled in the EU and UK, about two-thirds of all those who fled the country in 2022 ended up in former Soviet republics, Turkey, Serbia and Montenegro, while 10 to 15% went to the UAE and countries of Southeast Asia: Thailand, Indonesia and even Vietnam and Cambodia.<sup>31</sup>

However, we believe that it is precisely this diversity that emphasizes the difference between relocants and emigrants. The first is people leaving the country without a clear strategy for further action. This group can be divided into two categories. On the one hand, this is a continuation of the migration of the 2000s and 2010s, when it became popular among Russians to buy real estate abroad or to spend a large part of their time outside the country (primarily in, let's say, resort locations). Given the recent uncertainty, such relocation has increased – primarily towards Southeast Asia, Turkey and the UAE. On the other hand, there are those who left in the panic of the first days of the war, without a serious intention to do so and in the hope of staying abroad for several months to around a year (the main destinations for this kind of departure were the former Soviet republics, Turkey and Montenegro). Among these people, there is no clear notion of their future plans; some want to move further to Europe or America, some are ready to integrate into local societies, and some intend to return (and are already returning) at the first opportunity. The second group consists of those who have firmly decided to leave Russia forever or until serious political changes in their homeland happen; these people almost never go to Asia and, to a small extent, to the UAE; if they stay in the countries of the former USSR, Turkey or Montenegro, they perceive these locations as temporary – as a springboard for moving to Europe. This difference seems to be extremely important since, if there is one way in which the Russian relocation of the 2020s resembles the emigration of the 1920s, it is in the fact that full integration is considered by our compatriots as a real option only in Europe (or, more broadly, in the West).

All these circumstances are important for analysis because it is clear that the Russians who left the country are relatively free to choose a place of relocation, and the EU countries became home to some of them not so much

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31. D. Kasânčuk, "Skol'ko rossiân v 2022 godu uehalo iz strany i ne vernulos" [How Many Russians Left the Country in 2022 and Did Not Return?], *The Bell*, December 30, 2022, available at: <https://thebell.io>.

because of their own policy but due to developed custom: in the pre-war years, Russians liked to visit Europe; they purchased (and continue to acquire) real estate in EU member states; many of those now leaving share European values and the European way of life. Thus the influx of Russians to Europe continues. We believe that the Europeans should not try to prevent this influx; on the one hand, for purely economic reasons, since the relocants can become a serious driver of economic development (more on that below), and, on the other hand, because it would lead to Russians' becoming disappointed with a "collective West" that fails to make a distinction between ordinary citizens who were not involved in Putin's crimes and Russia's regime itself.

We conclude this section by arguing that the current outward migration from Russia represents the largest exodus of highly qualified and entrepreneurial people sharing Western values and brought up in the European cultural tradition that has happened in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – and that this process should be taken seriously by the Europeans.



## Some distinctive features of the Russian relocants

In recent years, both Russian and European experts have conducted many studies on those who have left Russia, examining their communities with varying degrees of depth. The most prominent and indisputable conclusion drawn from the available analyses is the observation (though quite obvious) of a disparity between recent relocants and the average Russian, which is evident in their background, age, income, education, willingness for risk-taking and entrepreneurship, and values and habits.

We have previously discussed the most apparent features — gender and age. It bears repeating that, over the past decade, the emigrant community has become increasingly dominated by younger males. While there might be a temptation to attribute this trend to wartime circumstances and fears of mobilization, prompting primarily young men to flee, such assumptions remain unconfirmed. A study commissioned by CASE indicates that the deviation in this trend occurred immediately after 2013 and not in 2022.<sup>32</sup> The relocants tend to be predominantly urban dwellers, originating in particular from cities with populations exceeding one million. Surveys, albeit potentially not fully representative, suggest that up to 70% of those leaving the Russian Federation originate from these cities,<sup>33</sup> despite the fact that only 26% of the total Russian population live in such agglomerations.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, at least half of the relocants had previously moved from one place to another within Russia, most often from smaller cities to larger ones or from regions such as Siberia, the Volga region and the Urals to the major cities of central Russia. These features indicate both a high degree of social and spatial mobility and adaptability, as well as a willingness to rely on one's own capabilities and a long-term outlook in planning life strategies.

Moreover, the Russian relocants differ from most of those who still live in the country in terms of their economic well-being and professional trajectories. Six months after relocation, no more than 5% of relocants reported facing financial hardship, with 40% still possessing savings.<sup>35</sup>

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32. Survey of Russian emigrants in European countries (Germany, France, Cyprus, Poland), *op. cit.*

33. M. Kiseleva and V. Safronova, “Novye rossijskie èmigranty. Kto oni, skol’ko ih i kuda uehali?” [New Russian Emigrants. Who Are They, How Many of Them Are There and Where Did They Go?], *Russkaâ služba BBC*, May 25, 2023, available at: [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com).

34. A. Kurilova and V. Mišina, “Perepis’ naseleniâ vyâvila četyre novyh goroda-millionnika”, *Vedomosti*, May 30, 2022, available at: [www.vedomosti.ru](http://www.vedomosti.ru).

35. K. Babič, “‘Ni straha, ni nadeždy’: počemu rossiâne vozvrašâtsâ iz relokacii” [“Neither Fear nor Hope”: Why Russians Are Returning From Relocation], *OpenDemocracy*, June 16, 2023, available at: [www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net).

In comparison, more than half of Russian citizens claim to have no savings at all, and only up to 12% could sustain themselves for up to a year living in their current conditions,<sup>36</sup> without even reflecting on moving to another country. According to the study commissioned by CASE, the majority of relocants not only possess substantial financial reserves but also earn high incomes, well surpassing the standards of an average Russian. More than 60% of respondents reported monthly incomes exceeding €3,000, placing them within the upper middle class across all relocation destinations. Many departing Russians end up either as highly paid professionals in cutting-edge sectors — with 28% reporting employment in information technology and another 18% in financial institutions, universities, and scientific or expert organizations — or as self-employed individuals or owners of private enterprises. This trend is hardly surprising, given that over 81% of relocants hold higher-education degrees, including 10% with academic qualifications.<sup>37</sup> In comparison, in Russia, only around 31% of adults possess higher education qualifications,<sup>38</sup> with approximately 60% of them being women — a demographic noticeably underrepresented among emigrants. Therefore, when adjusted for gender distribution, the proportion of relocants with higher education is three times higher than the Russian average. An indirect affirmation of the significance of relocants to the domestic economy is the increasing shortage of skilled labor in Russia, a challenge recognized by most senior officials.<sup>39</sup>

The Russians who have left also differ in their value system from those who decided to stay. They are much less religious, aligning more with the general sentiments of Europeans; they find it much easier to engage in collective, volunteer and non-profit projects; they display significant empathy — including towards Ukrainians who have become victims of Russian aggression — and are more often inclined to respect other ethnic groups and cultures, as well as showing a willingness to learn the languages of their new countries of residence, regardless of how long they intend to stay there.<sup>40</sup>

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36. V. Sergeev, “V Rossii uveličivaetsâ dolâ graždan bez sbereženij” [The Share of Citizens Without Savings Is Increasing in Russia], *Nezavisimââ gazeta*, March 4, 2024, available at: [www.ng.ru](http://www.ng.ru); “Čislo rossiân, sposobnyh prožit' na nakopleniâ, vyro-slo za tri goda” [The Number of Russians Able to Live on Savings Has Increased Over Three Years], *RIA "Novosti"*, April 18, 2024, available at: <https://ria.ru>.

37. Survey of Russian emigrants in European countries (Germany, France, Cyprus, Poland), *op. cit.*

38. E. Mamonova, “Količestvo rossiân s vysšim obrazovaniem prevysilo 31 procent” [The Number of Russians With Higher Education Exceeded 31 Percent], *Rossijskaâ Gazeta*, June 14, 2021, available at: <https://rg.ru>.

39. “Glavnaâ problema rossijskoj èkonomiki — kadrovyj golod” [The Main Problem of the Russian Economy Is Staff Starvation], *Finmarket*, November 10, 2023, available at: [www.finmarket.ru](http://www.finmarket.ru).

40. N. Kostenko, M. Zavadskââ, È. Kamalov and I. Sergeeva, “Rossijskaâ rizoma: Social'nyj portret novoj èmigracii” [Russian Rhizome: Social Portrait of the New Emigration], *Re.Russia*, January 11, 2023, available at: <https://re-russia.net>.

A crucial litmus test is their attitude towards Ukraine: among those who left after the onset of full-scale war, 64% of respondents support Ukraine in the ongoing conflict, compared to just over 40% among those who left Russia prior to 2013. Additionally, the latest relocants are twice as likely to express unequivocal support for Ukraine compared to people who have not lived in Russia for more than 10 years.<sup>41</sup>

In general, relocants are much more politicized than the earlier emigrants. Before 2013, the proportion of those who left the country for economic and personal reasons exceeded by approximately three times the share motivated by political developments and rejection of Putin's aggressiveness. However, from 2014 to 2021, these groups turned out to be almost equal in numbers, and since 2022, the latter exceeds the former by more than 2.5 times.<sup>42</sup> Appreciating the political freedoms championed by Western societies, relocants appear more tolerant of the new reality and are less likely to expect host societies to cater to their interests (almost 80% agree that any sovereign nation-state has the right to limit the number of immigrants it accepts) and are generally more prepared to integrate into them. Numerous studies indicate that friction between relocants and the local population is significantly lower than the level of mutual distrust, misunderstanding (and sometimes hostility) between people belonging to different waves of Russian emigration. However, it is essential to note that 56% of those who left before 2013 already enjoy European citizenship and cannot be assessed in the same light as new arrivals. This implies that the relocants from Russia are not only economically beneficial but also socially appropriate for European societies.

Having fled dictatorship, Russians realize the real value of freedom; 80% of respondents believe that a successful society cannot be built without a democratic foundation and that people should not rely on the government but must earn the money they need to live through hard work, innovation and entrepreneurship. Atop of this, about 70% of the relocants are convinced that every people has the right to its own sovereign nation-state.<sup>43</sup> Respect for others' values and adherence to local legal regimes are points that some authors have repeatedly highlighted for the European audience.<sup>44</sup>

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41. Survey of Russian emigrants in European countries (Germany, France, Cyprus, Poland), *op. cit.*

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*

44. D. Gudkov and V. Inosemtsev, "Sechs Dinge, die Europas Politiker über die ausgewanderten Russen wissen sollten" [Six Things Europe's Politicians Should Know about Emigrant Russians], *Der Spiegel*, February 6, 2023, available at: <https://www.spiegel.de>.

# The state of the Russian diaspora(s)

Assessing the condition of Russian relocants two and a half years after the start of the war and the first wave of the dramatic exodus from Russia, one should pay attention, on one hand, to their subjective feelings, political preferences and self-identification and, on the other, to their economic situation, employment and positioning in host countries.

When it comes to their self-identification and self-perception, the Russians still – this has not changed much over time – define themselves as part of some Russian community (either as Russian relocants, as part of an entire Russian society, as belonging to some “future Russia”, or as part of their family who either remains in Russia or has already left it). More than 80% see their exit from Russia as a forced and temporary move, and more than 70% maintain regular contact with colleagues and relatives still living in Russia, obtaining most of their information from Russian or Russian-speaking media.<sup>45</sup> However, when it comes to Russian relocants in Europe, as indicated by the results of the CASE research, only half of them express a desire to return to their home country; 11% say they will do this in any case, and 37% if “the situation has changed” (which may include various factors, from the absence of the danger of mobilization and the end of the war to the complete dismantling of Putin’s regime). Moreover, what seems equally important to us when asked if they would like to obtain citizenship in their new country of residence, up to 75% of relocants respond positively, which suggests a re-evaluation of their desire to return to Russia in the medium term (which highlights again that this applies only to EU countries, and suggests that the majority of returns to Russia in 2023-2024 originated from somewhere else – primarily from the post-Soviet countries).<sup>46</sup>

As far as their economic involvement and employment are concerned, some significant changes have occurred over recent years. At the time of their departure, just under half of the Russian relocants were employed by companies or organizations based in Russia, but gradually – due to actions undertaken by the Russian authorities and corporate leadership gradually limiting the possibility of remote work from abroad,<sup>47</sup> receiving

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45. E. Kamalov, “Poltora goda spustâ: progress i bar’ery v integracii rossijskikh èmigrantov” [One and a Half Years Later: Progress and Barriers in the Integration of Russian Emigrants], *op. cit.*

46. Survey of Russian emigrants in European countries (Germany, France, Cyprus, Poland), *op. cit.*

47. E. Lepehina, “Kakie rossijskie kompanii vveli ograničeniâ na rabotu iz-za granicy” [Which Russian Companies Have Imposed Restrictions on Work From Abroad], *RTVi*, November 28, 2023, available at: <https://rtvi.com>.

remuneration from Russia, and the emergence of new opportunities – this proportion decreased to 13% by mid-2023,<sup>48</sup> and probably does not exceed 10% now. It should be noted, however, that Russian relocants – representing affluent segments of the country's population – have provided significant amounts of money flowing into their new countries of residence.<sup>49</sup> In Turkey alone, Russians purchased over 27,000 properties in 2022-2023<sup>50</sup> (they have been also active in the UAE, Israel, Indonesia, and Serbia). Additionally, currency inflows into destination countries are now observed not only from Russia; relocants are starting international businesses in many parts of the world, including high-tech companies. Finally, it should be noted that they are starting local companies in their new countries of residence or finding employment there.

This aspect of the lives and activities of relocants is of the greatest interest to us. The influx of Russians in 2022 altered the economic dynamics of many destination countries. In Armenia, where up to 110,000 Russians moved in 2022,<sup>51</sup> the GDP growth rate reached 12.6% and 8.7% in 2022-2023, respectively; in Georgia 10.4% and 7.0%; in Kyrgyzstan 7.0% and 6.2%<sup>52</sup> (to understand the significance of the Russian factor, one needs to consider that, in mid-2021, the World Bank forecasted GDP growth in these countries at 4.3%, 5.0%, and 3.3%, respectively).<sup>53</sup> The arrival of the Russians caused these countries' currencies to appreciate by between 11 and 23% against the US dollar<sup>54</sup> and spurred a boom in housing construction and the services sector, where demands began to be made that the local population had rarely expressed previously. Seizing on

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48. E. Gabdullina, "Srednââ temperatura po zagranice" [Average Temperature Abroad], *Kommersant*, January 23, 2024, available at: [www.kommersant.ru](http://www.kommersant.ru).

49. In the first half of the year about \$14 billion was withdrawn, against the background of mobilization – about \$10 billion more in "Iz Rossii vyveli za rubež 11% VVP v 2022 godu" [11 GDP in 2022 was withdrawn from Russia], *Pravo.ru*, August 26, 2022 <https://pravo.ru>; "Rossiâne zabrali iz bankov počti 500 mlrd. rublej na fone mo-bilizacii" [Russians Took Almost 500 Billion Rubles Out of Banks Amid Mobilization], *RBK*, October 20, 2022, available at: [www.rbc.ru](http://www.rbc.ru).

50. See the data for 2022 in G. Trušin, "Rossiâne v pervye stali liderami po pokupke žil'â v Turcii" [Russians for the First Time Became Leaders in Buying Housing in Turkey], *RBK*, January 17, 2023, available at: <https://realty.rbc.ru>; For 2023, see G. Trušin and S. Velevič, "Rossiâne stali liderami sredi inost-rannyh pokupatelej žil'â v Turcii" [Russians Halved Their Interest in Housing in Turkey, but Retained Leadership], *RBK*, April 19, 2024, available at: <https://realty.rbc.ru>.

51. "Bolee 100 tysâč rossiân pereehali v Armeniû v godu" [More Than 100,000 Russians Moved to Armenia in a Year], *TASS*, March 16, 2023, available at: <https://tass.ru>.

52. Data on Armenia: K. Melikân, "VVP Armenii za 2023 god zamedlilsâ v roste do 8,7%" [Armenia's GDP Growth for 2023 Slowed to 8.7%], *Finport Armenia*, February 21, 2024, available at: <https://finport.am>; for Georgia: "Rost VVP Gruzii v 2023 godu sostavil procentov" [Georgia's GDP Growth in 2023 Was 7%], *Èho Kavkaza*, January 31, 2024, available at: [www.ekhokavkaza.com](http://www.ekhokavkaza.com); on Kyrgyzstan for 2022: "VVP Kirgizii v 2022 godu vyros na 7%" [Kyrgyzstan's GDP in 2022 Grew by 7%], *Interfaks*, March 24, 2023, available at: [www.interfax.ru](http://www.interfax.ru); for 2023: "VVP Kyrgyzstana v 2023 godu vyros na 6,2%" [Kyrgyzstan's GDP in 2023 grew by 6.2%], *Sin'hua*, January 16, 2024, available at: <https://russian.news.cn>.

53. "Evropa i Central'naâ Aziâ, Iûn' 2021 goda" [Europe and Central Asia, June 2021], World Bank, June 8, 2021, available at: <https://thedocs.worldbank.org>.

54. "Russia's War Turns Neighboring Currencies into World's Best", *Bloomberg*, December 21, 2022, available at: [www.bloomberg.com](http://www.bloomberg.com).

these new trends, the authorities of several post-Soviet countries – for example, Armenia – began creating favorable conditions for relocants, hoping to retain them in the country and encouraging them to open local businesses. However, judging from the feedback from many Russians who found themselves in former Soviet republics, most of them do not perceive these countries as the final destination of their journeys.

Unlike the countries of the Russian “near-abroad”, most EU member states did not express enthusiasm about Russian emigration. In Europe, a debate emerged about banning Russians from purchasing real estate (as of the beginning of 2022, Russian citizens owned about 1 million apartments and houses in EU countries, the UK, and Switzerland, and the number of valid residence permits and visas at that time approached 2 million);<sup>55</sup> numerous (sometimes informal) restrictions were imposed on opening bank accounts; processing payments from Russia and from Russian citizens residing in other countries was hindered; and opening and maintaining accounts in cryptocurrency also became problematic. As a result, the number of applications for long-term visas, residence permits and political asylum from Russians who want to regularize their status is increasing much faster than the number of satisfied petitions (in 2021, 82,900 residence permits were issued to Russian citizens in the EU, in 2022 more than 91,000,<sup>56</sup> and in 2023, their number could increase by 20-30%) – but even at these rates, the process could take several more years, until (or if) all potentially interested parties finally reach the EU.

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55. Number of people living in Europe with Russian citizenship in 2021, by country, Statista, May 2022 available at: [www.statista.com](https://www.statista.com); Press-sluzhba Predstavitel'stva ES v Rossii, “Putešestviâ i obrazovanie” [Travel and Education], Predstavitel'stvo ES v Rossii, November 24, 2022, available at: <https://www.eeas.europa.eu>.

56. P. Laakso, “V 2022 godu 24 iz 27 stran ES vydali rossiânám svyše 90 tysâč pervičnyh VNŽ” [In 2022, 24 out of 27 EU Countries Issued over 90,000 Primary Residence Permits to Russians], *VC.ru*, July 25, 2023, available at: <https://vc.ru>.

# Russian diasporas in EU member states: similarity and differences

A study conducted by the University of Nicosia on behalf of CASE differs from most other contemporary surveys of Russian relocants because it probably pioneers the insights into the diasporas that have emerged in “old” Europe – in Germany and France; in “new” Europe – e.g., Poland; and in Cyprus, which has long been one of the noticeable destination countries for Russians located outside the former USSR. It also allows for a comparison of attitudes and objective conditions of those who left Russia before 2013, between 2014 and 2021, and in 2022 and later, both overall and for each of these countries.

In general, it should be acknowledged that both the sentiments and status of the Russians who left their homeland after 2014 share significant similarities across most European countries included in our sample (we presumed, for example, that the differences between Poland and Germany would be much greater). In all of these countries, the relocants primarily identify themselves as “ethnic Russians” or “Russians” (taken together, these responses are twice as common as identification as “residents of the host country”), even though 93% of respondents have temporary or permanent residence permits or even dual citizenship. Everywhere, they are loyal to the values and laws of the local societies, make efforts to integrate, and strive to earn a living in the host countries (overall, only 9% of respondents in the sample claim that their main income comes from Russia, and about 10% give an indefinite answer or refuse to comment). However, there are some differences, with France and Cyprus being at opposite poles.<sup>57</sup>

The differences between these cases cannot be deemed fundamental, but they provide some food for thought. Some are both easily explainable (for example, among those driven by the desire to preserve their gender identity, relocation to free and secular France is 2.5 times more common than to conservative and Orthodox Cyprus) and understandable (for example, France has the highest material inequality among relocants, with a record number of Russians with incomes below €3,000 per month and above €10,000 per month (this means, probably, that both those who intend to live on social

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57. Survey of Russian emigrants in European countries (Germany, France, Cyprus, Poland), *op. cit.*

welfare and those who have no financial problems choose France), while in Cyprus, the proportion of those earning between €3,000 and €7,000 per month is one and a half times higher than the average across all considered countries).<sup>58</sup> At the same time, there are differences that would not appear obvious and expected without detailed investigation.

First and foremost, it's worth noting that those who relocated to France are less likely than those in other countries to cite disagreement with Putin's aggression against Ukraine or any other political reasons being the main motivation for leaving Russia (this proportion is more than a third lower than in Cyprus); instead, nearly three times as many respondents cited "personal reasons" as the basis for their move. The Russian diaspora in France appears to be the most tolerant towards the current situation in Russia; those who primarily identify themselves either as ethnic Russian or as Russian citizens are at least a third more numerous here than among those living in other EU countries. Nearly a fifth of the relocants adhere to the "typical" Russian attitude that both sides – Ukraine as well as Russia – are to blame in the current conflict; here, the largest proportion of the relocants "fully" or "partially" support Vladimir Putin's policies (18% compared to 5% in Cyprus); accordingly, the smallest proportion condemn them (51% compared to Cyprus's 77%). Unsurprisingly, in France, the difference in proportions between those who support Ukraine and those who remain on Russia's side is relatively small – only 32% compared to 43% in Poland, 48% in Germany, and 56% in Cyprus. All of this contributes to a somewhat unexpectedly lukewarm attitude of current Russian relocants towards France as the host country: only 24% of those who moved there are unwilling to return to Russia, compared to an average figure of 36% across the other three countries surveyed.<sup>59</sup>

We won't overburden our readers by continuing to compare individual country cases. However, our study does not address another important issue: the scale of Russian relocation. Today, hundreds of thousands of Russians live in many European countries without being their citizens, but in all of them, the share of these relocants does not exceed 1% of the total population. Only in Cyprus, which stands out among other European countries in many respects for the Russians who have moved there in recent years, are they much more noticeable in terms of both numbers and economic influence. The Cypriot local authorities are trying to adapt the island's legislation to make their lives more comfortable; the taxes they pay contribute a hefty part of the country's budget revenue, and their participation in the country's economic and technological development is relatively significant. Therefore, we want to go beyond the survey data and present the current situation with the Russian diaspora in Cyprus as a special case.

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*



## The Cyprus case

Cyprus is arguably the most “russified” EU member state these days: the Russians’ share of the island’s population exceeds 6%,<sup>60</sup> and in major cities, it reaches up to 1/3.<sup>61</sup> Unlike most EU nations, Cyprus has been developing for decades as a semi-offshore tax jurisdiction, making itself attractive for international businesses. Over the past 20 years, it has also become a major center for IT entrepreneurship. Since the mid-2010s, both Russians and Belarusians have been relocating major internet companies there, which has also attracted their skillful employees. From 2016 to 2022, the number of Russians with Cypriot permanent residency permits increased by 4.6 times and of Belarusians by 3.8 times (with an increase of 63% and 76% in 2022 alone), resulting in Russians and Belarusians accounting for 26.4% of all valid residency permits.<sup>62</sup> It is beyond doubt that these proportions grew further in 2023. According to Cypriot statistics, migrants from Russia and Belarus are employed in the most advanced sectors of the local economy. For example, in the Information and Communication sector, which includes “Computer programming, consultancy and related activities” and “Information service activities”, 42% of all Russians and 48% of all Belarusians are employed, making them the highest-paid ethnic groups in the island (according to 2022 data, their average salary reached €5,482 and €5,278 per month, respectively, exceeding the average Cypriot remuneration by almost 2.5 times)<sup>63</sup>. The IT sector has become one of the drivers of the Cypriot economy in recent years; its share of exports of goods and services from the island rose from 8.4% in 2012 to over 19% in 2023. As of January 1, 2024, Russians and Belarusians have registered up to 10,500 companies in the country, where they own more than 50% of the capital.<sup>64</sup> It is worth noting that developments over the past two years indicate an extremely important trend: if Cyprus was previously a jurisdiction where Russians registered companies, even without intending to do business in the country but only for accumulating profits and dividends received in Russia, many of them have now left the island (including FixPrice and United Medical Group, which moved to Kazakhstan, and Sbermarket, TCS Group Holding, and Etalon Group, which became incorporated in Russia’s offshore zones),<sup>65</sup> while companies in the IT sector that are actually operating in the country are becoming new

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60. E. Varvitsioti, “Cyprus Counts Costs of Weaker Russia Ties after Kremlin’s Invasion of Ukraine”, *Financial Times*, May 24, 2022, available at: [www.ft.com](http://www.ft.com).

61. H. Smith, “Cyprus: Displaced Ukrainians Adjust to Life on Russia-friendly Island”, *The Guardian*, March 23, 2022, available at: [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com).

62. These data were obtained upon request from the Cyprus Statistical Service ([www.cystat.gov.cy](http://www.cystat.gov.cy)) and are available to the authors.

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Ibid.*

65. “Krupnye rossijskie kompanii pokidaút Kipr” [Large Russian Companies Are Leaving Cyprus], *Uspešnyj biznes*, January 11, 2024, available at: <https://sb-cyprus.com>.

drivers for growth, helping to mitigate the collapse in tourism revenue from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine following the start of the war and the suspension of flights by both European and national airlines from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine to all these countries.

The success of Cyprus in recent years, in our view, could be attributed to several factors. First, starting from the early 2000s, the island's authorities consistently implemented a policy of increasing transparency, focusing not on selling "golden passports" (this program was halted in 2020, and the passports of several Russians, who became targets for European sanctions after the start of the war, were revoked),<sup>66</sup> but on facilitating the immigration of professionals willing to develop their own businesses on the island. Secondly, the government prioritized key business sectors: fintech, gaming, video content production, CRM systems, cryptocurrency projects, and software development, all benefiting from favorable tax conditions. For example, a special tax regime called IP Box was introduced with a rate of 2.5% of income for companies earning profits from software rights.<sup>67</sup> Thirdly, a work visa can be obtained based on a company's willingness to hire a foreigner in just three weeks, valid for one year with the possibility of extension<sup>68</sup> – a revolutionary experience within the EU, where not even every residence permit allows employment. Additionally, a new citizenship law provides an accelerated path to citizenship in just four years for those permanently residing on the island and employed in high-tech sectors of the economy.<sup>69</sup> Essentially, Cyprus, in recent years, has been implementing a system that encourages the relocation of professionals capable of earning through their own projects, creating job opportunities, including for local people, contributing taxes to the budget, and generating additional demand for goods and services produced by the islanders. This model is yielding results: in 2022, the country's GDP rose by 5.1%<sup>70</sup> and in 2023 by 2.5%<sup>71</sup> (higher than the Eurozone averages for these years of 3.4% and 0.4%, respectively).<sup>72</sup> In our view, this is an optimal strategy for leveraging the human capital of Russian relocants.

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66. "Cyprus to Revoke Passports of Four Sanctioned Russians", Reuters, April 7, 2022, available at: [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com).

67. A. Skrynnikova, "V Cyprus est' rus': kak rossiâne pereezžaût na Kipr" ["Cyprus Has RUS": How Russians Move to Cyprus], *Forbes Russia*, May 5, 2022, available at: [www.forbes.ru](http://www.forbes.ru).

68. A. Pravdin, "Na Kipre uprošeno polučenie graždanstva inostrannymi specialistami" [Cyprus Simplified Obtaining Citizenship by Foreign Specialists], *Cyprus butterfly*, December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023, available at: <https://cyprusbutterfly.com>.

69. *Ibid.*

70. GDP Growth (annual %) – Cyprus, World Bank, available at: [www.data.worldbank.org](http://www.data.worldbank.org).

71. Growth Rate: 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter of 2023 for the Cypriot economy, Cyprus' Finance Ministry, February 14, 2024, available at: [www.mof.gov.cy](http://www.mof.gov.cy).

72. GDP stable and employment up by 0.3% in the Euro area, Eurostat, March 8, 2024, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu>.

# Policy recommendations

The main features of the current Russian relocation allow us to expand and refine the propositions that we expressed in our article a year and a half ago.

We believe that EU member states countries should treat Russian relocants as, on the one hand, an important economic and social resource for European societies; and, on the other hand, as an effective tool for weakening an aggressive Russia, more in terms of economics than politics. Both of these factors highlight the desirability of integrating Russian migrants into European societies rather than rejecting or sidelining them.

Within this approach, it seems logical to soften the requirements that Russian relocants are facing for obtaining documents allowing them to permanently reside in the EU. In our view, the main objective of such a move is to encourage relocation to Europe by Russians with the knowledge and skills necessary for running their own businesses or working in high-skilled positions. This should not imply (as often happens) that people must secure employment in advance; a kind of “probationary period” could be secured during which the capabilities of relocants can be assessed. In other words, those who left Russia after the start of the war in Ukraine and are now staying outside the EU could be given priority opportunities to obtain a yearly resident card upon confirming their knowledge of one of the main European languages, a higher-education certificate, work experience in their field, and entrepreneurial activity, along with confirmation that they have a certain amount of funds considered sufficient for living in the country of residence (evidence of real estate or liquid assets in Russia owned by them could serve as an analog). At the same time, the main conditions for the renewal of residency documents should be, on the one hand, employment or creation of some functioning business, as well as confirmation of any income-generating activity that does not require the host country to provide the relocants with social benefits; and, on the other hand, proof of staying more than 3/4 of the time in the country issuing the residence permit, as well as a valid contract for the purchase or lease of housing there. Such measures could affect Russians who have already left Russia and do not wish to return: by the most modest estimates, within several months, no fewer than 300,000 applications could be submitted, which would serve as a signal to many of those remaining in Russia. European embassies in Moscow could shift their focus from issuing visas to accepting applications for longer stays; this would reduce the chances of unwanted Russians entering, as visa issuance remains quite extensive, and candidate checks are not stringent enough.

The same approaches should be extended to the Russians who are already in the EU, using previously issued visas; if they can demonstrate sufficient financial resources for living in Europe, disclose sources of income, and waive social benefits, as well as commit to staying in the issuing country for more than 3/4 of the visa's duration, they could also obtain residency rights. Of course, holders of such documents should not encounter the usual difficulties faced by today's relocants when opening bank accounts, renting property, finding employment, etc. Essentially, it is proposed that a broad program of "economic migration" from Russia should be developed.

What can such a program achieve? In our view, quite a lot.

First of all, it would provide European countries, especially those with slow economic growth, with additional financial and labor resources. It is unlikely that a large number of relocants would find jobs in European countries immediately, which means they would need to bring in no less than €20,000 to €35,000 annually from abroad, thus bringing tens of billions of euros to Europe. (The authorities can set ceilings on both the balances of relocants' accounts and their transactions to protect against money laundering and only allow rental or property purchases with the involvement of notaries who could control the targeted use of funds transferred for these purposes). Several hundred thousand Russians with an inclination for entrepreneurship (which we noted earlier) could provide an additional boost to European economies – not as massive as observed in post-Soviet countries, but still considerable.

Furthermore, Europeans would gain a unique kind of diaspora, who, while remaining loyal to the society of their homeland, would have no reverence for its authorities (one can easily imagine the attitude of those fleeing dictatorship towards Vladimir Putin's call to "integrate but not assimilate" in Europe; we believe it would differ greatly from the reaction to a similar call directed at Turks living in Germany, recently voiced by Recep Tayyip Erdogan),<sup>73</sup> or towards any "traditional" institutions (the vast majority of the relocants do not support the social and political "doctrine" of the Russian Orthodox Church), making it an exception to most other ethnic diasporas. Facing representatives of previous waves of Russian emigration, many of whom today hail the Kremlin's nationalist policies,<sup>74</sup> the relocants would become ambassadors of European values in Russian-speaking circles, and they themselves would integrate into host societies much faster than their predecessors.

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73. "Erdogan Irks Austria with anti-assimilation Speech", Reuters, June 19, 2014, available at: [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com).

74. V. Shevchenko, "Ukraine War: Russians in Germany Split over Putin's Invasion", BBC, May 13, 2023, available at: [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com).

Finally, in the longer term, the integration of new Russian relocants and their transformation into a new wave of emigration could disrupt the unity between Russia and the Russians, which has formed in the European consciousness over the past thirty years, when Europe received a “copy” of Russian society each time: in the early 1990s, relatively poor but educated individuals fleeing the crisis in their country, and, in the 2000s and partly in the 2010s, those who got wealthy during the Putin boom and corresponded to the image of a prosperous Russia, “obeying some rules”. If the relocants are accepted, Europeans have a chance to see behind the facade of the new dictatorship to recognize that there is a Russia of people who know how to do business, who are well educated, have a broad outlook, and share liberal values – not in the contemporary leftist guise, but in that classical understanding, which is gradually being forgotten in modern Western societies. These people would become a living reminder for several decades that Russia and Putin are different entities and that, in fighting Putin, there is no need to alienate Russia and its people because of the deeds of their ruler.

Here we arrive at the second topic, no less important than the first.

For several decades, Western politicians – explicitly or implicitly – have had two prejudices about Russia and its positioning *vis-à-vis* the West. The first was based on the principle of “Wandel durch Handel”: change through trade and the development of economic ties, which has been one of the basic foundations of German foreign policy towards Russia since the Soviet era.<sup>75</sup> This approach is now probably practically dead; even Daniel Treisman, a progressive economist who some time ago insisted that “Russia is a normal country”<sup>76</sup> has switched to condemning Vladimir Putin as a “spin dictator”.<sup>77</sup> The second prejudice assessed everything coming from Russia as a kind of “absolute evil”, talking up the export of dirty money and corruption from the country, insisting that the rule of law would not prevail in Russia as long as Russian oligarchs settled disputes among themselves in the High Court of London, and pointing to bribe-takers comfortably spending the rest of their lives on the Côte d’Azur.<sup>78</sup> This dogma is also going out of fashion as Europeans realize that repatriating Russian money back from Europe to Russia only helps Vladimir Putin keep the economy afloat and gives him a chance to wage war in Ukraine almost indefinitely.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, today the

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75. E. Bahr, “Wandel durch Annäherung’: Rede in der Evangelischen Akademie Tutzing”, 1000 Dokumente, July 15, 1963, available at: [www.1000dokumente.de](http://www.1000dokumente.de).

76. A. Shleifer and D. Treisman, “A Normal Country: Russia After Communism”, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2005, available at: [www.aeaweb.org](http://www.aeaweb.org).

77. S. Guriev and D. Treisman, *Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022.

78. K. Dawisha, *Putin’s Cleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015.

79. D. Gudkov, “Evropejcy menâ sprašivaût: kogda u Putina den’gi zakončatsâ? S vašej politikoj – nikogda!” [Europeans Ask Me: When Will Putin Run Out of Money? With Your Policy – Never!], *Holod Media*, October 24, 2023, available at: <https://holod.media>.

strategy to undermine the Putin regime should include orchestrated “bleeding”: stimulating the outflow of qualified specialists and money from Russia, unrelated to the war, of Russian business.

All this seems particularly important right now, as political repression has reached a certain “plateau” but will surely intensify if the regime feels vulnerable in the war with Ukraine or requires new mobilization; when the Kremlin begins a deliberate assault on minority rights, which will inevitably become increasingly brutal; and when the rise of the “power oligarchy” will require additional pressure on businessmen and redistribution of property — in this case not only that controlled by the oligarchs, but also the property of small and local businesses. Opening up the “exit routes” for the Russian middle class, who understand that their activities will be unwanted in Russia or that they will not be able to survive in Putin’s fascist state for ideological and security reasons, would deliver a serious blow to the regime. It needs professionals who, as it believes, have no chance to escape. Currently, only the leaders of the government’s economic bloc are sounding the alarm about the increasing shortage of personnel, but Europeans can “open up” the Russian labor market in such a way that no migrants from Central Asia will replenish the losses. Providing the opportunity for relocation to small and medium-sized businesses and legalizing the transfer of funds originating from the legal sale of Russia-based assets into European jurisdictions would be a tremendous challenge for Russia. Back in 2022, there were people who, seeking to survive, ensured the stability of the Russian economy, restructuring the supply and sales chains, and launching “parallel import” schemes. Members of this stratum should also be offered a path to Europe — not as before, through “citizenship by investment”, but rather under the conditions outlined above, that is, upon their real, not fictitious, resettlement in countries issuing documents granting the right of residence, and through gradual integration into their economies without any use of the established European social security system.

To finalize our research, it is worth addressing a question often raised by experts and politicians: How important is it to preserve and support the Russian diaspora as a factor in the potential future political transformation of Russia?

To our mind, this task cannot be the main one shaping the European strategy regarding the Russian relocants, and for several reasons. First, as we have already noted, political emigrants constitute a tiny minority in the emerging Russian diaspora (unlike, for example, in the 1920s). Secondly, most expatriates left Russia not having lost some round of political struggle but consciously preferring not to get involved in it. Thirdly, as discussions among Russian expatriates themselves show, many consider regime change from within to be more likely than from outside. The Russian diaspora, if the regime collapses, could rather become a source of people involved in the

global economy and understanding the basics of how democratic institutions function, being able to form the backbone of a new public service. (This community is unlikely to provide Russia with new revolutionaries, as the Russian emigration of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries did.)

Summing up, we would like to reiterate: With the onset of Russia's war against Ukraine and the irreversible transformation of Putin's regime into a dictatorship, the Western world may get a unique opportunity to weaken its geopolitical adversary as well as to secure substantial economic benefits by welcoming Russian relocants and their capital. For quite a long time, the Russian diaspora in Europe has been shaped by the people who moved to the West primarily to secure their own comfort or to establish "reserve headquarters" for their families and money, but who were not inclined to integrate into their new societies and preferred to continue conducting business in or close to Russia. The current wave of newcomers, on the contrary, consists mainly of those who may be called "Russian Europeans", who have realized that their paths have diverged from Putin's Russia and who can and want to integrate into European societies, work for their prosperity, endorse European values, and, in the end, become Russian Europeans, without any quotation marks. The more numerous they are, in our view, the better it will be for both Europe and, ultimately, Russia, as this people will become instrumental in a future reconciliation between Europe and Russia, without which any hopes for peace in this century appear entirely illusory.

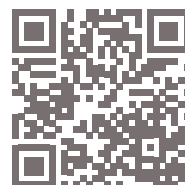
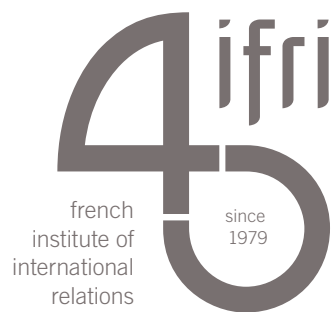
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