

A b s t r a c t s

Direct Connection? Russia's Ambivalent Friends

Roland Götz

“Everything for the Front, Everything for Victory” Russia's Economy at War

Russia recorded economic growth, full employment, and a rising standard of living in 2023 and 2024. The macroeconomic data gives the deceptive impression that the war against Ukraine has had no negative economic consequences. Only stubborn inflation points to difficulties. Since spring 2025, however, there have been increasing signs that the civilian economy is stagnating, as the arms industry absorbs labour and capital. The sanctions imposed on Russia are having an impact on the national economy and on Russia's material ability to wage war. If Russia's oil revenues fall, this effect will increase. However, economic pressure alone will not dissuade the regime from continuing its war of aggression against Ukraine.

Ilse Kreutzberg

Russia's Magnificent 20th Century History in Textbooks

Russia has new, standardised textbooks for history lessons in its schools. The presentation of certain periods of the 20th century, from the First World War and the October Revolution through Stalin's rule, the Great Patriotic War, the rise of the Soviet Union to world power, and the history of the Russian Federation up to the “Special Operation” against Ukraine, reflects the Putin regime's view of history. The authors tell a story of success and sing the praises of the strong state. Darker aspects of history, such as the mass terror of the Stalin era, are glossed over or ignored. Regarding the present, it is said that the “Special Operation” in Ukraine is a defensive struggle against fascism and a hostile West. The books are intended to serve patriotic mobilization. They are an expression of the ideologisation and militarisation of education in Russia.

Moritz Florin
Palimpsest of Protest
Tbilisi's Graffiti Landscape in Spring 2025

Since autumn 2024, Georgia's capital Tbilisi has been the scene of vehement protests against the policies of the ruling party Georgian Dream. The political conflicts manifest themselves not least in hundreds of graffiti texts on the walls of buildings. They are constantly subject to change and amendment, turned to their opposite meaning, painted over by order of the authorities, and put back up. The images and slogans reflect the main themes of the political and social debates taking place within the country: imperial oppression and national resistance, relations with Russia and Ukraine, geopolitical affinities and competing narratives of history. While the protest movement is committed to militant self-assertion, pro-government forces are propagating a peace based on alignment with Russia. In the palimpsest of graffiti, older, newer, and the most recent layers of Georgia's self-image become visible.

Nikolay Mitrokhin
Russia's War against Ukraine
Weekly Reports May and June 2025

The ceasefire negotiations in Istanbul have failed. Russia is making unrealistic maximalist demands and now wants to create new conditions with a summer offensive in Donbass and northern Ukraine. The Ukrainian army is under pressure on several fronts, but so far, losses of territory have been limited. Ukraine has attracted attention by destroying several of the enemy's strategic bombers. Russia has responded by intensifying airstrikes with drones and missiles. Ukraine's air defence capabilities are exhausted.

“Russia's Friends”

Alexandr Osipian
Donbas, 1991–2014
Politics, Identity, and the Road to Uprising

Donbas was a model region of the Soviet modernization model. In the 1990s, this region in eastern Ukraine, dominated by the mining industry, experienced economic collapse. People's lives were marked by unemployment, environmental pollution, a decline of public services, and pervasive corruption. The Party of

Regions, founded by local industrial leaders, attempted to revive the old self-image of a proud industrial region in the 2000s through paternalistic policies. But its authoritarian rule stood on feet of clay. When President Viktor Yanukovich fell in February 2014 following the Maidan protests in Kyiv, a power vacuum emerged in Donbas. Pro-Russian groups rushed in to prepare the ground for an armed uprising: marginalised anti-European groups and local petty criminals supported by intelligence operatives, Don Cossacks, and militant nationalists from Russia, as well as the local Russian Orthodox Church.

Alexandr Voronovici
Laboratory for the Russian World
Self-Image and Nation in Donbas

The self-image of the “Donetsk People’s Republic” has changed since 2014. Official documents and schoolbooks initially propagated a multi-ethnic regionalism to justify secession from Ukraine. With the “Russian Donbas” doctrine, the idea that the People’s Republic belonged to the “Russian World” came to the fore. However, what this world meant remained unclear. Some saw it in the tradition of the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union. An ethno-national interpretation has prevailed. Today, Russian ethnonationalism dominates not only the “People’s Republic” but even multinational Russia.

Volodymyr Ishchenko, Don Kalb
From Head to Toe
A Neo-Marxist Reading of Ukraine

The war between Russia and Ukraine is generally interpreted from a culturalist perspective. However, the methodological nationalism inherent in such approaches is misleading. Anyone who wants to understand developments in Ukraine and the escalation of the conflict with Russia must view the events as a class conflict. Neither the political capitalists, often referred to as “oligarchs”, nor the urban middle class, associated with transnational capital, have managed to present the working class and the lower middle class with a convincing forward-looking project for Ukraine and thus achieve cultural hegemony. The constellation is the same as in Poland or Hungary, only the geopolitical environment is different. Russia, too, was characterised by this post-Soviet class conflict until Putin’s Caesarean model of rule prevailed. Russia’s ruling class has been attempting to extend this model to Ukraine since 2022.

Petru Negură, Lilian Negura
Ambivalent Attitudes
What Moldovans Think about the War in Ukraine

Moldovan society is deeply divided in its attitude toward Russia's war against Ukraine. This is especially true regarding the causes of the war and who bears responsibility for it. Interviews and focus group discussions show that most respondents associate negative emotions with the war. Many individuals refuse to answer the question of responsibility for the war. They advocate for an end to the fighting as quickly as possible. For them, a ceasefire takes precedence over the political assessment of the question of guilt.

Aliaksei Bratachkin
In dubio pro-Russia
History, Politics, and Dictatorship in Belarus

Belarus has maintained an ambivalent relationship with Russia for decades. Since perestroika, the Belarusian national movement has seen the country's dependence on Russia as an obstacle to nation- and state-building. The political leadership seeks proximity to the Kremlin, but at the same time emphasises its independence. Historians play a central role in this debate: some support the regime and a positive view of Russia, while others pursue a national Belarusian historiography. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the image of Russia fluctuated between nostalgic attachment and anti-colonial demarcation. Since the protests of 2020 and the war against Ukraine, Belarus and Russia have moved closer to one another. History increasingly serves as a means of securing power and is being politically instrumentalised in both countries.

Andrey Makarychev
Multiple Identity or Double Life?
The Self-Perception of Russians in Estonia

For several years, the Russian minority in Estonia has been searching for a position between cultures. Artists have developed various forms of hybrid self-perception in order to avoid being clearly categorised as either "Russian" or "Estonian". Today, Russia's war against Ukraine makes this almost impossible. A neutral stance on this war raises doubts, while the Estonian majority of society expects a clear positioning.

Nikolay Mitrokhin

Security of Faith

The Estonian State and the Estonian Orthodox Church

In Estonia, the authorities are taking action against the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. They see the church as an agent of Russian influence and a threat to Estonia. This policy, which has now culminated in a de facto ban on the church, is not based on any evidence. Thus, security policy arguments are being used to justify policies that favour the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church. This cannot succeed and will only lead to the exacerbation of long-standing conflicts that were stably resolved until 2022. Contrary to claims, the Estonian Orthodox Church is not a “Russian” church. However, many Russian speakers in Estonia who rarely or never attend church services now see “their” church under threat. There is a real danger for Estonia if Putin exploits the conflict and positions himself as the protector of the “Russians” in Estonia.

Filipp Semyonov

The Politics of Depoliticised

Kazakhstan’s Russians: Integration or Radicalization?

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 meant a considerable loss of status for the ethnic Russians living in Kazakhstan. In the following decade, a number of associations tried to give political weight to the concerns of the Russian minority. Since the early 2000s, however, increased emigration, the social integration of the remaining Russians, and the country’s authoritarian political climate have served to depoliticise the Russian question. Russia’s attack on Ukraine in February 2022 shattered the relative social peace of the 2000s and reignited old conflicts between ethnic Russians and the Kazakh majority population. However, the discursive radicalisation of part of the ethnic Russian population is not due to their ethnicity, but rather a consequence of their lack of political participation.