

CIVIL SOCIETY STUDY GROUP

DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

28.04.22 | ONLINE



THE WAR AGAINST DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL SOCIETY: VOICES FROM UKRAINE, RUSSIA AND POLAND

EVENT DETAILS

Speakers:

- Dr Iryna Pawłowska (Centre of Eastern Europe, Marie Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin) presented “Russian aggression against Ukraine in the perception of Ukrainian and Russian society”.
- Dr Joanna Fomina (Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences) presented “Russian political migrants’ responses to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine: engagement into anti-war and humanitarian aid activities”.
- Prof. Donnacha Ó Beacháin (School of Law and Government, Dublin City University) acted as Discussant.

Presentations are available at the DSAI website:
www.dsaireland.org/resources

SUMMARY

The on-going Russian invasion of Ukraine shattered the lives of the people of Ukraine and laid bare the assumptions of peaceful cohabitation with authoritarian dictators dreaming of restoring the bipolar world order. The humanitarian crisis that ensued triggered unprecedented upsurge of grassroots organising to greet and accommodate four million refugees (as of the end of March 2022) in countries neighbouring with Ukraine’s western and southern borders, and beyond. The democratization of Ukraine and the development of its civil society proved as unacceptable to the Russian government as its own political opponents and international NGOs aka “foreign agents”. Authoritarian rulers thus disprove any doubts that an authentic civil society is a prerequisite for democracy. To discuss the development of civil society in Ukraine, this webinar features prominent speakers who have played seminal role in the external support for Ukrainian civil society, studied grassroots organising in Ukraine and conducted research among Russian political migrants.

HIGHLIGHTS

- One of the many insightful observations Dr Iryna Pawłowska made was that the war against Ukraine catalysed support for the presidents of the aggressor and the attacked country alike. Whereas it is easier to understand why support for Volodymyr Zelensky soared from 41% to 93% since the outbreak of the war, it is less obvious why support for Vladimir Putin would have increased from 71 to 83% for the same period of time.

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- To quote from Dr Iryna Pawłowska, after the end of the war, prospects for Russian people include a long-term road to insight, reassessment of state policy, change of power and lustration of officials, the road from hatred to repentance, economic recovery after sanctions, establishing a dialogue with Ukraine and with countries that did not support Russia's actions in Ukraine.
- On the other hand, prospects for the Ukrainian people include restoration of destroyed cities, reintegration of returning refugees, moral recovery after the horrors of the war (especially children), strengthening the professional army and the national defence system, final decommunization, lustration among officials who supported occupants, strengthening the positions in the international arena (primarily accession to the European Union), establishing dialogue with Russia.
- Dr Joanna Fomina focused on the concept of democratic remittances and responsible emigration, i.e. the idea that (political) migrant activists not only can, but also must engage in anti-Kremlin regime activities from abroad. She presented a follow up to her last research project (2017-2019) on the interplay between migration and democratization based on the analysis of pro-democratic participation of Russian diasporic and migrant communities post 2011 following Kremlin's increased persecutions against the democratic opposition and civil society.
- The results of this research just came out in Routledge "Political Dissent and Democratic Remittances. The Activities of Russian Migrants in Europe". She advocated for the importance of democratic resilience, i.e. keeping up opposition voices, even if from a distance. She insisted this way Russian political migrants can contribute to the eventual fall of the autocratic regime in Russia while counterbalancing the nationalist, xenophobic and militaristic engagement of Russian diaspora, particularly in selected EU states, including Germany or Latvia.
- She highlighted that Russian migrants do not act in a vacuum, but often co-operate with European and Ukrainian volunteers, organizations, media outlets and pointed out that their migrant voices and participation in the public sphere is also key for democratic societies of the EU countries.
- Prof. Donnacha Ó Beacháin provided the historic background for the on-going war Russia waged against Ukraine. He shared his insight from his participation in academic events and travelling extensively throughout the former Soviet space and reminded us that Russia's imperialism has been there for us in plain sight. Later on he responded to a question regarding the similarities between Ireland and Ukraine.
- All webinar participants agreed the issues the event touched upon call for further investigation and that the understanding of the processes which took place in the region of East-Central Europe and former Soviet Republics versus Russia, especially after the end of the Cold war, need to be reappraised.