

This document is the result of the collaborative work of a group of experts. It is not yet part of a political programme, but a proposed solution developed by the forum's participants.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND INFORMATION POLICY

Brief overview

Russia is experiencing a long, unspoken cycle of violence. The state's gross and systematic violations of human rights and freedoms, committed over decades — against citizens, activists and vulnerable groups who refused to submit to the system — were not accidental.

In the 1990s, Russian society failed to become a political actor capable of holding the state accountable.

This predetermined the emergence of an authoritarian regime based on political terror and enabled it to wage war against Ukraine. The regime uses violence as a universal tool for solving any problem.

The war has transformed society: it has destroyed notions of what is possible and permissible, normalised the language of violence, expanded the space of fear, and torn apart human connections. This all requires deep collective reflection. Joint efforts are essential to ensure that the trauma experienced by participants, supporters, and opponents of the war does not lead to mutual aggression. Without such reflection and social dialogue, we cannot restore the social fabric, trust, or the capacity to build a shared future.

We must prepare for the moment of political transition and help bring it about faster. The participation of civil society in preparing transitional justice processes restores agency to society, making it both the initiator and auditor of these processes, and laying the foundation for partnership between society and the state. Already today, we can document crimes, collect testimonies, create a space for dialogue between different social groups, and lay the groundwork for a future rule-of-law state and lasting peace.

Russia's future depends on whether society can learn from the past and become a true political actor.

Recommendations

Reforms for Civic Participation

1. Strengthen the role and powers of local self-government; return genuine decision-making to the people.
2. Simplify and encourage the creation and operation of civic organisations — trade unions, civic initiative groups, and associations.
3. Restore elections in accordance with international standards.
4. Reinstate the institution of election observers and educate citizens on ways to participate.
5. Strengthen the legal status of collective expressions of citizens' will (petitions, public initiatives).
6. Create conditions for fair, transparent referenda as instruments of decision-making.

This document is the result of the collaborative work of a group of experts. It is not yet part of a political programme, but a proposed solution developed by the forum's participants.

7. Guarantee freedom of assembly.

8. Support the participation of alternative candidates in elections; build partnerships with different political forces to change legislation.

9. Reinforce the role of the Public Monitoring Commission (ONK) as a significant and effective institution, and create similar oversight bodies. Ensure transparency in the work of law enforcement agencies and government institutions by introducing public audits and mechanisms of accountability.

10. Restore the independence of religious organisations and prevent state interference. Enshrine a strict prohibition on the state's use of religious organisations to advance political objectives.

Civic Education

1. Facilitate dialogue between representatives of different social viewpoints, based on shared positive goals and values.

2. Memory and history must be removed from state control. It is necessary to analyse and deconstruct the historical and political, Soviet and imperial militaristic narratives, practices, and ideas. History must not be used as an instrument of state propaganda.

3. Citizens must develop an understanding of their own responsibility and their connection to political processes, both within their own state and at the global level. This is impossible without an awareness of the complexities of the modern state, democratic institutions, and the interconnectedness of all processes in the global world and community.

4. Explain the importance of international institutions and build public trust in them. Highlight the role of civil society in the work of international institutions.

Building Civic Identity

1. Free language from manipulative distortions and ingrained norms that conceal or normalise discriminatory practices and propaganda clichés. Develop inclusive language using unifying concepts and meanings.

2. Create a new symbolic landscape. Establish and promote new days of remembrance and civic rituals dedicated to victims of repression, civil resistance, and the struggle for freedom and dignity. Encourage unifying practices that foster a sense of belonging and shared identity ("Returning the Names," "The Last Address" and public charitable initiatives).

3. Give citizens an active role in paying taxes.

Information Policy

1. Initiate media discussions of issues relevant to different segments of the population.

2. Provide strategic support to the media — financial and organizational. Promote the development of horizontal channels of information dissemination, such as social media and local communities. Support journalists in conducting independent investigations.

3. Restore open data registries and create new public databases.

This document is the result of the collaborative work of a group of experts. It is not yet part of a political programme, but a proposed solution developed by the forum's participants.

4. Cooperate with international digital platforms to preserve and expand tools ensuring Russian citizens' access to the global Internet.

Transitional Justice

Preparations for transitional justice measures should be initiated by society even before any regime changes. This makes society the initiator, executor, and auditor of these processes and of the democratic transition itself. However, full and consistent implementation of transitional justice is impossible without state participation. This is the only guarantee against a relapse into revenge or authoritarianism.

1. Open state archives.
2. Create mechanisms for documenting, discussing, and processing trauma.
3. Establish an independent Commission for Truth and Reconciliation*. Its purpose is not to punish the guilty, but to engage in critical reflection and understanding of past events — especially war, repression, and mass human rights violations — to ensure they never recur.
4. Involve diverse social groups, including vulnerable, ethnic, secular, and religious communities, in the transitional justice processes.

* "By definition, truth commissions are temporary not permanent monitoring and enforcement bodies, mandated to gather and to interpret information about some past human rights violations, and meant to finalise their work with the release of a concluding report either to the general public or to the body that created them. They generally investigate patterns of human rights violations occurring over long periods of time. In some cases they can examine shorter periods of time that mark the beginning and the end of a specific historical event marred by atrocities and abuse." Truth Commissions in Central and Eastern Europe, by Lavinia Stan

A truth commission is always centered on the victims of a conflict, while also aiming to give voice not only to those who suffered but also to perpetrators and witnesses, which is critically important in a divided society. All sides of the conflict, especially the victims and their families, have the right to express their views and receive answers to their questions. Society as a whole has the right to know the truth about past events and horrific crimes that were perpetrated.

This document is the result of the collaborative work of a group of experts. It is not yet part of a political programme, but a proposed solution developed by the forum's participants.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Sergei Davidis | Human Rights Defender

Sofya Zhukova | Director of Social and Charitable Projects

Lyubov Sobol | Politician, Lawyer

Andrey Kordochkin | Priest

Inna Berezkina | Civic Activist