

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.

SECURITY, JUSTICE, AND INTERACTION WITH THE FORMER REGIME

Brief overview

The inevitable departure of Vladimir Putin — whether through death or premature termination of his powers — will open an extremely narrow window of opportunity for political transition in Russia. The acting president (constitutionally, the prime minister) will face serious political, economic, and social challenges caused by the war with Ukraine and will very likely seek domestic support and international legitimacy, as well as an end to active hostilities and a softening of sanctions. This creates space for limited political liberalisation, which the opposition must use to advance its demands during the transition period: participation in free elections, the release of all political prisoners, the cessation of political repression, the suspension of repressive legislation, and the dismantling of censorship.

At the same time, the successors and beneficiaries of the former regime will retain control over key resources and instruments: major finances and state assets, security structures, the judiciary, bureaucracy, and the media. They will not willingly relinquish control of these resources in order to maintain power. Against this backdrop, it is critically important that international actors agree to discuss the partial lifting of sanctions only if transition conditions are met. This gives the opposition its only real instrument of leverage over the old elites, limiting their ability to sabotage agreements and roll back into dictatorship.

The security sector poses the greatest risk. The power structures possess a monopoly on violence, weapons and equipment, strong ideological loyalty, combat experience, and a history of suppressing protests. Any configuration of the transition will depend on the opposition's ability to prepare in advance, build effective coalitions, and act strategically in the first weeks after the transfer of power. The main task for the opposition is to ensure that “non-systemic” opposition candidates can participate in presidential elections, which, according to the Constitution, must be held within three months. It is during this period that it will become clear whether the loss of power by the current leadership will lead to a renewal of the political system or merely to the transfer of autocratic control to another figure.

The measures proposed by experts constitute an initial and necessary set of steps aimed at dismantling authoritarianism and using this narrow window of opportunity to begin democratisation and return the country to the rule of law.

Problems

The working group structured the problems of the transition period into three categories: political, judicial, and those related to law enforcement.

Political problems

- Retention of the regime's control over key political, administrative, and financial processes, in practice making the regime's “former” status nominal.
- Systematic efforts to physically, legally, and reputationally destroy opposition activists and leaders, as well as their organisations.

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- Use of co-optation mechanisms to fragment and subdue the opposition, including financial inducements and integration of selected figures into old administrative frameworks under the deceptive pretext of “renewing” governance from within, while representatives of the former regime retain political control.
- Exclusion of the opposition from negotiations with international actors and the conclusion of separate deals to monopolise foreign policy and the sanctions agenda.
- Total control over media, digital platforms, and internet infrastructure, including the dependence of tech companies on the security apparatus, the presidential administration, and oligarchs.
- Bureaucratic sabotage of transition conditions by using formal pretexts to delay, block, or distort decisions.
- The deliberate destruction or concealment of archives, undermining the ability to ensure legal accountability in the future.

Problems related to the judiciary

- The complete absence of judicial independence: a rigid vertical subordination and dependence on the regime’s political directives.
- The functional paralysis of the judiciary: it is unable to consider “political” cases promptly without “top-down” instructions.
- The potentially hostile and confrontational stance of the Constitutional and Supreme Courts towards the conditions of the transitional period.
- Deliberate attempts to sabotage the implementation of transition agreements through formal legal interpretations, procedural delays, and manipulation of court decisions.

Problems related to law enforcement bodies

- Strict hierarchical subordination, creating high readiness to follow orders regardless of legality.
- Ideological hostility toward the opposition, formed through years of propaganda, education, and institutional culture.
- Systemic tolerance of gross human rights violations, encouragement of violence, impunity, and reliance on force as a standard tool of governance.
- Restriction or blocking of communications so as to control information and suppress organised opposition.
- Existence of paramilitary structures — organised criminal groups, siloviki-aligned activists (“titushki”), regional or corporate armed units capable of acting autonomously.
- Presence of heavy weaponry, particularly within the National Guard, increasing the risk of lethal violence during the transition.
- A sprawling system of special units with combat experience, weapons, special means (including chemical agents), cover identities, and legal privileges.

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Possible solutions (recommendations)

General

- Conduct negotiations with all actors only through authorised intermediaries with strictly limited mandates to minimise the risk of manipulation.
- Proceed from the presumption of bad faith by representatives of the former regime when evaluating any proposals, actions, or agreements.
- Treat proposals for “power-sharing” or co-optation into old structures as traps designed to neutralise and discredit the opposition.
- Rebuild civil society and oversight infrastructure through legal entities, observer status mechanisms, and other forms of basic institutionalisation.
- Maintain responsible, pragmatic rhetoric in all communications, avoiding statements that could be used against the opposition.
- Act transparently, strictly within the law, and in accordance with Alexei Navalny’s principles of “don’t lie and don’t steal.”
- Take measures to prevent the destruction, forgery, or concealment of archival data and establish legal accountability for such acts.
- Support and protect internal whistleblowers and informants, both within the institutions of the former regime and in the technological and financial sectors.

Justice

- Insist on full openness of court proceedings and the live broadcasting of hearings for the media and civil society as a key safeguard against judicial arbitrariness during the transition period.
- Actively use the Anti-Corruption Foundation’s [Black Book](#) and other tools of personalised accountability to document violations and identify individual perpetrators of unlawful decisions.
- Support nonviolent protests arising in response to the former regime’s failure to meet transition commitments.
- Strictly link any discussion or phased lifting of international sanctions to the fulfillment of conditions of the transitional period, ruling out partial compromises that could erode the foundation for democratic change.

Security (Security Forces)

- Use careful, responsible rhetoric aimed at building a new balance and consensus in society, including with representatives of the former regime (especially in the security sector), avoiding threats or excessively harsh language that could provoke unwanted escalation.
- Introduce a moratorium on legal prosecution for exercising the right to peaceful assembly, demonstrating readiness for a nonviolent transition scenario.

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- Work should begin now on developing technical solutions that minimise the effects of administrative communication restrictions and shutdowns.
- Establish a professional security and civil protection service for the opposition, capable of protecting rallies, headquarters, key figures, and activists from threats to life and safety amid political uncertainty.

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