

# **Attitudes of Russian Citizens about the War/"Special Operation" in Ukraine**

**Nonviolence International**

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This paper (translated from Russian) formulates the conclusions obtained as a result of the analysis of information on the mood of Russians, collected from mid-November to the end of December 2022. This update reflects the dynamics of public sentiment from mid-November to end of December 2022, that is, approximately from the retreat of the Russian Armed Forces from the city of Kherson and the right bank of the Dnieper. The paper concludes with updated recommendations regarding the development of the anti-war movement and attitudes in Russia.

## **Research Methodology and Overview**

Formal polling is not an option nor even a preferred tool to assess and report on Russian Federation public opinion for two reasons: 1) The Russian Federation has criminalized any dissent or reporting that is not in line with the official state narrative. 2) Traditional polling conducted in recent weeks indicates that more than 50% of contacted people refuse to participate.

Our research is conducted by monitoring public attitudes through informal conversations with different people in varying geographic, socio-economic, and ethnic circumstances, as well as monitoring social networks, and public reports of evidence (like graffiti and public protests). We communicate with these contacts, who remain completely anonymous, about once a week. Random communication with citizens of the Russian Federation through existing social networks are also used. Our information is reviewed by Nonviolence International and NVI-Ukraine.

## **1. GENERAL TRENDS REGARDING ATTITUDES IN SOCIETY**

During this period, the main factor influencing the mood of the population in the Russian Federation remained the so-called "partial mobilization" as well as the flow of information from those mobilized. People's attitudes were influenced by unclear prospects for the war, against the backdrop of the absence of any military successes and the retreat of Russian troops from Kherson and from the right bank of the Dnieper.

The immediate reaction to the retreat of the Russian troops from Kherson was not clearly manifested and was hidden in the framework of the prevailing general attitudes toward the war / "special operation"

As for the general trends of attitudes in connection with the war / "special operation", the following can be noted:

**1.1 A desire to avoid the topic.** After the announcement of a "partial mobilization", the importance of war as a factor influencing people's moods increased significantly. At the same time, about one and a half months after the start of mobilization (perhaps due to the announcement that the mobilization is over), there was a revival of the tendency of people to "avoid" relevant questions and conversations about the war. It seems though, that the motivation for people to react in such a way has changed somewhat. If in the summer and early autumn such an avoidance of the topic could often be explained simply by the desire to "fence off" one's personal space from a topic that one could not influence, a similar trend over the past month may be attributed to fear of speaking out on such a sensitive issue, as well as to a general feeling of depression in connection with ongoing events. Fear of mobilization is often combined with fear of talking about how to avoid it.

**1.2 Decreasing percent of those who do not have a position on the topic.** Among the people there was much less uncertainty about the ongoing events, the majority chose for themselves the position of either agreeing / supporting the current course, or being skeptical / opposing it. There are indicators that the second position was often hidden behind unwillingness to talk about this topic.

Despite the fact that part of the population is trying to avoid discussions about the situation, the war has entered the circle of topics that affect people's relationships, including those that seem to be far from this issue. For example, in St. Petersburg there was a split among taxi drivers into "cotton jackets"<sup>1</sup> and "non-cotton jackets", and the latter turned out to be a majority. As a result, the dispatchers began to play along with the "non-cotton jackets", giving them more profitable orders, etc. Interestingly, this alignment was formed among the Russian citizens, it does not involve those taxi drivers who are guest workers – those declare their "neutral" position.

**1.3 Psychological consequences of war and negative expectations.** There's a noticeable increase of fears and tensions in society, negative expectations prevail, people feel psychological exhaustion, and many feel depressed. One psychologist stated that "now everyone experiences a sociogenic trauma."

Many begin to fear that the war will spill over directly onto Russian territory: in many cities work began on equipping bomb shelters and informing the population about their location. Also, internally displaced persons appeared in the country from territories located along the border with Ukraine, in particular from the Belgorod region.

There is a fear of a "second wave" of mobilization. There have been cases where people or families "live on suitcases" in order to quickly leave the country in the event of such a development.

People worry about the danger of a "closing the world" for Russians, especially for young people. These fears get exposed, among other things, at various "motivational" events: *"How can one build a 'path to a dream' when his son can be sent to war?"*

This overall condition of society was demonstrated during the New Year celebrations; the usual New Year's excitement was practically not noticeable in stores.

**1.4 Irritation towards local authorities.** General depression and growing tensions are manifested through critical statements toward local authorities over different issues that previously did not create such a reaction (for example, over poor performance of communal services, bad roads, etc.). This, in all likelihood, is also a manifestation of the accumulated social tensions in a situation where people are afraid to talk about the problem that truly worries them and that is clearly related not to the activities of local authorities, but to the decisions of the country's leadership.

**1.5 The disappearance of bravado statements regarding the war.** The bravado that sometimes was expressed during the first month after the announcement of a "partial mobilization" has practically disappeared. Statements in the style of "we will beat the shit out of the Ukrainians" are gone. There is less talk about one's "duty to the Motherland" and so on. The general tone has changed to a cautious one, even in moderately pro-government forums. At the same time, the reality of the war has not yet reached everyone. Cases were still recorded of relatives of those who participate in it expressing a rather relaxed attitude about the matter. For example, a case was recorded when relatives could

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<sup>1</sup> The term "vatnik" (cotton jacket) is used to name people who listen to state propaganda, support the official "Russian world" ideology, etc.

actually bring back home a person who was mobilized in violation of certain norms, but instead they were satisfied with promises that he would not be put on the front line and would just “sit in front of a computer”. In addition, as before, many people expressed an attitude: “I don’t want to fight, but if called, I’ll do so.”

**1.6 The annexation of "new territories" has not been appreciated by people.** If in October, albeit under administrative control, rallies were organized to express support for the announced annexation of Ukrainian lands, then in November-December this topic was not noticeable at all. At the same time, there was a sharp reaction to the statements of one Ukrainian analyst about the possibility that the Ukrainian Armed Forces may will take the city of Taganrog<sup>2</sup>. This suggests that in the minds of people there is still a different attitude towards the internationally recognized territories of Russia and towards those that were recently annexed. Crimea, apparently, occupies an intermediate position in this respect.

**1.7 Military defeats and the image of victory.** Although Russian society does not show a sharp reaction to the military defeats that have occurred, including the retreat of the Russian troops from Kherson and the right bank of the Dnieper, these events lead to an increase in general skepticism about the war, and about how the authorities are coping with the situation. At the same time, there is no serious concern among the majority of society about prospects for Russia's military defeat. Most likely, this is due to two factors:

First, for part of society – those who have a relatively adequate understanding of the situation (this is a fairly significant percentage of the population), a military defeat is not perceived as something particularly negative. Moreover, quite a few of the anti-war-minded citizens express their desire for Ukraine's victory in the war.

Secondly, for the majority of the population, those that are influenced by state propaganda to one or another degree, the prospect of a military defeat is not yet seen as something probable, the idea that “we will still win in the long run” prevails.

Society practically lacks any intelligible “victory image”. When people are directly asked about how they perceive victory, some find it difficult to answer at all, some offer a wide range of different options, mostly related to certain territorial acquisitions. For example - the official recognition of Crimea as part of Russia, or such a recognition of both Crimea and the Donbass. The Kherson and Zaporizhyya regions are often not even mentioned, despite their formal “incorporation” into the Russian Federation. Among the more radical groups (presumably from 10% to 20% of the population), the image of victory is not as much about territorial acquisitions but more related to the denial of the existence of a modern independent Ukrainian state as such. Some people talk about the possibility of dividing Ukraine between the Russian Federation and Poland, or (often at the same time) about how good it will be for “everyone to live together again”.

**1.8 Economic impact of the war.** In the described period, there was a deterioration of the economic situation, which is seen in a number of indicators:

- a significant increase in the cost of utilities and public transport in a number of regions
- the continuing process of closing enterprises, including small businesses, especially in the service sector

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<sup>2</sup> This is a city in the Rostov region of Russia, on the Azov sea coast, near the Ukrainian border.

- the continued withdrawal of foreign firms from Russia's market, including Chinese ones
- problems associated with the disappearance of certain imported goods and the lack of high-quality products to substitute for them
- a noticeable deterioration in the quality of medical care, associated, among other things, with the additional burden on the healthcare system due to the war

In the public mind, these negative trends are often associated not with the war as such, but with economic sanctions, the "anti-Russian actions of the West", etc.

**1.9 Fewer "Z-symbols".** In most of the regions where the information was collected, a decrease in the number of "Z-symbols" continued to be recorded, especially on private property (houses, cars, etc.). True, in connection with the preparations for the New Year, in many regions the corresponding symbols began to be actively used again by the administration as elements of street decorations. Moreover, there were cases when the New Year celebrations themselves were held in a militaristic style, for example, when Santa Claus would arrive on military vehicles.

Against the backdrop of reports mentioning a trend towards a reduction in the number of "Z-symbols" on personal property in a number of regions, at least in one, in St. Petersburg, the opposite trend was noted.

**1.10 Formation of pro-war interest groups.** Having staked on the promotion of the idea of a "people's war", the state directed huge efforts and significant funds to support the "necessary" behavior of various groups of the population, including:

- Substantial material support for military personnel and their families;
- Exemption from inspections of business structures that behave in the "right" way - support the army, provide assistance to "liberated regions", etc.
- Carrying out campaigns to glorify all who died in the war (for example, erecting public stands with photographs of the military personnel, setting up "desks of heroes" in schools, etc.);
- Freezing payments on loans for those who take part in the war;
- Providing active support of the relevant youth policy through organization of numerous events, gatherings aimed to promote patriotism, oppose the West, support traditions, etc.;
- Supporting for the "correct" volunteering and relevant non-profit institutions;
- Requiring the "correct" wording in applications for government support even in seemingly non-political areas, for example when applying for grants to conduct scientific research;
- Providing "social lifts" in various state and municipal structures for young people who show themselves in the "right way".

As a result, under the influence of such a militaristic policy, significant groups of beneficiaries have formed, including persons directly related to military personnel like divorced mothers who have experienced a significant increase in material assistance from the fathers of their children, young specialists in different government institutions, businessmen who managed to adapt to the relevant requirements, workers in defense enterprises, employees of the "correct" non-profits, etc.

**1.11 Increased pressure on independent organizations and "dissenters".** Simultaneously with numerous efforts to expand the public base of war supporters, there is increasing pressure on the remnants of independent civilian organizations and on any manifestations of disagreement with the current course. On December 01, 2022, a number of amendments to the law on "Foreign Agents" were introduced, essentially making the assignment of such a "status" completely arbitrary and dramatically expanding the repressive elements of this law. State bodies began to actively support and use for repressive purposes the practice of writing denunciations of "dissenters" by "concerned citizens", for example, requesting for such people/organizations to be investigated in connection with "receiving funds from unfriendly countries." The government is in a process of formally closing any still surviving independent NGOs, and cases of physical attacks on their members have been recorded. The theme of fighting against "enemies and traitors" is again actively promoted in the state media.

## **2. PERCEPTION OF PROPAGANDA**

During the period under review, the reorientation of state propaganda toward promoting a "people's war", in the style of the "second Great Patriotic War", was completed. Information about the failures of the RF Armed Forces was also presented, in particular, about the retreat from the city of Kherson was presented accordingly.

As before, a loose set of "what is the war against" arguments are used, with new topics thrown in periodically. During this period, "information" about, supposedly, trade in human organs in Ukraine became such a new topic. It seems that propagandists have a policy of periodically throwing in new fake topics for discussion, as the old ones "fade out". This helps keep society in a state of tension. In general, propaganda topics can be roughly divided into three categories:

- "Permanent", for example: the "preventive" nature of the war, the need to fight against the "anti-Russian West", the prevention of "LGBT propaganda", "revenge for the dead", "the fight against Nazism", "defense of Donbass", "Zelensky's criminal regime" etc.;

- "Replaceable": "biological laboratories", "poisoned birds", "trafficking in organs", "revenge for the Crimean bridge", "medals for the capture of Rostov", etc.;

- "Occasional": related to certain specific events, for example, about "Europe freezing without Russian gas". In the period under review, "preventing Halloween celebrations" as an element of "manifestations of Satanism" became a similar topic.

The government continues to use the practice of spreading false rumors, for example, "information" from one's "aunt / friend" in Kharkov, who "personally saw a container with 200 nasal diaphragms"

In many social networks, the process of "cleaning out" unwanted comments has become more noticeable.

The authorities are ambivalent about recognizing losses. On the one hand, such information is hushed up, relative publicity (for example, in the local press), as a rule, is given only to information about the funeral of officers, as well as "authoritative" persons from private military companies, while such information about the dead among the privates and sergeants is often ignored even by the local press (not to mention the losses that fall under the "missing in action" category). On the other hand, there is an attempt to glorify all the dead, for example, "desks of heroes" are set up in schools, posters with photographs of "heroes" are erected on streets, etc. Naturally, information about the dead is actively used to promote the need to "avenge our boys."

Equally controversial is the propaganda coverage of the war prospects. On the one hand, propaganda tries to make people confident in Russia's "victory" (without revealing, however, what this actually

means). On the other hand, it began to sometimes scare people with the supposed horrific consequences of a possible defeat.

Of course, special attention is paid to work with the youth. In addition to the already mentioned "desks of heroes" and the new school subject "Talking about the important", various actions are held in schools, such as sewing clothing for the military at labor lessons, and information about the "special operation" is being introduced into the history program. Active militaristic propaganda is also being carried out at the level of kindergartens.

Participation in hostilities is also being promoted as an opportunity to earn money and solve various financial problems, both for oneself and for one's family. This has an effect on some parts of the population.

It is surprising that propaganda even tries to use the theme of human rights in its favor, acting in line with the traditions of the USSR. Around the Constitution day (12/12/2022), propaganda spread the message that Russia is a much freer country than the countries of the West.

#### The perception of propaganda by the population is also quite contradictory.

There continues to be growing skepticism among population about the messages of the political leadership and especially about the military reports. Also, people continue to express discontent with the arbitrary nature of mobilization, the poor provisions for those mobilized, the lack of normal training, etc. There was also a new trend when some people watch the first part of propaganda programs when a certain synopsis of events is presented to be later discussed by "experts". These reviews of real events provided, for example, within the framework of the "60 Minutes" program, give some understanding of what is actually going on.

An important factor that influenced the mood of the people in the reporting period was the announcement of the "end of mobilization", although this point was not particularly promoted in the media. However, in the second half of December fears of a "second wave" of mobilization began to grow. Many people, against the background of objective risks, preferred to cling to different arguments why they or their loved ones should not worry - "*They won't take my son, he is an IT specialist (disabled, did not serve, etc.)*".

As noted in the previous report, a significant part of society still believes in the words about one's "patriotic duty", need to "defend one's motherland", etc., although, unlike in October, there was no bravado associated with this during the reported period. There was also no information about cases when people voluntarily went to military registration and enlistment offices under the appropriate ideological influence (which does not exclude cases of voluntarily enlistment in the army in order to solve material and financial problems).

At the same time, the results of propaganda work with young people of school age (especially with high school students) are very modest. For example, the lessons "Talks about important things" introduced into the school curriculum from September 2022 are often called "Bullshit about the useless" by the students themselves.

Propaganda continues to be quite successful in influencing a significant part of society, imposing on it the "logic of war". This influences the moods and attitudes of a significant part of the population and some people are increasingly radicalized:

- There is a blurring of the mental line between "Ukrainians" and "Nazis". For example there were cases when people expressed satisfaction with strikes on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, mentioning that "our children will have a holiday, but theirs won't".

- There is a growing negative attitude toward countries that are perceived as supporting Ukraine, as well as toward their citizens. For example, in one regional capital, a case was recorded of an aggressive reaction of passengers in a bus towards a British citizen.

- There is a clear radicalization of attitudes towards people with a different point of view: the term “national traitors” is being used. People make statements about the desirability of the death penalty, they refer to those in opposition: “*if these people come to power, they will burn us in furnaces*”, etc.

Such radicalization, combined with the repressive actions of the state and the spread of denunciation, means that despite the objective increase in the number of opponents of the war and “doubters”, these people face a sense of danger and isolation.

### 3. FEARS / ANTI-WAR MOODS

The main fear associated with the war during the reported period undoubtedly remained the fear of mobilization. Over the reported period, this fear became mixed with general fears about the uncertainty of the future, different types of negative expectations and so on. After the announcement of the end of the “partial mobilization”, this fear somewhat decreased, resulting in a decrease of those attempting to leave the country. However, corresponding fears and feeling of uncertainty continued to affect people. Over the reported period there was information about several cases when people were “sitting on their suitcases”. At the same time, there are fears that the exit from the country for persons subject to conscription may be closed, though many continue to hope that they will have time to cross the border at the last moment. In general, the outflow of people continues, although less intensely than in September-October. This is especially true for young people, and people working in the IT sector. Many go to Asian countries. Another reaction to the threat of mobilization was the massive registration of disabilities by people who have at least some reason for this.

Also, it was noted that both modern “guest workers” and citizens of Russia with roots from other former republics of the USSR began to speak very positively about their country of origin / historical homeland. Cases were recorded when conflicts arose between the older generation and young people in such families. The older generation - who moved to Russia at one time, acquired Russian citizenship, adapted and reached certain successes in Russia - considers such a choice as their important life achievement, while for young people their historical / ethnic homeland becomes attractive.

There were cases when the fear of mobilization increased as people received information about how “people were seized on the streets” in the “newly annexed” territories of the LDPR<sup>3</sup>. In general, the information field continues to be influenced by information people get from various participants in the events, both from military and civilians.

Among all the fears associated with the war, there was practically no obvious fear associated with the prospects of defeat in the war. Concerns that were observed among representatives of the most pro-government groups, were associated with fears that “liberals”, “Soros children” may come to power. Most likely this is a mirror reflection of the absence of a clear “victory image”. Since the authorities (and, following it, state propaganda) cannot present such an image, neither is the opposite picture formed in the eyes of the population. And while “horror stories” that are thrown in by propaganda to justify the war do affect a significant part of the population, they are perceived as justification for the war, but usually not as an immediate threat.

Against such a background expressions as “*if only all this would end soon, at least somehow*” are heard more and more often. Sometimes (not always) additional “clarification” is added to such expressions,

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<sup>3</sup> The so-called “Luhansk and Donetsk Peoples Republics”

related to one's individual concept of "victory", for example: "*we would free the Ukrainians from the Nazis*". The available information allows us to make a reasonable assumption that the lack of a victory image and society's war fatigue creates a situation where the demand for peace, the desire for the war to end, prevails over the demand for "victory"<sup>4</sup>.

Summarizing, it can be stated that a gradual shift towards a skeptical-negative attitude towards the war continues in Russian society, and that the war has become a key factor worrying Russians and giving rise to negative expectations among them. The process of transforming such a negative attitude towards the war into a negative attitude towards the authorities is still being blocked by the state. The Russian government and its propaganda machine is relatively successful in shifting the blame for the war to Ukraine and the "West", promoting the idea that the war was forced on Russia, romanticizing and glorifying its soldiers, creating groups of people who benefit from the current situation.

The "window of acceptable criticism" continues to exist, allowing critical statements about how the mobilization is being carried out. Also, there is criticism from the "right" of the mistakes and shortcomings of the military leadership<sup>5</sup>. Propaganda is actively working to create the impression that "in general", mobilization is proceeding "as it should", effective military training is underway, the military personnel are provided with appropriate conditions and equipment, and information that contradicts this is nothing more than "individual shortcomings" to which relevant authorities promptly respond.

Anti-war sentiments clearly manifest themselves in cases when people manage to organize certain "spaces of freedom", for example, in those social networks that are perceived as relatively safe (Telegram, Facebook), as well as during offline meetings, for example, within various cultural initiatives. Of course, the main thing for the emergence of such spaces is mutual trust and a sense of security for people. In examples of such free interactions, mentioned during the reported period, it was noted that the discussions were built not along the line "for the war/special operation" or "against the war/special operation", but around the dilemma "being against the war" - "needing to support "your side"<sup>6</sup>. Among the anti-war-minded citizens, there is a division regarding the dilemma of how to relate towards those who have been mobilized – should one sympathize with them, what forms of assistance for such people are acceptable.

Ethnic movements became another space within which some direct ("*Putin is the enemy*") manifestations of anti-war sentiments were noted. Examples were cited when the rhetoric of the relevant activists, who had previously been quite loyal to the central government, changed rather sharply.

In the face of increasing pressure on society, people often use the "Aesopian language" and various sayings to express their attitude towards the state and propaganda, for example: "*Sheep were afraid of wolves, but died from the hands of the shepherds.*"

Cases were recorded when people directly stated that in the event that they need to choose between war and prison, they would prefer to go to prison. While this has not become a mass phenomenon, it can be expected that as the real risks and horrors of war become realized by the majority of the

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that standard sociological polls, asking questions like "*do you support the special military operation?*" are unable to capture such shifts in people's minds.

<sup>5</sup> Most likely in this way the political leadership hopes to ward off criticism for the failure of the "special operation" and shift the responsibility to the military.

<sup>6</sup> However, it is important to take into account that such platforms for free discussion arise in a situation where there is no radical divergence of positions among the participants, so the points of view that dominate during such discussions cannot be extrapolated to society as a whole.



population, for an increasing number of people the fear of serving time in prison will be perceived as the lesser of two evils.

#### **4. RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT AND ATTITUDES**

As already noted, in recent months both the mobilization and a radical turn in state propaganda have brought the war much closer to the bulk of the population. There is no doubt that today the war and its numerous consequences for people's lives are a key factor influencing the feelings and fears of the majority of Russians. And although a significant percentage of the population tries to avoid talking about this topic, behind this, in the vast majority of cases, hides deep concern and uncertainty about their position, as well as fear of expressing an opinion that diverges from the official line.

A demand for peace is growing in society, a demand for a return to "normality", which the state cannot ignore. The question is how this demand will be channeled. The entire state machine and the entire propaganda apparatus are trying to promote the concept that, as said in one song from the times of WWII: "*the way home goes through war*", that peace is possible only through some kind of mythical "victory", a clear image of which is not offered to society. The idea is being promoted that war was inevitable, that there is no alternative, and that actively supporting and participating in the current policy is the only way to bring back peace and return to a normal life.

Accordingly, the general thrust of anti-war messages should contribute to the dismantlement of the imposed stereotype that there is no alternative to returning peace and normal life, except through military successes. An alternative to the mythical and incomprehensible "victory" for most people, should be framed not in terms of "defeat" – this will not be understood by the majority of the population<sup>7</sup>. Rather, it is possible to speak of "internal changes", "reorientation toward of the country's development", etc. In this regard, it seems important to complement the anti-war messages with the image of a positive alternative. Among the anti-war-minded part of society, a request was repeatedly recorded for specific options for action, both in practical terms - how to avoid mobilization, and more general form - "*why are we silent?*"

If in the previous report, which recorded the situation over October and early November, it was noted that part of the population was slowly realizing all the realities of the ongoing war and the real "prospects" for those who were being mobilized. Over the current reported period, understanding of the terrible conditions and a horrendous degree of danger for those who take part in the war is becoming widely recognized. Messages are required that can help link an awareness of the horrific practical realities of war with an understanding of its senselessness, futility and injustice. A very good example of such a message was the videoclip of M. Pokrovsky: "*Happy New Year, son!*"<sup>8</sup>. In particular, an example was given when, by posting this clip in an online forum, one was able to silence the voices of pro-government participants.

Since society still has a certain "window for criticism" regarding how the mobilization is carried out and, in general, how the "special operation" is being conducted, used by the authorities to "let off steam" in the form of "correcting certain shortcomings", it is important to use this to put forward uncomfortable questions for the authorities, helping people to realize the senselessness and futility of war.

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<sup>7</sup> Although among a part of society the desire for a Ukrainian victory is openly articulated, which is considered both as a fair result of the war and as a key factor in regime change in Russia.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-W8w527oU4>

It is important to use every opportunity to create and support "spaces of freedom", both online and offline. Skillful work within the framework of such platforms can make it possible to overcome the common attitude that participation in the war is required by "a man's duty to defend the Motherland", that "consolidation of society in difficult times" is necessary. In particular, the idea was put forward of using, within such "freedom spaces", methods that are used in the framework of drug prevention initiatives aimed to teach people to refuse.

It is important to give people the opportunity to de-associate themselves from the current policy of the Russian government, for example by actively spreading the term "Putin's war"<sup>9</sup>. And, of course, it is important to focus on alternatives to the current situation, demonstrating the connection between the revival of positive prospects both for individual people and for the country as a whole with the end of the war and changes in the political course.

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<sup>9</sup> This is not to deny collective responsibility for the war on the part of the country's citizens. However, this issue will be relevant after the war, at this stage it is important to narrow the base of support for the regime's actions as much as possible. By attributing the war to its main culprit, people can be encouraged to think about personal prospects for themselves, their families, their country, beyond the stereotypes that are imposed by the state and its propaganda apparatus.