



WE HAVE TO  
LEAVE LIVE  
HERE.

RUSSIA

**The theme of Russia and its position vis-à-vis other countries and Europe was another thread running through the discussions.** In particular, there was the sense of a double isolation that activists in Russia face: within their own country and within Europe. Spaces for activism are shrinking within Russia, for instance, with the government's taking control of financial resources and expecting "to be paid with loyalty." And this is aggravated by the threat of the general isolation of Russia within Europe, another important topic of discussion. And yet activists stake a claim: we also belong, we will not leave.

Participants observed the special difficulties of being an activist in Russia: "it is such a big country and groups are isolated: we need to create more networks for mutual support, not to feel alone and to understand that there are people who stand up for you. We have to do permanent work with those young people most vulnerable to propaganda: most young people get their information from state-influenced sources." But activists also emphasized how much work was already being done: how "in Russia, young people vote with their feet!" by protesting out on the streets or leaving the country. And how despite outside repression, there is still space to act: "We need to work with peers: many women in Russia are afraid to be active and even though they share our values, they wouldn't join the protests: so we need to show them that yes, there are things to be afraid of, but there is a lot of us and we can all work together. Don't be afraid and stay active."

**"IN 1990, I HAD MY FIRST CONTACT WITH SOMEONE FROM ABROAD. BEFORE THAT, I HAD LIVED IN A CLOSED COUNTRY AND WORKED IN A CLOSED INSTITUTION. I WAS ALREADY 40 YEARS OLD." CONFERENCE PARTICIPANT FROM RUSSIA**

The focus was not only on the isolation within Russia, but also on Russia's situation within Europe and here, a very complicated picture emerged. There was the sense that relations changed significantly after the transitions, breaking isolation and making contacts to other countries possible for the

first time. At the same time someone from Germany remarks: "I had the impression that during reunification, people were so busy with themselves: everything was suddenly cut off, also relations to other countries which were so important before. Suddenly, it was 'off to new shores' and we were no longer interested in the political development of former neighbour countries, for instance, Russia. But we had such similar political developments and we should acknowledge these as the basis for a peaceful coexistence." Participants emphasized the importance of being connected to fellow activists from outside of Russia. When asked to give feedback on the conference, someone stated: "I had some different visions of Europe and it was very important and interesting to hear about the experience of Socialist collapse. It came later in the Soviet Union, so it was very important to me to hear these earlier stories. To me, the main result is that we could build connections that are directed to the future, because really: the problems we are dealing with are very similar, but we all use different tools. And how did you all achieve your success – because your success is tremendous: comparing what you have done to what we have done."

Many people commented on the uneasy relationship between Russia and their own country today, and also on their own uneasiness vis-à-vis Russia. "I am not proud of this, but I have to realize how far from my mindset Russia is," someone from Germany admitted. There was also concern about Russia's situation today. As someone from Germany said: "I deeply regret that after the transitions, the Soviet Union/Russia was pushed out of Europe. It was clear to us how much we had the Soviet Union to be thankful for. There was so much that was undignified: the way the Soviet Army was treated, for instance. All the things that happened in the 90s: the Eastern expansion of NATO. Even Putin was initially very open to Europe. But then Russia was pushed farther and farther, and so, as a result, Russia isolated herself. And so the bogeyman of Russia became again the new bogeyman. Back then we missed out on a huge opportunity to rebuild the common house Europe together with Russia." And someone from Russia spoke about the difficult relations between Russia and other countries in the following way: "Concerning the relationship between Russia and Europe, there are a lot of mixed feelings having to do with history. Russia is a very aggressive colonial empire and that should be clear especially when we talk about Eastern Europe as a symbol of hope or as examples of how things could be done differently. But when we speak of international solidarity, we shouldn't just say: this is evil Russia, evil Putin, but think about how on the individual level, we tend to reproduce the same hierarchies and dynamics."

During some moments of the conference, the relations became very visible between actors from different historical contexts. Thus the conference provided a good opportunity to uncover the different perspectives as well as some of the blind spots and mutual ignorance—all of which are an incentive for further work and collaboration.