

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Europe, Great Britain > Eastern Europe & Russian Federation > Russia > **Ilya Budraitskis: 'Repression is structural, no one in Russia can say they (...)**

# **Ilya Budraitskis: 'Repression is structural, no one in Russia can say they are safe'**

Monday 11 September 2023, by [BRUSA Francesco](#), [BUDRAITSKIS Ilya](#) (Date first published: 17 August 2023).

**WAR. Interview with the socialist political scientist: 'After the Wagner mutiny, the FSB is even more powerful: it is managing Putin's fears. From prison Navalny does not mention the Russian left, much less enter into the merits of his political programme: it is a total rejection of any collaboration'.**

Putin's war is as much external as internal. While the war against Ukraine rages on, state repression of Russian dissidents and political opponents continues. One of the most emblematic figures in this respect, Alexey Navalny - leader of the 'Russia of the Future' party, the victim of a poisoning attempt in the past and in prison since 2021 - made public last Sunday a long message from the penal colony where he is imprisoned.

It is the first statement by the opponent since his final sentence of 4 August, which sentenced him to 19 years in prison: a detailed indictment of his country's elites.

We commented on it with Ilya Budraitskis, political scientist and activist who left Russia shortly after the invasion of Ukraine, member of the Russian Socialist Movement and author of the book *Dissidents among dissidents*.

**In his message Navalny makes harsh criticism not only of Putin but also of the Yeltsin leadership and the liberal political class of the 1990s, identifying the 1993 coup as a key moment when the centralisation of power in Russia began. What do you think?**

This is not an unprecedented move for Navalny. I would say it is part of his political strategy, which also aims to distance himself as much as possible from the controversial and painful experience of the 1990s. The leader of 'Russia of the Future' has realised that in order to promote a new 'social-liberal populism' it is very important to mark a strong difference from that legacy and, from prison, he is further developing his analyses in this regard. In some ways this is a significant critique. If we look at Russian liberal circles, we notice how the basic conception with which the recent transformation of the Putin regime and the aggression against Ukraine is commonly explained is the idea of a continuity between the current Russian government and the Soviet regime. It is a typically liberal and 'anti-communist' line of thought that now, with Putin's dictatorship, there is a sort of revival of Stalinism, Soviet authoritarianism and so on. Navalny, on the other hand, sketches a different genealogy. He accuses Yeltsin and the old post-Soviet elites of having missed the historic opportunity to give Russian society a democratic foundation (in this case, an independent justice system and a strong parliament) and of having sacrificed the rule of law at the altar of the interests of the criminal cliques that came to power and enriched themselves through wild privatisations.

**What kind of reactions is this message provoking? Do you think it can find support in the Russian opposition?**

This is perhaps the most negative aspect of the letter. Navalny does not only make a general analysis of the 1990s period and the Yeltsin government, but personally accuses several important figures of the Russian liberal opposition. What transpires is therefore a total rejection of any kind of collaboration with the people who, according to Navalny himself, are morally and politically responsible for the current situation. Here, too, we are faced with an attitude typical of the leader of 'Russia of the future', who on the one hand has often distinguished himself by refusing to pursue democratic mediations with other opposition forces and on the other hand seeks to accredit himself and his supporters as the only sufficiently 'clean' and worthy figures to lead the Russian opposition. Those who have been criticised have had an easy time responding only on a personal level, without going into the merits of the broader political analysis. Moreover, there is hardly any mention of the Russian left, let alone going into the merits of Navalny's own political programme. This makes it problematic to think of potential collaborations. However, I think that the points concerning free elections and transition to a parliamentary republic should be supported without hesitation by all opposition forces.

**Meanwhile, the repression continues and does not only affect Navalny, but also important left-wing intellectuals such as Boris Kagarlitsky as well as far-right paramilitaries such as Igor Girkin. Are we entering a new phase?**

After the so-called 'mutiny' of Wagner's commander Prigozhin, both the level and the political spectrum of repressions have increased significantly. I believe that the secret services (FSB) turned out to be the biggest winners from that event: they were the first to give a name to what was happening and call it 'a mutiny'. It is safe to assume that the FSB has become even more powerful than before and is managing Putin's fears (which have increased precisely because of Prigozhin's actions). Meanwhile, attempts are being made to justify the wave of repression in the eyes of society. An article in Ria Novosti by Aleksandr Dugin, for example, has just stated that repression is a way of reinvigorating and making the social body more dynamic, while the new history books for schools that will come into force from September identify the excessive lightness of repression as the cause of the collapse of the USSR. In short, repression is becoming a structural element of the ideology of power, no one can say they are safe any more.

---

**Francesco Brusa**  
**Ilya Budraitskis**

[Click here](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and/or French.

---

**P.S.**

Il Manifesto

<https://ilmanifesto.it/ilya-budraitskis-la-repressione-e-strutturale-nessuno-in-russia-puo-dirsi-al-sicuro>