

## PERSONAL REACTIONS

### ***Personal Reactions of Prominent Russians to the Start of War*** ***A Sample Collected by Meduza***

#### **THE REACTIONS**

##### **Anton Dolin (film critic)**

Last night the most horrific and shameful event took place, at the very least in the course of my lifetime. The President of my country declared war on Ukraine. Never in my lifetime neither by word nor deed have I supported Putin and have never voted for him. Notwithstanding, for me this action is shameful and awful. Dear Ukrainians, I know that none of you has time now for individual voices, but all my thoughts are with you. If knew how to pray, I would write “prayers.” But I don’t know how. No doubt for the first time in my life I am experiencing such destruction from the blackness of evil, of which we are now at the center. And there is no way to know on what or whom to place our hopes. I don’t write “forgive”. Forgiveness for this is impossible.

##### **Valery Meladze (author)**

What happened today should never have happened, ever. History will someday judge and sort all this out. But today I want to ask, I beg you, halt the military actions and to take a seat at the negotiating table. People should be able to reach agreement – that’s why we have been given language. For this, we have been given all our capabilities. People should not perish, this must be stopped.

##### **Karen Shainyan (journalist and creator of the YouTube channel, “Open Discussion with Merry People”)**

This morning at seven o’clock I picked up the phone and learned that the war had begun. I thought it’s good that my son and his mother, who live in Kiev, are right now, completely by accident, not there but in Berlin.

I wasn’t expecting this. Our brain always tricks us, tries to keep up the hope that the worst won’t come to pass. Otherwise, we could go crazy. But actually, what’s happening now is the worst possible.

In any crisis situation, we should not think about the scale of the \*\*\*\*\* and how there is nothing we can do. We need to focus on what is under our personal control. The only thing that we can do is to protest actively. Secure wherever possible the safety of dear ones. If you still have money, convert it into foreign currency. Withdraw it as cash. As to what one should do in the grand scheme of things, how to go forward – for the moment, I have no answer. Everything that has concerned me in recent years has shriveled up against the backdrop of war. Just about everything else has lost its meaning. It impossible to think about anything when somewhere nearby they are killing people dear to us. And not just anybody is doing the killing. We are. And there is no way to escape by saying that this is the work of a mad Putin or of some blood-thirsty regime. No, Russia is us. And Russia has attacked Ukraine. And as long as we, ourselves, don’t take responsibility for this, \*\*\*\* will continue.

Therefore, each of us has to consider what individually we can do to stop killing people. Of course, (protesting) is dangerous and risky. But what are the options? We don’t have a big arsenal. Posts on Facebook won’t help, ironic posts on TikTok won’t help either. If you

don't give expression to peaceful civil protest against authorities, you become a collaborator. And my son, who is living in Kiev, one day will ask me: "Dad, what did you do when the Russians attacked Ukraine?" Am I to tell him I made a post on Facebook?

We must all assess our own risks and make a decision. I am not agitating. I am simply saying that I personally intend to express my position as a citizen because I am deeply opposed to this war – it is fratricidal, senseless, and unforgiveable. Never mind that it is simply a disgrace, with gigantic economic losses, those are secondary considerations. Most important – people are being killed there. It is stupid to deny this. For eight years we have closed our eyes to what has been happening in Donbas with Russia's participation. It is no longer possible to remain neutral.

**Galina Yuzefovich (literary critic)**

This is the most horrific morning of my life. And it is all being done in my name.

**Sergei Smirnov (journalist and editor-in-chief of Mediazona)**

Alarmists were right. American intelligence was right. I will say honestly just a couple of weeks ago, I didn't believe ... you just can't make any sense of it. So let's go forward as alarmists, it seems that this is the most rational position today. Putin aims to take Kiev and Lvov. And judging by his pronouncements he is even threatening under some undefined scenario to use nuclear weapons.

So, you try to be rational and write something. But to be honest, it is not working out all that well. You just want to scream and wake up. Nothing like this should be. This should not be. What a war. Why have we all become hostages to this madness? Shame on all those who pressed forward with this war. All of you who are engaged in propaganda, who are promoting propaganda, who are rejoicing in the bombings. Be damned.

**Dmitry Glukhovsky (author)**

For anyone with any common sense, living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it's impossibly strange to imagine a full-scale war, especially one unleashed by one's own side, under false, contrived pretexts. Notwithstanding that in the main I follow both domestic and foreign political agendas, like the rest of us, I can't help but note that tyranny here is deepening and freedom is being suppressed. All the same, it seemed that all this was a post-modern game in the spirit of Surkovism, that is, a sham, not a true dictatorship as in the USSR and Stalinism, but fake suppression. And suddenly it's all real..... It turns out that this is not paranoia or fantasy, it is astonishing and disconcerting that we are standing on the threshold of events that may entirely change the world and above all life in Russia, not to mention Ukraine.

This is a typical example of a predatory and rapacious war, which without any hesitation we can compare with Hitler's campaigns to seize the Sudetenland and with the partitioning of Poland. And it seemed that we would never find ourselves in such a reality, that it belongs to a long-forgotten past. All the same, that reality is here now. This war is fratricidal, the pretexts are all false. I am pained and ashamed by what is happening. I would like to ask forgiveness of Ukraine, as a people, for what we are doing with them. I don't know what we should all do. Who here knows? I have made clear my position on all possible social networks and will try to engage my audiences in order to make clear my position.

**Mikhail Gel'fand (bioinformatics technologist)**

I was not expecting to wake up and learn that war had started today. I turned out to be more stupid than I should have been. I am not ready to share my emotions.

The only thing that I consider right to say now consists of just two everyday observations. All of us to one extent or another are responsible for what is happening, some more, some less. Almost all. And second, I was in Kiev and Odessa after 2013, I gave some public lectures. I understand that now, apparently, this will never happen again in my lifetime. This is awful. I lack the corresponding life experience to know what to do now. But I think everyone should study the history of Germany, 1930-1940, and come up with their own conclusions. They could turn out to be quite disparate.

**Boris Akunin (author)**

Until the very end I could not believe that Putin would launch this absurd war, -- I was wrong. I always believed that in the end reason would triumph -- I was wrong. Insanity triumphed. People are dying, blood is being spilled. Russia is ruled by a psychically abnormal dictator and worst of all, most horrifying of all, Russia is submissively following his paranoia.

I know that Putinland and Russia are not the same thing, but today for the whole world there is no difference. For Ukrainians it is terrifying. It is terrifying for sensible Russians under the power of a maniac. It is also horrific to think of the Russian numbskulls who today are going to celebrate.

On February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, for all of us a terrifying era began. How long will it last, and how many victims will it claim?

**Kseniya Rappoport (actress)**

My youngest daughter is about to wake up. And before I take her to school, I will have to explain to her that our country has unleashed a war. And I will have to answer her simple, direct questions: Why are people going to die? Who decided this? And how are we going to stop it? And I don't know how to answer her. Rather, I know, but I am ashamed to do so.

How does one explain to a child in tears that we wise grown-ups, people who have finished the same school she now attends, who have read a bundle of wonderful books, who have studied several foreign languages, who have friends and dear ones in different countries across the world, trying to help each other, – that we cannot reach agreement with each other but rather are ready to kill. I am ashamed and fearful. I am against war. I don't want war. I don't know what I can do now to stop this horror.

I don't want to wake my daughter.

**Dmitry Muratov (editor in chief, Novaya Gazeta, Nobel laureate)**

Early this morning all of us got together in the office. We are grief-stricken. On the orders of President Putin, our country has launched a war with Ukraine. And there is nobody to stop the war. And along with our grief, we are ashamed. And the man in charge is spinning the nuclear button like the charm on a keychain to an expensive car. What is the next step? A nuclear strike? There is no other way to make sense of Vladimir Putin's words about the weapon of retaliation.

We are publishing this edition of *Novaya Gazeta* in two languages – in Ukrainian and in Russian. Because we do not consider Ukraine an enemy or the Ukrainian language the language of the enemy. And we never will. Only the anti-war movement of Russian citizens can save life on this planet.

**Viktor Shenderovich (writer and publicist)**

I was counting on their cold cynicism. I so hoped it was all a bluff. And as before, I think it was a bluff. The slap in the face which Putin personally received required him to respond in the form of real blood. And it turned out that there was not among the entire political elite a single decent person. There was not a single person who would try to stop this catastrophe. This war is the product of one man's sick, wounded pride. This is, of course, Russia's crime. We are all partners in this. All of us who allowed this moth to grow into a dragon capable of destroying the world. Shame and horror. "Forgive us poor murderers."

**Vladi (rapper and member of the group “Kasta”)**

I was sure that war was impossible. I truly consider the Ukrainians and us to be brothers and near ones between whom war is impossible. Still with my own eyes I saw the confirmations of the current regime. Such confirmations came only recently. I feel myself in the grips of an inhuman tyrant who has it in for all whom he does not like.

I hope we all will survive until such time when Russia will officially count all the crimes of today's authorities and acknowledge them.

**Evgeny Roizman (politician and former mayor of Ekaterinburg)**

I consider that our leaders have betrayed their own country. This is a tragedy. War has broken out. No one was expecting it. No one believed that this could happen. In the Third Reich, of course, there were also many skeptics. I have not yet sorted this all out in my head, but I consider that the decision to invade Ukraine is first of all a betrayal of our brothers and a betrayal of our own country.

**Roman Volobuev (theater director)**

It was clear how all this would end. Already yesterday it became clear that the President of Russia had lost his mind and that he is surrounded by cowards and idiots, so all we could do was to hope for a miracle. But there was no miracle. This is a horrific day. All the more horrific since as citizens of our country we have had over 20 years to prevent this. But we didn't. I don't know what more to say.

**Mikhail Khodorkovsky (politician)**

Putin has started a war against Ukraine. This is a crime against humanity. It is a heavy criminal action under \*Russian law, and it is a betrayal of \*Russian national interests. But we must clearly recognize that the war has been unleashed by Putin himself and by his circle for the purpose of retaining power, and not by the \*Russian people. Unfortunately, the government and its security structures are under their control. The unleashing of aggressive war, the use of military force for personal interests, means that power in Russia has been seized by a junta with Putin at its head.

Anyone who by word or deed, of his own free will, assists this junta will be a war criminal.

The war against Ukraine must be brought to a halt at any price. The war will become a fatal component in the development of \*Russian society and a critical factor for \*Russian stathood. Putin's threat to use nuclear weapons which he aired in his negotiations with the West has brought the world to the threshold of catastrophe.

As a \*Russian citizen and as a patriot, I consider it my duty to do everything to bring this unjust, aggressive, imperialist war to a halt. Participation in the anti-war movement, sabotage of the orders of the junta supporting the war, are the duty of every decent human being. Friends, compatriots, I call upon you to use every means to oppose this war.

**Sergei Lazarev (singer)**

A week ago my son awoke in the night in tears. When I asked him what was wrong, my seven-year-old son answered: "Daddy, I am afraid of the war." I answered, "My sunshine, what's wrong with you? Don't worry, relax, there's not going to be any war." Then, son of a bitch, today a real war began! \*\*\*\*\* {Devil, what are they doing?} Right now, I am bawling like a young kid. \*\*\*\*\* because I am fed up with the powerful of this world who continue to take the measure of themselves by arms and weapons and \*\*\*{damn it} there is only one life and it is passing us by. And no one will be able to breathe for years or to plan anything even for tomorrow because the politicians have other plans.

**Viktor Kosakovsky (film director)**

I hope that no cinematographer supports this unconscionable war. I hope that none of them will take part in the propaganda to support it. I hope that no one will take fake shots and films. Just film reality! No to war!

**Ekaterina Varnava (actress)**

For several hours, I have been unable to understand in what parallel world I find myself. I am very distressed. I am very worried for my family, my friends, my colleagues. I have been receiving, one after the next, messages on my social networks about what is happening now. All very different. From requests not to remain silent to personal accusations and threats. I watch the videos of your homes and streets and I read the comments about how frightening it is. And believe me, we are no less terrified. We are shocked, in pain, and ashamed. Why is all this happening? To what end? If everything continues like this, there will be no winners.

I am terrified by the media, and by those who say that they are delighted that all this has started, who note with pride, and who support what is happening, calling it "Defense" and "Liberation." Defense against whom? Against my friends who live there? We are clearly "hostages" to someone's ambitions and you rejoice at this? I am terrified at the ease with which our authorities are ready to retreat from relationships with the whole world and give no consideration to us. Without asking us.

Everyday citizens are suffering, and I don't understand: what is the logic? I simply don't believe that people can't reach agreement in a civilized way. That the diplomats have exhausted all means and that there are no compromises, that the people at the top have no desire to live in peace. Does history really teach us nothing? How can that be? Lord, why is all this happening? Who can stop this horror? NO ONE WANTS WAR. AS FOR MYSELF, I WANT ONLY PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP!

**Danila Poperechny (comedian)**

You can look at our authorities in different ways. Some people in this country actually voted for him, some not. But fact is fact, this is our reality, this is our government, this is our current president, and these are his actions and his decisions. In the meantime, as we can confirm, our politicians and the ministers of our country stutter and tremble with shaking hands and can do nothing other than nod obediently. Responsibility for at least some words rests with us.

**Liya Akhedzhakova (actress)**

Glukhovsky, in one of his powerful novels, *The Post*, describes an epidemic that has taken possession of all of Russia – it's called "Obsession." What is this terrifying infection? Words.

People are hammering nails into their ears to save themselves from this savage disease, so as not to fall ill with it. Where people bite each other's throat, bleed, and die in pain.

More than anything, I fear these words, this propaganda, after which begins the epidemic of obsession. Still, I call on all cultural agents: the moment has come when we must speak out. This is our last chance.

The war is raging. And this war and this lie are overflowing so that the sea is flooded. Nature can no longer put up with our lie, with our meanness and that we have dirtied everything we possibly could, with words, action, and corruption. And with this foul relationship with our neighbors, with the earth, with the oceans, and with the seas. The volcanoes cannot survive. Typhons erase whole cities from the face of the earth. This is because we are all enemies, because we hate everyone around. We have come to hate Ukraine. And I can't understand why. Why do we hate Ukraine? We fought, together, we did time in the gulag together, in Sandarmokh....

When will this hate for all around us come to an end? Only we are white and fluffy. And everything dirties us. This will end badly. The world will not stop. I have traveled over the whole of Belarus and Ukraine. They are my followers – one does not find in them this hatred of a neighbor for the simple fact that he is from Belarus, or Georgia, or Moldova. This does not exist among the people. And now they are bombing Ukraine via Lukashenko. This will never wash off. And bombing with delight, with applause. And for eight years now people have been dying.

**Kantemir Balagov (film director)**

What is happening now is simply some sort of nightmare. It is shameful and painful. With each new event, it becomes more and more complicated to love one's country. And let's not pretend that just one man is responsible for all this. That would be too convenient. We are all guilty that we did nothing to prevent this.

**Boris Grebenshchikov (musician and leader of the group “Aquarium”)**

What is happening is pure insanity. Those who have unleashed this war have lost their minds. They are a disgrace to Russia.

**Miron Fyodorov (rapper, “Oxxxymiron”)**

Today I won't limit myself to the words that I am for peace and against war. Because in words, everybody is for peace and against war, however, this does not prevent us from waging rapacious wars. I want to say specifically that I am against this war, the war that Russia is unleashing against the people of Ukraine. I find this a catastrophe and a crime....

I have given performances in Ukraine a bunch of times. We were always received with great warmth and hospitality. I love that country very much.

Now I want to specifically address my followers. I am postponing my six concerts in Moscow and St. Petersburg indefinitely. Whoever wants to can get their money back. I am confident that you will understand me: I can't entertain you while \*Russian rockets are falling on Ukraine, while the residents of Kiev must hide in cellars or in the subway. And as long as people are dying.

Generally, I cannot remain silent. I know that the majority of those living in Russia are against this war. I am confident that the more people speak out against the war, the sooner

we will be able to bring this nightmare to a close. And finally, I know that the natural reaction to what is happening now is despair. Total disorientation. A sense of inevitability. But I remind you: if you stand up in opposition, don't do it with a sad face.

## **Glossary -- Who's Who of the Respondents**

Anton Dolin is a Russian film critic, journalist, radio host, blogger, and podcaster. He was the editor in chief of *Iskusstvo Kino* Magazine. -- *The Art of Film*. Fled to Latvia in March 2022 after death threats.

Valery Meladze is a Russian singer of Georgian descent. He is the brother of composer and producer Konstantin Meladze, who writes songs for him. Honored Artist of the Russian Federation.

Karen Shainyan, born in Siberia the son of two scientists, is a journalist, producer, and TV presenter. Gay rights advocate who ran the YouTube channel, Straight Talk with Gay People, and is a cofounder of the Future History studio.

Galina Yuzefovich is an award-winning literary critic who writes for Meduza online news and teaches contemporary literature. Called Russia's #1 literary critic – “the person on whose verdict the fate of a writer depends.” Winner, in 2017, of the Revizor prize awarded by the Russian book industry. Fled to Turkey on Feb. 24, 2022.

Sergey Smirnov is a political journalist and editor-in-chief of Mediazona, an influential independent news website whose reporting focuses on political persecutions and human rights violations in Russia. Fled to Vilnius, Lithuania on March 4, 2022.

Dmitry Glukhovsky, a popular author and journalist, has 44 books on Goodreads with 207,949 ratings. His most popular book, *Metro 2033*, a post-nuclear dystopia set in the Moscow subway. His novels have been translated into English and other languages. In June 2022, a warrant was issued for his arrest for discrediting the Russian army. He now lives outside of Russia.

Mikhail Gel'fand is a bioinformatics specialist. Well-known in the international scientific community, his work focuses on comparative genomics and systems biology, among other topics. He is a Fellow of the International Society for Computational Biology and director of the Center for Molecular and Cellular Biology at the Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology,

Boris Akunin, a philologist, critic, essayist, and translator of Japanese, is one of the most widely read writers in Russia. He has 178 books and 149,887 reviews on Goodreads. He is the author of a multi-volume history of the Russian State,

Kseniya Rappoport is an actress and director, best known for her roles in *The Seagull*, *Streets of Broken Lights*, and *Anna Karenina*. She is an Honored Actress of the \*Russian Federation.

Dmitry Muratov is a journalist, TV presenter, and the editor-in-chief of *Novaya Gazeta*, which advocated for democracy and freedom of expression in Russia. In 2021, he won the Nobel Prize for Peace for his work with *Novaya Gazeta*.

Viktor Shenderovich is a prominent satirist, author, scriptwriter, and radio host. He writes a column for the *New York Times*.

Vladi leads the Russian rap group Kasta, which has produced many albums and musical videos and won many awards, including best hip-hop (Russian Music Awards MTV, 2004) and best acoustic (Russian Street Awards, 2010).

Evgeny Roizman is a politician and former mayor of Ekaterinburg (2013-18). He campaigned against corrupt police and supported drug rehabilitation. He was reportedly detained for referring to the “special operation” as an “invasion”. *NYT*, Aug. 24, 2022.)

Roman Volobuev is a Russian film and TV director, writer, and producer, best known for his eight-year stint as film reviewer at *Afisha* magazine and for writing and directing two popular Russian TV series.

Mikhail Khodorkovsky was once Russia’s wealthiest oligarch and is sometimes termed “Putin’s oldest enemy.” After founding a reform-oriented organization, he was jailed for eight years, subsequently pardoned, and today lives in London.

Sergey Lazarev is a singer, dancer, and actor. He represented Russia in the Eurovision Song Contest in 2016 in Stockholm, finishing in third place.

Viktor Kosakovsky is an innovative documentary filmmaker whose films have received more than 100 awards at national and international festivals.

Ekaterina Varnava is a TV actress and presenter known for her role in the Russian comedy show *Double Trouble*. She has over seven million followers on Instagram.

Danila Poperechny is one of the most popular Russian stand-up comedians, as well as a cartoonist, YouTuber, actor, and podcaster.

Liya Akhedzhakova is a Soviet and Russian film, stage, and voice actress who received the title of People’s Artist of Russia in 1994.

Kantemir Balagov is a young filmmaker and cinematographer who was named Best Director at the Cannes Film Festival in 2022.

Boris Grebenshchikov, a singer, song writer, and musician, is a prominent member of the generation that is widely considered to be the “founding fathers” of Russian rock music. In part for his leading role in the band Aquarium, he is a household name in Russia.

Miron Fyodorov, known by the stage name Oxxxymiron, is one of Russia’s most popular rappers. He was cast into the media spotlight when he cancelled a series of shows in Moscow and St. Petersburg to protest Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

