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Falter Radio, der Podcast mit Raimund Löw.
Sehr herzlich willkommen, meine Damen und Herren im Falter Radio.
In dieser Sendung hören Sie die Abrechnung der Russland-Expertin Nina Khrushcheva mit Putin und seinem Krieg.
Khrushcheva lehrt und forscht in den USA.
Sie ist bestens vertraut mit den russischen Verhältnissen.
Und sie ist Ur-Enkelin des ehemaligen sowjetischen Parteichefs Nikita Khrushchev.
Khrushcheva warnt seit Langem vor der Rehabilitierung Stalin zu unter Putin.
Den Angriff auf die Ukraine er hat sie unmissverständlich verurteilt.
Was sich in der russischen Gesellschaft abspielt unter den Bedingungen des Krieges, das wird entscheidend für die Zukunft unseres Kontinents.
Anlass für Zuversicht gibt es aus Ihrer Sicht wenig, angesichts einer drohen Eskalation des russischen Krieges, trotz des heldenhaften Widerstands einer Minderheit.
An der Akademie der angewandten Kunst in Wien sprach der Historiker Philipp Blom mit Nina Khrushcheva.
Nina ist Professor für International Relations at the New School in New York.
Sie herself describes herself somewhat modestly, if I may say so, as a Professor of Bullshit.
That has a lot to do with the fact that she looks at propaganda.
And if you professionally study propaganda, I suppose you are a Professor of Bullshit.
Nina has written widely on Russia, on modern Russia.
She is at the moment preparing a biography of Nikita Khrushcheva, who also happens to have been her great grandfather.
But her first book was on Nabokov and that shows you that there is a great cultural range and depth to these observations.
Nina, welcome and thank you for being our first guest.
Thank you.
Tell me before we go into all the political considerations into the historical considerations, you were working on this biography and that meant that you spent a good part of last year in Moscow.
Yes, I did.
Yes, I did.
Tell me about that experience.
Tell me what happened and what changed in Russia and in Moscow in the course of this year when you were there.

Well, thank you.

Thank you everybody for inviting me.

It's a great honour and I'm very humbled to be the first one to open the series.

I also want to address, if there are any Ukrainian people in the audience, I do want to say that many of us feel horrible and very apologetic for what my country is doing to your country.

I know that, Mayor Kooper, you've heard it many times, it doesn't change anything, but I think it is important to say that and also I do understand that the heartache of the Russian society cannot be possibly compared to what Ukraine is going through and yet to answer your question, there is a heartache in the Russian society.

I entered Russia, I left, I was there for a year and a half writing the book.

I left Moscow to teach in New York at the new school in January, a month before the war or as it is called in Russia Special Military Operation began.

Until 30 minutes before Putin announced it, I argued that it cannot happen.

I argued that it cannot happen because it was going against every single national interest, not the Kremlin interest, the national interest that Russia had and Putin with everything he has done or has been done under him in 22 years of him being in power seemed a gambler, but a careful gambler, he would not bite more than he could chew and the idea that he would decide to go on all of Ukraine because even I knew and I thought if I knew that how could his people or he himself wouldn't know it because what I learned from writing Khrushchev's biography is that he was in charge of the Communist Party of Ukraine before the war, after World War II, after World War II, that Ukrainians are going to fight like hell.

They are not going to give up and I remember there was a conversation a few months after it began saying, well, you're surprised that Ukrainians are so tough and so not giving up.

No, I didn't.

That's the first thing I said, that Russians wouldn't have a prayer, so Russians didn't have a prayer.

I decided to go back after teaching a semester because I wanted to see what it is there.

Instead of just reading the New York Times of what it is there.

I wanted to witness that because people go to places where things change for the better.

They go to wars because that's where the action is.

They don't go to the dying societies because they're dying societies, whether you're going to find out there.

So I went there to see sort of the end of that Russian history, the end of Russian history of 30 years when Mikhail Gorbachev said, it's a free country, do whatever you want to do.

That's how in fact I ended up in the United States.

I wasn't an immigrant.

I just went as an expert.

I wanted to study in America and so I did.

So I wanted to see what it is when history unravels back.

And I drove on a bus from Helsinki to St. Petersburg.

It was an absolutely red sunset and it really felt like I was getting into the end of the world environment.

It was just absolutely as if the world is going to end tomorrow.

And that's how I ended that Russia.

I was walking around the next day in St. Petersburg and everything seemed as if nothing happens. There was a pivot to Asia, as Putin said, we have nothing to do with Europe, we're just going to look a different direction.

Every restaurant was Julius Meln HaCafé, the Roman Pizza, the Brussels French Fries.

There were street artists who were, instead of painting Sisi Ping, they were actually painting Angelina Jolie and George Clooney.

And so it really felt like even if the government said, that's what we're doing and we're turning away.

We're turning away St. Petersburg, a window into the West, which is an imitation, a grandiose imitation of Amsterdam, Venice, and other places.

And I thought, the people didn't get the message, clearly they just did not get the message.

But then you start listening to conversations and every conversation is about the war.

Everybody talks about sanctions, war, how horrible it is, no, we were forced to do it, no, Putin needs to go, and all different conversations, just about that.

And then September 21st, partial mobilization, partial mobilization, and I witnessed once again the most amazing thing, then my building where I live in Moscow, suddenly my phone started lighting up and saying, this bastard's on the seventh floor, this bastard's on the eighth floor, this bastard's on the second floor.

The recruiters don't open the door.

So people were warning each other that that's happening.

And you could hear that those who don't have boys in the family, they would run out and start screaming at the recruiters, saying, what are you doing?

Who needs this war?

This is ridiculous.

Why can't we just live normal life?

And what did the Ukrainians do to you?

And it was very brave because God knows you can be arrested for, very brave, and once again comparing to Ukrainians, nothing is very brave, but it was brave in that environment.

And then the woman who was a social liaison, she was complaining to me, she said, well, they were so horrible, like, what did you expect, what, you bring, you take these people to war.

And then you noticed how, you know, with all the declarations on TV that 99.5% of the population support the special military operation, and then on the other side of TV, which you actually don't see, but you know it's happening because you go on the Internet or people talk about it, the oldest lines on the road to Kazakhstan, on the road to Georgia, on any bordering country trying to escape the 99.5% support of that war.

And I would calculate that about a million and a half, two million people left.

So it cannot possibly be 99.5% because 2% already, it's not more, is gone.

And so what I saw is the society in complete and utter despair, society that doesn't its dialogue for tomorrow, that absolutely doesn't see any future for itself and just basically trying to comprehend what happened to them.

I mean, this is, I think, very important because I think we all live behind the screen of propaganda in our western countries, certainly more benevolent and more porous than in the totalitarian regime. But of course everything we hear is colored by a perception, colored perhaps also by a

will.

We do not get much unfiltered information.

And we have many of us, many people in the West have the impression that support for the war in Russia is either very high or most people just couldn't give a damn and live their lives and have a total lack of empathy.

But what did you perceive in that society?

How did they deal with that change?

Well, I mean, yes, they do give the numbers 75%.

I didn't do my own polling.

I went to a couple of places.

I didn't go far into Siberia, but I did go to a place which is right in front of the euros, sort of as they call it, the last city of Europe, which I guess it's not going to be the last city of Europe, because Russia no longer part of anything European, as we were told, city of Perm, which is sort of, I mean, it's an artistic city, but also quite a working city at the same time.

And I did not see that support.

But when you have a new law and all these incredibly oppressive laws, because before February 24th last year, February 22nd, when Putin announced that he's going to annex the territories completely, the Danetsk and Luhansk republics, then it was a functional autocracy.

So it was a functional autocracy, but it had some free speech.

There was still some opposition.

There were protests.

Nowhere, I guess.

Nowhere.

There was still publishing.

There was Dorscht, Rain TV, and so Memorial that got closed December 31st, so a great gift for the New Year as December 31st of 2021.

So all of that really sort of existed.

I mean, it wasn't freedom by no means, but also what you discover by being there.

And that's it for me.

That's why it was important how you think it's totalitarian, but actually it was not.

It was first autocracy, then it became authoritarianism.

After the 24th, it is a dictatorship.

It's not totalitarian yet, because there is still room.

People would not be able to travel.

People would not be able to have all this sort of novel gazette, still publishers, and it still can be accessed online.

The Rain TV is still going to be accessed online.

The Echo Moskwy, the Echo Moskwy Radio can still exist online.

So totalitarianism would suggest or tells us that none of it is going to happen.

So we're not even there yet.

And so what I witnessed in the last six months is that it's like a straight jacket, that people are terrified of moving in, because in a straight jacket, the more you move, the tighter it gets

you.

And so in Perm in St. Petersburg in Moskwy, and I said I cannot speak for further, it's not that they don't have empathy.

They have an absolute horror.

It's a despair.

It's something that, how did we get there?

What was wrong?

Where some people think what went wrong?

Some people, of course, blame the other, because that's in propaganda.

The first thing you do is blame the other, especially when it pours on you from TV every day.

So you blame the other.

But it is a society that absolutely doesn't understand what the stability is, what the exit is.

And I was giving you these numbers when we spoke before.

So 50% of depression drugs, I mean the cell of depression drugs went 50%.

And Russia is a very reading country.

It's a cultural country.

So they read a lot.

Last year, two most sold books.

One first one is a self-help book.

And another one is George Orwell 1984.

So clearly that's not a society that is not empathetic.

You had a little encounter with George in a bookshop as well.

I did.

I did.

I really, George has been really quite present there, because another thing is the animal.

The third book is the animal house.

So what are we doing is we're treated like the animals once again.

So St. Petersburg again, I went to a bookstore in St. Petersburg, their grand bookstore.

A lot of Russian bookstores are grand and you're very well equipped with books.

And I was actually there in the summer when I went, when I arrived, when I said there was still unclear which way we're pivoting.

And it was a regular bookstore with normal books at the books that are sold, sold a lot at the entrance, as often are at the bookstore.

So in the winter, it was an entirely different story.

The books upfront at the door would be all this patriotic, I mean, nobody needs to know the titles, but the title is, Russia is Great, St. Petersburg is the greatest thing that happened to humanity.

Moscow is even better.

It's our Vladimir the Great or whatever, Ivan the Third, or Ivan the Terrible, we have the best thing that happened to humanity and so on.

There was a great nationalist, very serious kind of nasty nationalist and a writer, actually a talented writer, unfortunately, Zakhar Prelepen.

So it's a new biography of Sholokhov.

Do you remember Sholokhov, Mikhail Sholokhov, okay, some of you do.

But a lot of people don't.

I personally kind of forgot about him when I got out of high school in the Soviet Union.

So here it is, a new biography of Sholokhov, right there in Dreyantron.

So just read all this patriotic things.

So I got my anthropological experience.

I saw how the country changed in the bookstore from summer to winter.

And I was walking out and suddenly I am seeing a very familiar face on a mug right there in the middle of all this patriotic books.

And I just startled because it was the face of George Orwell on a mug.

And on the other side of the mug it said, let the big brother think that there is tea in this mug.

So somebody who was doing this patriotic display decided just to stick George Orwell right in the middle of it.

Just that.

That brings us sort of to the heart of the matter in this where you study propaganda.

And every conflict is also a conflict of narratives.

And well, we hear some things about this Russian narrative and it's pretty confusing.

I think that is partly part of the method, the confusion, the putting out of different equivalent statements that partly contradict each other, but how did this narrative, I mean is this narrative, is that something that people just let wash over them, are they informed or is that something, we are beginning to learn Russia is at war with NATO and NATO started it and Russia had to help it, had to help it, seven had to defend the Russians in Ukraine or the Russian speaking Ukrainians and therefore et cetera, et cetera.

How plausible is that narrative in Russia?

As Mikhail Gorbachev used to say in your question, there is an answer.

So you already just summarized it all for me.

For many people it is plausible because that's what you hear every day.

And of course every time when European politicians says we need to defeat Russia or we need Russia

to disintegrate or we need Russia to have strategic weakening, so of course is them being replayed and reused as propaganda, very conveniently and rather successfully to a lot of people.

And also of course Russia, maybe like Austria, but a lot of countries, for example I live in the States in America, it's certainly the case, their cities and then there are smaller places and then their villages and so of course they receive information, no, I mean they may receive information similarly, but they don't really recycle it for themselves differently.

So for example in cities when they say NATO is out to get us, people have traveled to NATO countries so they know NATO is not out to get them, in fact not at all.

But if you are in a smaller place or in a village and you've never been abroad or you've been to Turkey when once in five years you would collect some money to go to Antalya, and it is an entire, I mean Turkey is a NATO country, but it's a friendly one too.

So it would be an entirely different perception and that's what the state propaganda targets, really those who, because everybody in the, you know, there's two million, a million and

a half and two million that I said left, these are the ones who are not going to believe that NATO is out to get us and others who cannot leave, because another thing in propaganda is that, and it's not just the Soviets, in Nazi Germany it was as well and in Saddam Hussein's Iraq it was, is that ultimately people tend to think to defend themselves, so they defend themselves for themselves.

And instead of thinking and having sleepless nights for many people they say oh my god what are we doing, and a lot of people are having that.

But many others would say I really have to deal with my own children going to the kindergarten and my parents are sick and I need to do a new job, so I'm not going to be overridden with guilt.

I'm just going to take this because it's a very good defense mechanism and that's how it works.

But I must say that I am not entirely believer in the fact that when the state Putin messaged Sergei Lavrov message, the Foreign Minister, kind of slightly contradictory in their nature, then Prigorzhin is there, and then of course Dmitry Medvedev is something else.

I actually think that that cacophony is not because they are planning it this way, because Russia is a just generally chaotic and discombobulated country.

It's not really kind of evolutionary formula where, as it would be in German case for example, in pH 255, we are going to say this and that.

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Aber ich meine, es ist für die Westen, für die Menschen, die nicht mit diesem Kind von Propagandas gewohnt sind, es ist witzig, wenn jemand sagt, die Ukrainien sind alle Nazis, und du weißt, dass das Land von einem jüdischen Präsidenten, der mit mehr als 70% des Votos gelöst hat, etwas Nazis nicht immer tun, wie ist es möglich, dass eine Geschichte so auszulegen kann und existieren?

Eine Geschichte so auszulegen kann, ich meine, jede Geschichte kann eine Geschichte auszulegen. Was ich dazu möchte, ist, dass es eine Theorie ist, dass reale Kraft ist, was du nicht glauben kannst.

Ich meine, ja, es ist so eine Sache, dass es ein totaler Leben ist, also wenn du die Geschichte brennst, aber es ist auch eine Repetition, wenn du deine Geschichte oft genug brennst, und besonders, wenn jemand sagt, dass Russland zu verdient ist, und das ist auch so, dass er vielleicht ein Punkt hat.

Aber dann noch eine Sache über Russland, ich meine, wir müssen das nicht erinnern, aber ich meine, es ist ein sehr großartiger Land, also in vielen Gründen ist es leichter zu kontrollieren, aber es ist auch viel schwerer zu kontrollieren.

Aber noch eine Sache, es ist leichter für die Menschen, die von den Staaten, weil von den Staaten, wenn es zum Ausgleich des Staates geht, du weißt nicht, was passiert, wenn du in Kamchatka bist, die in Japan gefordert ist.

So was es in Moskau ist, deine Message ist schon ziemlich gestorben, also du hörst,

was du willst.

Aber eine andere Sache über die All-Nazis, Russland nie glaubt, eine Vollmessage, ich meine, das ist eine andere Sache.

In Russland gibt es eine Double-Speak, die George Orwell auch beschreibt, die Double-Speak-Double-Think,

ich meine, die Staaten sagen dir etwas, aber für dich, also sie sind möglich, um etwas auszunehmen.

Sie glauben nicht auf die Voll-Nazi Sache, aber dann, auf der anderen Seite, sie wollen sie defeated.

Also da muss etwas mit ihnen falsch sein.

Aber auch, und ich bin wirklich überrascht, zu sagen, dass wir in dem Fall Kursche bauten, und die Russen oft schon haben, ich meine, jetzt probieren wir wieder, da war es ein leichter derogativer Name für die Ukraniern, die Hachli, und ein paar Russen, ich meine, ein paar Soviets, ein paar Soviets haben es nicht gemacht, aber die Russen haben es benutzt.

Und weil es, manchmal, du weißt nicht, dass es derogativer ist, du machst es einfach.

Und ich erinnere mich, meine Mutter hat mir gesagt, wenn sie ein kleines Mädchen war, sie hat das Wort benutzt.

Und Kursche war komplett in Ruhe, sie sagte, wie du siehst, das ist eine Nation, das ist nicht eine Nation, die fängt ganz von, eke sehr gut auf alle Russen, sie encouraging sich in den

Das Problem ist, dass du nicht von A bis B bis C in Ordnung gehst.

Du gehst von A bis Z, von Z bis C bis C bis K, und so weiter.

Und so kannst du sich alles denken, alles, was du willst.

Also ist es nicht 100% rational.

Aber wenn es ein paar Prozent ist,

wird niemand die jüdische, jüdische Zelenskie, die Nazis glauben.

Aber es muss aber etwas sein.

Und das ist so, wie sie es sich für sich selbst erklären.

Du warst in einem Interview gefragt, wie viele die gefragt haben.

Könnte das Wohl sein, wenn es geäußert wurde?

Und du sprichst George Kennan.

George Kennan ist ein amerikanischer Ambassador in Russland.

Er ist ein long-term Diplomat, der in Russland über viele Jahre lebt.

Seine politische Analyse ist eine konservative Virginie

auf der Reaktion, aber immer sehr, sehr clever.

Und informiert by a real deep insight.

Tell us what George Kennan said about this and how you interpret it.

It's interesting that you say what's conservative Virginie

in the reactionary, because he was quite right about a lot of things.

In fact, he was the author of the containment theory,

as you remember, 1947, when he wrote a long telegram

in foreign affairs describing the sources of Soviet conduct

and basically designing a formula of preventing wars with the Soviet Union.

And in fact, it worked fine.
I am slightly biased about George Kennan.
I can tell you why. I was his research assistant.
I was his last research assistant.
He was 90 years old at Princeton.
So I spent two years discussing these things with him.
And in fact, he had, I was his research assistant
exactly at the time when I was strobe tell,
but then under secretary of state for Eurasian affairs.
In the state department, they were suggesting the expansion of NATO
and they writing memos.
And of course, they would write memos to George Kennan,
because George Kennan spent his whole life analyzing Russia
and the Soviet Union. In fact, he began a long, long time.
And of course, he spoke beautiful Russian.
It was pre-revolutionary Russian.
And one time, and actually, he sometimes insisted on speaking Russian with me,
but then he said, well, I can't speak Russian to you.
We have to speak English and I would say why.
And he said, your Russian is so dirty.
Because he was beautiful aristocratic
and mine was Soviet Russian. That's all I have.
So he shared those documents with me.
I still have them, in fact, with his notes saying, what do you think?
Because of my research assistant opinion in 97
about the NATO enlargement matter at all.
But he was arguing that the NATO enlargement,
how no matter how non-aggressive that is,
Russians would take as an aggression.
And it would influence, even if they don't mean it now,
eventually would influence their political behavior.
Which is exactly what happened.
Also George Cannon wrote it before Putin came in.
So that he was still talking about regular politicians.
So Putin is not a regular politician.
And I learned it the hard way, as I said,
when I 30 minutes before the invasion, I argued it couldn't happen.
Because I still thought of him as a kind of a political being,
even if he's a KGB man.
But it turned out he's a KGB man bordering on the Tsar.
Which certainly no political consideration would apply to him.
And if George Cannon thought it would be a problem politically,
then if he knew that Putin would be president, he would say,
oh my God, don't do it, because that war is going to happen tomorrow.

But what do you do in politics with such an insight?
You know, doing this will be perceived as that.
But this involves sovereign nations, who are freed from associations
and have strong interests and their arguments on the other side.
So, what can grow from such an insight?
Yes, one can understand why this impression would arise.
But what would that mean translated into politics?
Well, I am not a policy person, which is thank God.
I think it's the worst job in the world to prescribe policy.
I only analyze politics, so I don't know.
But I also can tell you that what George Cannon was right about,
I don't know what you're going to do with this information,
because that's probably for policy, it's neither here nor there.
Although probably need to be recognized maybe or maybe not.
That his understanding of Russia very correctly,
even when there's no longer Soviet Union,
that Russia under any president, Yeltsin even,
would consider itself a great power.
And so great powers deserve certain considerations.
But isn't that at the heart of the matter?
Yes, but then you ask me then to prescribe policy,
which I absolutely refuse to do.
Well, I'm sort of glad you are.
But this brings up the matter of respect.
The insistence of being treated as a great power
for a nation with an economy the size of Switzerland,
a very large nation with a lot of rusty nukes.
It is an impossible ask, isn't it?
Wenn du russisch studierst,
wenn du russisch nicht studierst,
das ist ein sehr rationaler Argument.
Aber wie gesagt, nicht ABC,
aber AZK, Y, etwas anderes.
Take us into that irrationality, this subtitle of a book
about your grandfather, the lost Khrushchev.
The subtitle is a journey into the Gulag of the Russian mind.
Does this Gulag still exist?
Well, apparently, I mean, when I wrote this book,
it was sort of a matter of, even my Nabokov book was...
maybe George Kennan influence.
It was Russia between art and politics.
And the book argued that Russia has no politics,
it has only art, but then becomes politics.
And so when you talk about the rational reaction,

even Russian politics is artistic.
I mean, it's not a defense of it,
but it's just this grandiose,
we're gonna do something grandiose and something remarkable.
If you look at St. Petersburg,
it was built in 10 years, I think, in 17, something or other.
In 10 years, and you can see I'm a Muscovite,
I don't even know when St. Petersburg was built.
In 10 years, and the death toll was stunning.
But they got a great thing.
So it doesn't matter which way they're gonna get it,
but it's all this grandiose artists.
When Yeltsin said, we're no longer communists,
that's it, we're done.
We're just gonna build capitalism in three-a-quarter years.
In three-quick years, why would you want three years?
In the rest of the world spend 300 years achieving.
Okay, we're in a hurry where, why are we so rushing to do that?
And so that's how Russia approaches this.
Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution in 2017,
I think we talked about this, you read Marx, it's a philosophy.
It looks good on paper, they're not revolutions,
they're uprisals here and there, they're protest.
It's like, oh, actually no, maybe just a revolutionally way.
And the Russians, only Russians would say, looks good, let's do it.
And so they do it.
Then Putin reads all this Solzhenitsa and how to rebuild Russia,
which is a puntslavic state.
He reads all these philosophers,
actually fascist philosophers, Ivan Ilyin and others,
which is all philosophies created about Russia on a foreign soil.
So it's not even within Russia,
but it looks good on paper, it looks grand on paper.
And he's suddenly like Lenin, whom he doesn't like,
because he doesn't like revolutions.
He says, okay, yeah, that sounds good, let's just do it.
So it's absolutely rational.
And my book with the...
I heard, sorry, but I heard a lovely idea,
that one of the reasons that he doesn't like Lenin,
is that Lenin helped bring a Western ideology to Russia
and subjugated Russia, the entirety of Russia to a Western ideology.
Not exactly.
He doesn't like it, because he demolished the Tsardom.

And that great Tsardom of the Great Empire,
as if Lenin didn't bring a new empire to the fore.
In terms of the Gulag of the Russian Mind,
the book is that essentially Russia is a hypothetical culture.
It sort of imagines itself so and then lives into the imagination.
And so that was written in 2014, published in 2014.
So in 2014, it was before Crimea even.
And so then I was making a point that Russians don't even need barbwire
to keep them in check.
They're just going to build it in their own brain, in their own head.
And how wrong I was,
because now there is an almost actual barbwire rising up.
So in terms of propaganda,
once you kind of the message is there and the message is there,
and then suddenly it just turns into reality.
If you describe this society,
what do you see as a possible future from now on?
I mean, we are all in a situation where none of us know.
Anything can basically happen.
We are on a day after an American fighter jet,
a Russian fighter jet and an American drone collided in the air.
We are days or weeks before a great spring offensive,
which will decide a lot on the ground.
But of course you can't know the outcome.
But you have a very good idea of power society
in the situation that the Russian society is in, would react.
I'm supposed to know the answer, I guess.
I don't have a good answer.
I guess my answer to this question,
which of course we thought about right from the beginning,
February 24th, February 25th,
is that my mind hasn't changed.
And I think I already then thought that Ukraine will survive
and be better than ever and their identity is now stronger
than ever in the world helps them and hopefully they kind of exceed
the expectations that everybody has of them.
But Russia is finished.
I mean, I'm sure it will, it cannot.
I mean, 11 time zones do not disappear from the face of the earth.
I mean, it's too big of a country and it's adjacent to Europe
and part of it is in Europe.
But how Russia is going to get out of this is a miracle to me
because Putin is not going to give up.
He's not winning enough to stop the war.

So he is going to continue on.

And now I was talking to some Russian colleagues today and Putin is the war.

Now it is his identity, it is his definition.

It is his potential to stay in power for as long as he stays in power.

So as long as he fights the war, he is in power, unless there are some drastic decisions being made.

I mean, in this nuclear button keep coming up in a conversation.

And then maybe somebody around him would say,

you know what, we've waited long enough, just enough.

But we don't know that, so we are not going to predict that.

So the war goes, the war escalates because it escalates.

And we are not really up for all of us and not up for a great ending.

So if the war continues, it's bad.

If the war somehow stops, it's also bad,

because then what is future of Ukraine where the war stopped?

I mean, what would be, what are the guarantees?

What kind of territory Russia would be willing to give?

But these questions are very important, because whenever I write

or speak about this war, I get a whole bunch of emails telling me

that I glorify war, that I am an aggressor,

and that there must be immediate peace negotiations now.

And I got sent an a petition where I should have asked

that weapons deliveries to Ukraine should be tied to diplomatic progress,

whatever the diplomatic progress would look like.

It's this idea, by the way. Donald Trump just suggested that.

Well, that makes the idea all the more appealing.

Exactly, that's my point.

What do you say to people in Europe who, for very decent reasons,

think that there should be immediate peace and an end to the war at all costs?

When people accuse you of glorifying war, what does it mean?

I don't understand, how do you glorify war?

I've been known to say, I believe Putin must lose this war,

and we must do what it takes to support Ukraine in achieving that.

Okay, so, I wouldn't say Putin must lose this war,

just because that gives him ammunition, so I would refrain from this kind of lines.

I personally do know, I don't glorify war,

but I don't see how immediate peace agreement can happen, I just don't see it.

Because when, fine, let's say it is.

But then, so many times we've heard from the Russian side

that we are very happy to have a peace agreement,

but our conditions must be met.

And you should say, okay, if your condition must be met,

then every other condition must be met.
So everybody have their conditions that must be met.
So why your conditions are more important than other conditions?
So I just don't see any potential give or take.
I mean, if there is a give or take, I get it.
I mean, that can be negotiated, something.
But if the beginning of the process is, as the Kremlin often says,
we have no preconditions, but our condition must be met.
It's like, okay, you have no preconditions,
but everybody should do what you say.
So I personally do not see how it can happen now without some give or take.
Like it was in the Cuban Missile Crisis,
because everybody has been asking me about that.
1962, Oktober, Kruschew and Kennedy on the brink.
There is no such...
I'm not seeing any of that political, coming back to George Cannon,
any of this political negotiation.
It is my way or a highway,
but I don't really see how that has room for negotiations.
The realists in this debate say any peace process,
any process of negotiation can only happen
if either one side in the world believes now they have a decisive advantage,
or if both sides are so exhausted that they can no longer go on.
But few people realized that if there was a peace agreement of some kind,
that could only be reached very probably if Western countries would guarantee this peace.
Western powers, NATO or some other organization
would guarantee this peace and put troops on the ground.
Which would also mean that if Russia or Putin picked up this war again,
the West or NATO would be a direct party to the war.
That would change things.
Yes, but at the same time, the way I see it, not predicting it,
but it just seems to me going that direction,
that the West may be a party to that war soon enough.
Because as we saw with the more and more weapons delivered, promised,
I mean, I know I saw that Poland is already sending fighter jets,
and then they will, and then Americans,
there's a new suggestion in Congress that F-16s would be sent there.
And so if F-16s and then they could be boots on the ground.
So we may not even need to wait.
I mean, I'm saying it and I'm terrified.
But we may not even need to wait for a second iteration of it,
because it's already going, that's already going there.
But I think at this point why I don't see how negotiations possible now
is because Putin is not winning enough for him to stop.

And Ukraine is not losing enough for it to also stop.
And so, and I used it, maybe overused it in addition to Hollywood.
In addition to propaganda, I also teach Hollywood and politics.
And so in Hollywood, in a cowboy movie, it's called Mexican Standoff.
So it is, in a sense, a Mexican Standoff,
which escalates kind of a problem for a Mexican Standoff.
So there's still other way, other steps, which I personally,
I'm not a war expert in any way.
I cannot foresee.
So I don't have a better answer to this.
Let's come back to Russia itself and to a Russian future
and to a future of the Russian society.
This is a society that has been bled out brutally
and not only by an estimated now 200,000 soldiers killed or wounded,
but more drastically probably or more dramatically for the country,
probably, as you said, one to one and a half million people,
young people of working age or probably better educated
than the average, who have fled the country.
And in many countries won't be coming back.
That means this country will be quite dramatically weakened in any case.
But we have seen with the history of Germany
what a dangerous thing it is to humiliate a country in the long term,
to isolate a country, to keep a country weak in the long term.
A country that simply, because of its geographical size or position,
is an important player.
So how is the future there imaginable?
That's you kind of channeling George Kennan, by the way, right now.
My inner George Kennan.
You're just totally channeling George Kennan,
because he would make a similar argument.
Yes, absolutely.
And I actually said million and a half to two.
Because sometimes you hear it 700,000.
No, 700,000, only one to Kazakhstan.
So this is just the whole many more people there.
So absolutely the IT or the culture.
So we were and I was sort of upset about the certain instances
of consolation of Russian culture elsewhere.
But I have to say that Russia itself, Putin or his people,
are doing a bang-up, job-canceling Russian culture within itself.
Poets left, we even made a kind of a list.
So because Putin is P and so in Russian.
So the forbidden professions, poets.
And then the writers, which also starts in Russian with a P,

and singers, which is also with a P, and press, and so on and so forth.
So the P forbids all sorts of professions.
Absolutely, and in some comparison,
I actually don't think that history necessarily is a guide.
But history punishes very severely for not learning the lessons.
And so you could hear in Russia sometimes,
that it could be that the interwar period,
the World War I Germany, that led ultimately to World War II.
Possible, possible.
And that's why I would say, I mean, I know you say Russia needs to be defeated,
but maybe refrain from that language,
because Putin then is going to use it for his own propaganda.
So maybe not you, but generally be less gleeful about this.
Because Russians, as I said, when Ukraine is going from what it's going,
our heartache is irrelevant,
but yet it is relevant within the country.
And so yes, it is possible.
But once again, Russian history also showed that it's like a pendulum swing,
which I hope we will never come to that part of the pendulum,
when it is remission-oppression, remission-oppression.
So Stalin, Khrushchef,
not the Khrushchef was such a great Democrat,
but at least he was a reformer, Gorbachev, great Democrat.
So possibly somebody comes in and will try to address the population,
and say, mea culpa,
and we are going to change behavior,
and we are going to try to be better.
But then on the part of the West,
and I don't know how it can happen,
because everybody is so upset with the Russians,
that that is asking probably too much,
much more than it was asked in 1991,
because Gorbachev already smoothed over a lot of problems from previous years,
to say that maybe the West may not jump on the Russian bones that much,
because then instead of bringing people into the fold,
it would once again create an animosity.
But my fear is, for what has happened,
it may be too much to ask to be kinder to Russians.
I'm not asking for that, but I'm saying that maybe in terms of policy,
if some concessions are not made in something,
that it may create new pre-war, pre-second world conditions.
You say somebody might perhaps come to fill that space,
and if I interpret you correctly and please correct me otherwise,
it seems that you believe that there is no possible future

while Putin is at the helm.

There is perhaps a freezing of this conflict,
there is perhaps a Korea situation in Europe,
but there is no actual peaceful future while Putin is there.

But when you say somebody might come,
is there anybody you are thinking of?

Are there any people in Russian public or political life now
that you think have the potential to fill that role?

Totally. A lot of them.

But Russia is a Byzantine culture still.

All the Byzantines died in the 1400s, Stalin-Khryshev.

Khryshev would be the last person anybody would imagine would step up
and be what he has become.

So, simply we don't know.

Anybody who we think may be there is probably going to be a wrong person.

So a lot of people have been thrown around as potential.

I have some in mind, but I don't think I want to volunteer,
because I'm sure...

I'm right, I'm like, well, first mix them, but also who knows.

But I really don't think we would know.

In the West, from the Western media,

we get the impression that there is little or no Russian civil society.

There is the isolated light figure of Navalny in prison,

but otherwise we hear of hardly anybody who could carry that kind of culture.

I think that has more to do with our press and our reporting
than with Russian society.

How did you see that?

No, unfortunately it is true.

As I said, before February 24th, 22nd,
it was functional authoritarianism.

So there was still opposition.

I was in Moscow when Navalny got arrested

and there were still demonstrations for the first month.

The reporting was a bit off, because the police immediately started beating the demonstrators.

No, we were there for two hours.

We were standing there for two hours.

It was cold, it's Moscow winter.

It was cold enough, two hours the police got tired,

but also young people who were there got tired of standing.

So they just started acting and agitating
and the police decided to respond.

I was talking to a policeman.

My wife is having dinner, so it really just needs to stop right now.

I was like, okay, you get out of here.

And I left, because I didn't want to be in a fight,
but younger people are braver than I am, so they were fighting.
So all this was potential.
If you stayed for longer than two hours, maybe there's...
But we allow you to speak up, so speak up,
but then about time to go home now.
So, that's how it was.
And that was still, I mean, I said I was there, so in December 31st, 2021.
Memorial was still there, this great organization.
I was in one of the last panels of it in February, sorry, December 15th.
So it was all there, and then it began, and then it fell off.
And so, yes, there is no civil...
There's still remnants of civil society, because it's not a totalitarianism.
For example, and actually I was surprised
that nobody in the West reported, almost nobody.
There were protests on February 24th for this last February.
There were individual protests, people were immediately arrested.
There actually many came out, about a thousand people came out in St. Petersburg.
I mean, that really took guts.
And what's interesting, they went out and...
I forgot how many got arrested over 50.
And most of them were released without even a protocol.
So basically it's like, okay, just get out.
We're done, get out.
So there's still something possible.
But because it's...
This straight jacket is tightening and tightening,
and I always call it, I mean, I call it the paradox of tyranny,
that people tolerate those despots in Russian history,
because they think they cannot do anything.
They cannot change anything.
It's going to be...
They're going to be demolished.
And so they'd rather not move, hoping that they're going to survive.
They're not going to survive, but they're still hoping.
That's very interesting, because we have all heard now that
the political and security situation of the world
has effectively changed since the invasion of Ukraine.
And that we have to get used to a new situation,
which at the same time is an old situation.
And that is what I meant, because what particularly shocked me
during this war was that the Russian army,
with the rapes, the summary executions,
the plundering, the thieving,

was a Russian army that we've, and also strategically, tactically, throwing lots of bodies at positions.
That is the Russian army we know.
That's the Russian army we know from the Second World War, from the First World War, from Tsarist times.
That is seemingly a very strong continuity there.
How strong do you think are these continuities in Russia, a country that is only ever known, I think, apart from a few months in 1917, some form of dictatorship?
Well, and it is a continuity.
I mean, we, that's, you know, the gulag of the Russian mind.
I mean, it's, the state is always controlling.
The state is always relying on security apparatus to keep people in check.
We go back to Peter the Great, we spoke about Peter the Great, so he just celebrated,
or St. Petersburg just celebrated 350th Anniversary of his birth.
Window into the West, he was pro-western, by the way.
So that's why I'm not buying that whole argument about Putin and Lenin, because he made the country pro-western.
Like, Peter the Great was quite pro-western, but he was a Tsar, so it's all good.
And so instead of actually celebrating the window into the West, which is, would be contradictory now, in kind of almost oxymoronic, because Russia just put all the nails into whatever window and doors it had there, that's all now in Iron Curtain, it celebrated the fact that, wait for it, that he was the first one to open a secret Chancellery.
Secret Chancellery is the precursor to KGB.
So I use KGB as a collective term for security.
So basically, that's what we all celebrate.
So Peter the Great had that, and then Lenin had Zyrzinski and then Stalin had Beria and then others.
And then, I have to say, very proud of Khryshev, who kind of cut the KGB down to size, didn't demolish it, but at least made them subordinate to the party.
Not that the party was great.
Then Gorbachev had a chance to demolish it, didn't demolish it.
Yeltsin in fact brought Putin in, and in fact made a holiday celebrating the Denchikista, the day of the Czechist, the great democratic Yeltsin.
Then, of course, Putin comes in and that becomes the everyday reality.
So in some ways, really, Russia is kind of,

I studied literature, my goal book on Nabokov was also about Nikolay Gogol of the Dead Souls, and Nabokov was trying, in his literary work, he tried to rewrite every single piece of Russian literature, because Russian literature is circular, and it's always had a bad ending. So in the Karenin there would have, you know, you're very unhappy and you die. So Nabokov rewrites it into Anna and saying, no, no, no, don't need to be unhappy, it's bullshit, just be happy. So every single novel that Nabokov wrote is a rewrite of Russian literature. In a happy ending, for example, there's a very unknown, but great novel called Anna, it's a rewrite of Chekhov. It's an absolute rewrite of Chekhov, the Three Sisters. To Moscow, to Moscow, and they never go. So Anna actually goes. And so what Nabokov was trying to do is take the circular Russian literature, the Dead Souls, and move it into the evolutionary formula. Didn't last long. And something that Gertrud and I were speaking about yesterday is that there was a great Soviet poet, Osip Mandelstam, a great Soviet poet who died in Stalin's Gulag, even though he wrote Odes to Stalin, he wrote many. And Stalin never believed he was sincere, he wasn't sincere. And Stalin didn't believe it. He also wrote one different poem about Stalin. He wrote exactly. And one of his, and ultimately he wrote honestly, we live not feeling the ground under our feet. In our conversations are not heard from ten steps away. And suddenly, I mean, I grew up reading Mandelstam. And he was always the poet of the past. I'm a Soviet. He was the poet of the past. Because we don't experience anything like that anymore when I was growing up. And suddenly, Osip Mandelstam is the most contemporary poet Russia has today. So if you ask if there is a continuity, there is a continuity. We come back to the same circle that was described in Dead Souls in Google. In Dead Souls, you also have the image of the Troika. That is hurtling into a future. Many people have identified that with Russia. It's not going in a particular direction,

but it's going at a terrific speed.
But it's not even going to the future.
It's going into, in fact, in Google, read Google,
it's going into an oblivion.
It's not a future.
It's actually Google asks, where the hell are you going?
And that's how this book ends.
This is how this book ends.
And this is, I think, also how our discussion ends.
But Nina Kruscheva, thank you so much for sharing your insights with us.
And thank you for attentive listening.
Good bye.
Thank you very much.
Ich verabschiede mich von allen, die uns auf UKW hören,
in Freira, Tirol und auf Radio Agorah in Kärnten.
Analysen und Berichte zum russischen Ukrainekrieg gibt es jede Woche im Falter.
Daher empfehle ich ein Abonnement.
Alle Informationen auch zu den gratis Probeabos gibt es im Internet.
Unter der Adresse abo.falter.at.
Ursula Winterauer hat die Signation gestaltet.
Philipp Dietrich betreut die Audio-Technik im Falter.
Ich verabschiede mich bis zur nächsten Sendung.
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