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Russian Anti-War Committee Forms Team of 'Consuls' to Fight Deportations

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Former oil tycoon MIkhail Khodorkovsky. **MIkhail Khodorkovsky / Facebook**

A group of Russian opposition figures living in exile has formed a team of "consuls" to help prevent anti-war Russian nationals from being deported back to Russia, where they would face criminal prosecution.

The Anti-War Committee of Russia, established immediately after Moscow's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, has vowed to provide legal aid to "Russians with a visible anti-war stance."

"A consul helps you if you systematically and publicly oppose the war, volunteer or cooperate with anti-war organizations and independent media, which creates a real threat of political persecution and detention when you return to Russia," the committee said on its website.

The committee lists 15 consuls based in nine European countries and the United States. Among the consuls are Novaya Gazeta Europe editor-in-chief Kirill Martynov, Free University

legal scholar Elena Lukyanova and former Russian diplomat Boris Bondarev.

According to the website, the consuls will not be able to help with obtaining visas, permanent residency, or citizenship. But the committee said the need for consuls arose from an increasing number of deportations and refusals to renew residency permits for Russian nationals who face criminal prosecution in Russia for their anti-war activism.

The Anti-War Committee announced its formation as a big-tent group with the goal of opposing President Vladimir Putin and his orders to launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Some of its high-profile co-founders include former oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, former chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov and Navalny ally Lyubov Sobol.

Russia designated the Anti-War Committee an "undesirable organization" in January. The decision puts employees at risk of imprisonment and criminalizes any engagement with the group, including sharing its content online.

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