



POLICY PAPER

RUSSIA'S FEDERAL SUBJECTS AT WAR

BACKGROUND AND IMPLICATIONS

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Cover page photo: Russia's President Vladimir Putin meets with the governor of Belgorod region Vyacheslav Gladkov in Moscow on 8 August 2022 (AFP/Scanpix)

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INTRODUCTION

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine impacted the international system and continues to affect international relations throughout the world. For Russia specifically, the war has put the country further along the path to becoming a pariah, a rogue state or – as officially designated by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe – a terrorist regime.¹ While Russia is yet to be fully isolated, sanctions have cut the country off from most financial centres and some of the world's biggest economies.² The discovery of the Bucha massacre rendered diplomacy with Russia either high-stakes or undesirable.³ Russia's crimes have tarnished its reputation for everyone except for a small minority of states in the world.⁴

These circumstances also have an impact on the international connections of the Russian federal states. Prior to 24 February, Russia's 83 constituent federal states – 'federal subjects' in Russia's legal terminology – were engaged in a variety of forms of international relations and cooperation with foreign partners including in Europe and North America.⁵ City twinning agreements, cross-border cooperation, and other activities of this kind have always been a discreet yet constant form of non-traditional diplomacy between Russia and the world. The full-scale war has put these engagements into question, casting doubts on the future of such contacts between Russia's federal subjects and their foreign partners.

The international relations of sub-state governments are typically referred to under the

label of 'paradiplomacy,' and their impact on international affairs can be significant.⁶ Around the world, the authority of governors cannot match that of sovereign states, but it can play a role in various aspects of international relations. Even without conventional diplomatic or military tools, governors constantly engage with foreign partners and lobby on international matters, in their official and unofficial capacities. Business connections add more weight to these forms of engagement, advance strategic infrastructure projects and investment targets, and deepen international economic integration.⁷ Occasionally, governors may express their views on foreign matters or even engage in external relations in ways that are disharmonious with the country's overall foreign policy.⁸ This can prompt tensions with the central authorities and render 'paradiplomacy' into a contentious issue. Thus, governors and their international relations matter.

In highly centralised and authoritarian states such as Russia, governors have the freedom to choose neither with whom to engage nor the means of engagement. However, they are still rather active in international relations, in ways that carry weight. Throughout the past decade, Russia's governors have emerged as substantive international channels for Russia's foreign policy, enabling international connections even after the 2014 sanctions.⁹ The pattern stands to this day. Those governments who want to stand up to Russia's war of aggression should consider the role that Russia's governors play to facilitate the Kremlin's policies. What is the role of Russia's governors in the ongoing war in Ukraine? What does their involvement entail for Ukraine's supporters?

¹ Alastair Kocho-Williams, "[Russia is being made a pariah state – just like it and the Soviet Union were for most of the last 105 years](#)," *The Conversation*, 10 May 2022; "PACE declares Russia a terrorist regime," *ERR News*, 14 October 2022.

² Robert Greene, "[How Sanctions on Russia Will Alter Global Payments Flows](#)," *Carnegie Endowment*, 4 March 2022.

³ "Ukraine official negotiating with Russia said the peace talks turned darker after evidence emerged of a massacre in Bucha," *Business Insider*, 8 April 2022.

⁴ Only five countries in the world voted against the UNSC Resolution condemning Russia's full-scale invasion. These countries were Belarus, Eritrea, North Korea, Syria, and Russia itself.

⁵ This number does not include Crimea and Sevastopol, Ukraine's regions illegally annexed by Russia in 2014.

⁶ The term comes from 'parallel' and 'diplomacy,' implying that the international relations of sub-state regions happen in parallel to traditional diplomacy. This label is used not without contention. Some would prefer the longer but more accurate label of 'sub-state diplomacy' or 'sub-state international relations' to avoid the use of the word 'diplomacy.' For this report, I use both interchangeably.

⁷ Rodrigo Tavares, *Paradiplomacy: cities and states as global players* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁸ Panayotis Soldatos, "An explanatory framework for the study of federated states as foreign-policy actors," in *Federalism and international relations: The role of subnational units* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990): 34-53.

⁹ Sergey Arteev and Ivan Ulises Kentros Klyszcz, "From Decentralization to Coordination: The Evolution of Russian Paradiplomacy (1991–2021)," in *Problems of Post-Communism* (2021): 1-12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2021.2009350>.

To answer these questions, this paper 1) presents a concise background of the international relations of Russia's governors, 2) describes the ways the governors have supported the invasion since 24 February, 3) provides an illustrative case study of Leningrad Oblast, and 4) issues recommendations. The report argues that all Russian governors have an incentive to take the initiative and facilitate Russia's war. Considering that Russian governors have participated in the war effort by recruiting volunteers, transferring funds, and delivering supplies to the invading troops, they should be sanctioned as direct supporters and facilitators of the war.

Russian governors have participated in the war effort and should be sanctioned as direct supporters and facilitators of the war

1. UNDERSTANDING THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF RUSSIA'S GOVERNORS

The 2014 Russian invasion of Ukraine happened at a time when Russian governors had already established a variety of international partnerships, with some of them standing for decades. The end of the Cold War witnessed a proliferation of city and state-twinning agreements between Soviet and foreign authorities on the local level. These engagements were seen as part of people-to-people contacts that would contribute to overcoming the Cold War legacy.¹⁰ Once the Soviet Union had collapsed, these non-traditional forms of diplomacy were maintained in order to complement Russia's democratic and market reforms.¹¹

What followed, however, was a transformation of Russian paradiplomacy from decentralisation to authoritarian consolidation. Article 72 of

the Russian Constitution states that federal subjects are free to engage foreign partners 'in coordination' with federal authorities.¹² The norm that emerged is that regional governments should sign agreements only (i.e., not treaties) and never with the respective country's top authority as their counterpart. Upon arriving in power, Putin centralised the federal system, increasing federal oversight over the external engagements of federal subjects. Crucially, the abolition of direct gubernatorial elections in 2004 introduced several powerful incentives for the federal appointees to please the Kremlin in their dealings abroad. Notably, they do this by attracting investment and promoting the Kremlin's narratives in international affairs. This incentive stayed in place even after the post-Bolotnaya re-introduction of 'filtered' regional elections in 2012.¹³ In addition, during the 2000s and 2010s, many federal subjects adopted legislation that required reporting all engagements with foreign parties to the federal level for advance approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹⁴ In general, and looking beyond these legal frameworks, Russian governors have little room to manoeuvre outside of the Kremlin-imposed rules.¹⁵

The Kremlin exploits the international relations of its federal states to capitalise on their economic, geographic, and cultural connections

¹⁰ James Critchlow, "Public Diplomacy during the Cold War: The Record and Its Implications," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2004, 75–89.

¹¹ Andrey Makarychev, "Islands of globalization: regional Russia and the outside world," *Regionalization of Russian Foreign and Security Policy 2* (2000), <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-a-004001783>.

¹² The Russian Federation, "Конституция Российской Федерации [The Constitution of the Russian Federation]", 12 December 1993, Chapter 3, Article 72.

¹³ Denis Stremoukhov, "When governors go abroad: Incentives for paradiplomacy in recentralised Russia," *Regional & Federal Studies* (Spring 2021): 1-25.

¹⁴ Head of the Republic of Ingushetia, "Указ Главы Республики Ингушетия от 20.11.2017 № 218 "Об утверждении Положения о порядке подготовки и проведения официального приема иностранных граждан и иностранных делегаций в государственных органах Республики Ингушетия, выезда должностных лиц государственных органов Республики Ингушетия и официальных делегаций Республики Ингушетия за пределы территории Российской Федерации [Decree of the Head of the Republic of Ingushetia dated November 20, 2017 No. 218 "On approval of the Regulations on the procedure for preparing and holding the official reception of foreign citizens and foreign delegations in state bodies of the Republic of Ingushetia, the departure of officials of state bodies of the Republic of Ingushetia and official delegations of the Republic of Ingushetia outside the territory of the Russian Federation]," (Magas: Head of the Republic of Ingushetia, 2017).

¹⁵ Natalya Zubarevich, "The Fall of Russia's Regional Governors," *Carnegie Moscow*, 12 October 2017.

The Kremlin, in the meantime, exploits the international relations of its federal states to capitalise on their economic, geographic, and cultural connections. Trade and investment stand out as important vectors for international relations. Russia's federal states pursue economic engagements that ultimately allow the federal government to generate state revenue, bypassing international sanctions. The Kremlin's personnel policy incentivises local governors to search for new sources of revenue, including international tourism.¹⁶ For instance, as early as 2013, the governor of Primorskiy Krai – the most populated region in Russia's Far East – advocated for a special visa regime for itself. Tourism has, indeed, become a valuable income generator for this economically depressed area.¹⁷

Cultural kinship and geography also play a significant role in how Russia's federal subjects choose their foreign partners. The Kremlin often taps Russian regions to engage with their geographical neighbours. For example, Russia's Far East tends to engage more with Northeast Asia; while the North Caucasus and the Baltic Sea federal subjects interact directly with the Middle Eastern nations and the countries of the sea littoral, respectively.¹⁸ Regarding cultural affinity, the most prominent example is Chechnya, led by warlord-turned-governor Ramzan Kadyrov. The pro-Russia occupation regime in Chechnya has portrayed itself as devoutly Muslim and has consciously fostered relations with the countries of the Middle East to reinforce that image.¹⁹ For instance, Kadyrov reportedly functioned as a channel of communication between Moscow and the UAE at times when relations between the two countries were tense.²⁰

¹⁶ Stremoukhov, "When governors go abroad," 1-25.

¹⁷ "Визовый режим для иностранцев в Приморье может быть упрощен [Visa regime for foreigners in Primorye may be simplified]," *REGNUM*, 31 August 2013.

¹⁸ Małgorzata Pietrasiak and Michał Słowikowski, "The International Activity of Federal Subjects of the Russian Federation on the Case of the Far East," in *Paradiplomacy in Asia. Case studies of China, India and Russia* (Łódź: Łódź University Press, 2018).

¹⁹ Ivan Ulises Klyszcz, "Chechnya's Paradiplomacy 2000–2020: The Emergence and Evolution of External Relations of a Reincorporated Territory," *Nationalities Papers* (Cambridge University Press, 25 April 2017): 1-17, <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.8>.

²⁰ Pavel Luzin, "Ramzan Kadyrov: Russia's Top Diplomat," *Riddle*, 19 April 2018.

Since early 2022, Russia's federal subjects have seldom challenged Moscow as the Kremlin had by then reorganised all federal framework to its advantage. Mindful of the Kremlin's outsized role in appointing and dismissing them, governors are careful not to attract the ire of the Kremlin. The recent example of Governor Sergei Furgal of Khabarovsk Krai is the most illustrative. In 2020, the Kremlin triggered months of massive local street protests – atypical for the country – by dismissing a popular, elected governor. Furgal himself, however, did not rally his supporters to fight the Kremlin's decision.²¹ While in the governor's office, he had no record of any conflicts with the Kremlin over international relations either and mostly held a low profile in federal affairs. The case of Sergei Furgal proves that even when the Kremlin lacks complete control over the situation, governors still have very few levers or incentives to confront Moscow. In this sense, they are an integral part of the Kremlin's power structure and are thus complicit in Russia's war on Ukraine.

Even when the Kremlin lacks complete control over the situation, governors still have very few levers or incentives to confront Moscow

2. PARA-WAR: RUSSIA'S FEDERAL SUBJECTS AT WAR

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing international sanctions have brought a host of changes to Russia's international relations. This has had a cascading effect on Russia's regions, both on the side of foreign partners and of Russia's own federal subjects. For the latter, the war pressed new Kremlin demands on the governors, inevitably impacting their external engagements. Whereas for their foreign partners, any association with the Russian government – even with its local branches – was deemed undesirable. Consequently, Russia's regions witnessed rapidly diminishing direct contacts with their foreign partners, especially with those in Europe and North America.

²¹ "Our governor: lessons from the protests in Russia's Far East, one year on," *Open Democracy*, 21 July 2021.

For Russia's governors, the war brought a clear message from the Kremlin: *you too must join*. And answer the call they did, putting up conspicuous 'Z' symbols, delivering warmongering propaganda speeches, and sending 'humanitarian aid' to the front.²² Of their methods of support, two stand out: providing manpower and legitimising the occupation regimes.

Prior to the call for 'partial' mobilisation, a 'stealth' mobilisation was already taking place in several regions

First, months prior to the call for 'partial' mobilisation, a 'stealth' mobilisation was already taking place in several regions.²³ In the early stages of the war, only Chechnya distinguished itself by its overt manpower commitment to the invasion.²⁴ Chechnya's opaque public finances and Ramzan Kadyrov's personal wealth meant that the Chechen troops could be well-equipped early on. The demand for manpower had reached other regional governments by June. From that month on, all governors were reportedly asked to staff and fund, in part, their own 'volunteer' battalions. The recruits signed six-month contracts and went through a 30-day-training bootcamp at the Russian Armed Forces' active military bases.²⁵ Only limited information has surfaced about these volunteer battalions' functions and preparations. The Ministry of Defence would pay their salaries; however, regional budgets were expected to cover other expenses, such as enlistment bonuses.²⁶ Nonetheless, there are signs that this arrangement is dysfunctional. Reports have emerged suggesting that the money oftentimes does not reach the 'volunteers', while the regional governments rarely meet

²² Atle Staalesen, "[With a "Z" on his chest, the Governor of Murmansk views across border to Nordic neighbors](#)," *The Barents Observer*, 14 March 2022.

²³ Iryna Romaliyska and Olga Beshlei, "[Struggling To Fill Out Its Ranks In Ukraine War, Russia Resorts To 'Illegal' Regional Mobilization](#)," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 17 September 2022.

²⁴ Ivan U. Klyszcz and Harold Chambers, "[Kadyrov's Ukraine Gamble](#)," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 28 March 2022.

²⁵ Filip Bryjka, "[Russia Recruiting Volunteers to Fight in Ukraine](#)," *PISM Bulletin*, no 133 (2050), 18 August 2022.

²⁶ Kateryna Stepanenko, George Barros, and Frederick W. Kagan, "[Russian Volunteer Units and Battalions](#)," *Institute for the Study of War*, 16 July 2022.

the recruitment targets.²⁷ In early August, the Russian media wrote that at least 24 regions had formed a total of 40 volunteer battalions of varied strength, with combined manpower well below the 30-thousand target figure.²⁸ This trend of underperforming regional recruitment continued up to the eve of the partial mobilisation.²⁹

The September mobilisation decree turned the 'stealth' mobilisation into an overt one but did not change the role of governors, who still had to supervise how the president's orders were executed on the ground. In practice, it meant coordinating civilian and military authorities to summon the draftees. One indicator to measure the scope of the governors' authority is the amount of compensation to the conscripts that governors promise to pay from the regional budget. These compensations would be added on top of the federal compensations and vary from region to region.³⁰

Russian governors reproduce the Kremlin narratives and help the occupation authorities to maintain the façade of legitimacy

Second, Russian governors reproduce the Kremlin narratives and help the occupation authorities to maintain the façade of legitimacy. For instance, several governors have already visited the newly occupied territories of Ukraine and even signed 'cooperation agreements' – from economy to healthcare – with the occupation authorities.³¹ This type of activity has a historical precedent. During and

²⁷ "["We Were Nothing to Them': Russian Volunteer Reservists Return From War Against Ukraine Feeling Deceived](#)," *Idel. Realities*, 12 August 2022.

²⁸ Andrey Vinokurov, "[Специальная добровольческая операция](#) [Special volunteer operation]," *Kommersant*, 8 August 2022; Tim Lister and Josh Pennington, "[Russia is recruiting thousands of volunteers to replenish its ranks in Ukraine. Prior experience isn't always required](#)," *CNN*, 30 July 2022.

²⁹ Karolina Hird, Katherine Lawlor, Mason Clark, and Frederick W. Kagan, "[Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 19](#)," *Institute for the Study of War*, 19 September 2022.

³⁰ Todd Prince, "[Sweetening A Bitter Pill: Russia Offers Debt Breaks, Other Benefits To Entice Draftees](#)," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 28 September 2022.

³¹ Natalya Savankova, "[Пензенский губернатор в Донецке подписал соглашение о партнерстве с ДНР](#) [Penza governor signs a partnership agreement with the DPR in Donetsk]," *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, 4 April 2022.

immediately after the annexation of Crimea, Russian governors would pay visits to the new occupation authorities – their supposed counterparts – to sign such ‘agreements’ on inter-region cooperation.³² Sometimes, their efforts may go beyond the information space to include material support as well. Indeed, some regional budgets have begun to plan for the expenses needed for the ‘reconstruction’ of the Donbas ‘people’s republics.’³³ The British government states that several governors transferred their funds directly to the occupation authorities in Ukraine under the Kremlin’s orders.³⁴

Part of the international response to the war was to sanction Russia’s governors and sever ties with the Russian regions. For example, on 26 July, the United Kingdom sanctioned twenty-nine governors.³⁵ Many foreign governments and international organisations imposed sanctions against Kadyrov. That said, there is little coordination in the international sanctions on the Russian governors. In total, only 24 percent of individual sanctions introduced by Australia, the EU, New Zealand, the UK, the US, and Switzerland overlap. Apart from Chechnya’s Ramzan Kadyrov and Moscow’s Sergey Sobyenin, only the UK has so far sanctioned a large number of Russian governors.³⁶

There is little coordination in the international sanctions on the Russian governors

Outside of sanctions, institutional ties have also been shrinking. All European Union cross-border initiatives involving Russia – nine in total – were suspended in March.³⁷ Many regional

³² Ildar Gabidullin and Maxim Edwards, “Crimea crisis: the Tatarstan factor,” *Al Jazeera*, 15 March 2014.

³³ Yelena Mukhametshina, “Регионы начали закладывать в бюджетах средства на восстановление ДНР и ЛНР [The regions begin to allocate funds for the reconstruction of the DPR and LPR in the budgets],” *Vedomosti*, 28 September 2022.

³⁴ The United Kingdom, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP, “UK sanctions Russian officials propping up Putin’s proxy administrations in Ukraine,” 26 July 2022.

³⁵ The United Kingdom, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

³⁶ Maia Nikoladze and Charles Lichfield, “Russia Sanctions Database,” The Atlantic Council, last modified 15 August 2022.

³⁷ European Commission, “Commission suspends cross-border cooperation and transnational cooperation with Russia and Belarus,” 4 March 2022.

governments have taken a stance on Russia’s invasion and the initiative to suspend relations with their Russian counterparts. Although such cases are noticeably rarer beyond Europe and North America. For example, in South Africa, the Western Cape government condemned the 24 February invasion, while the local legislature barred Russian government officials from events at its chamber.³⁸ This decision was, in fact, heavily criticised for the potential negative impact on agricultural exports to Russia.³⁹

CASE STUDY: LENINGRAD OBLAST’S ROLE IN THE WAR

For the sub-state international relations, Leningrad Oblast offers a concise example of how the war transformed regional governments into belligerents. This region, with its capital city of Gatchina, has roughly 1 900 000 inhabitants. In many respects, it is an ‘average’ Russian region. Although the official statistics place Leningrad Oblast twenty-first by Gross Regional Product by federal state, its average income is lower than the combined average of its neighbours.⁴⁰ Aleksandr Drozdenko, who has served as a federally appointed governor since 2012, has no record of either challenging or diverging from the Kremlin’s line.

Prior to the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Leningrad’s international relations were rather diverse. The oblast, the city of St. Petersburg, and the exclave of Kaliningrad open up to the Baltic Sea, which enables them to participate in some regional organisations, such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). Moreover, they have been frequently encouraged and assisted by the federal government to do so. For instance, Russia even presided over the CBSS in 2012–13.⁴¹ Similarly, Leningrad Oblast participated in several EU-funded projects. It was never

³⁸ “Western Cape bars Russian embassy from legislature events,” *News 24*, 9 March 2022.

³⁹ Mwangi Githahu, “Russia-Ukraine: Fears that the Western Cape’s stance could hit fruit farmers, exports hard,” *IOL*, 1 April 2022.

⁴⁰ “Валовой региональный продукт [Gross Regional Product],” Archive of the Federal Agency for State Statistics, accessed 17 October 2022.

⁴¹ “Annual Report for the Russian Presidency 2012-2013,” The Council of the Baltic Sea States, 18 September 2013.

a leading partner or initiator, but it did join different multi-year programmes. In 2017-20, the regional government was a partner in a waste-management project organised by the EU Baltic Sea Region Programme.⁴²

In total, the governors of Leningrad Oblast have bilateral cooperation agreements with thirteen different regional governments. These include Hebei province, China (1992); Maryland state, the United States (1993); Kyoto prefecture, Japan (1994); Vitebsk, Belarus (1997); Gomel region, Belarus (1997); Minsk region, Belarus (1997); South Chungcheong province, Republic of Korea (2000); Mecklenburg-Pomerania, Germany (2002); Sofia province, Bulgaria (2003); Nordland county, Norway (2003); Antwerp province, Belgium (2004); Aragatsotn Province, Armenia (2011); Mogilev, Belarus (2016).⁴³ These agreements were either terminated or suspended from 24 February partly due to Drozdenko's role in the war. He has actively supported Russia's full-scale invasion not only in his public statements but also by sending 'aid' to the front and organising both 'stealth' and 'partial' mobilisations.

Regarding his statements, Drozdenko has promoted the Kremlin's narrative on the full-scale invasion, both for domestic and international audiences. At home, Drozdenko organised several public events meant to rally support for the invasion. For instance, at a 25 March gathering, he explicitly compared the 'events in Donbas' with the 1999 NATO campaign in the former Yugoslavia – a parallel intended to cast Russia's current role in Ukraine as righting historical wrongs and past humiliations.⁴⁴ Abroad, Drozdenko toed Russia's propaganda line. On 28 February, he attended the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, as a member of the Russian delegation to the Council of Europe. During that visit, he parroted the federal narrative that Russia had to invade Ukraine in order to 'protect' the local population in the 'people's republics' from a

'genocide'.⁴⁵ He also attempted to promote fakes about Ukraine by quoting the country's former president Petro Poroshenko out of context.⁴⁶

On 12 June, Governor Drozdenko signed an 'agreement' with the occupation authorities of the 'Donetsk People's Republic' promising reconstruction of Yenakieve, a town controlled the occupation forces as of writing. As an indication of this long-term commitment, the 'agreement' mentioned three reconstruction stages across several years.⁴⁷ On 2 August, Drozdenko announced that Leningrad Oblast would deliver one billion roubles to the occupation authorities, allegedly for reconstruction purposes.⁴⁸ As the town remained under occupation, there were no reliable reports about any tangible results of this 'reconstruction' effort. On 2 October, *Len TV 24*, a Russian state-funded channel, released a video that showed the 'head of government' of the 'Donetsk People's Republic' visiting Yenakieve to receive 'aid' from Leningrad Oblast. The news report highlighted construction works allegedly underway to rebuild a local school and an alleged donation of six trams.⁴⁹ Aside from this 'aid,' Drozdenko also appointed a 'representative' for the delivery of supplies from Leningrad Oblast to Russian troops in occupied territories of Ukraine.⁵⁰

⁴² "Better Efficiency for Industrial Sewage Treatment," Interreg Baltic Sea Region, accessed 17 October 2022.

⁴³ Committee on Foreign Connections of the Leningrad Oblast, "Список соглашений о сотрудничестве с зарубежными партнерами" [List of cooperation agreements with foreign partners], last modified 22 July 2022.

⁴⁴ Александр Дрозденко (drozdenko_a_u_lo), "В годовщину натовских бомбардировок Югославии" [On the anniversary of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia], Telegram, 25 March 2022, 14:57.

⁴⁵ "Губернатор: вы не реагировали на слова Порошенко о том, что «дети Донбасса будут сидеть в подвале»" [Governor: you did not react to Poroshenko saying that "the children of Donbass should sit in the basements"], *Gatchina24*, 28 February 2022.

⁴⁶ "Ложь: Петр Порошенко пообещал, что дети Донбасса будут сидеть в подвалах" [Fake: Petro Poroshenko promised that the children of Donbass would sit in basements], *StopFake*, 15 November 2014.

⁴⁷ "Ленинградская область и Енакиево в ДНР подписали соглашение о сотрудничестве" [Leningrad Oblast and Yenakiyevo in the DPR sign a cooperation agreement], *Interfax*, 12 June 2022.

⁴⁸ "Александр Дрозденко пояснил, где Ленобласть возьмет деньги на помощь донецкому Енакиево" [Alexander Drozdenko explains where Leningrad oblast will find the money to help Donetsk's town Yenakiyevo], *Len TV 24*, 2 August 2022.

⁴⁹ "Ленинградская область помогла Енакиево восстановить школу и детский сад" [Leningrad Oblast helps Yenakiyevo to rebuild a school and a kindergarten], *Len TV 24*, 2 October 2022.

⁵⁰ "У Дрозденко появился представитель для связи с воинскими частями в зоне СВО" [Drozdenko will have a representative to communicate with military units in the special military operation zone], *Zaks.ru*, 28 September 2022.

Regarding the recruitment campaign, the local government's press service reported that Leningrad Oblast had formed two 'volunteer battalions' – "Nevskiy" and "Ladozhskiy" – by late July.⁵¹ The regional government promised to pay 200 000 roubles (over 3 000 euros) to each volunteer enlisted, offering them free-tuition higher education and free-of-charge day-care for their children.⁵² All these (supposed) benefits would be paid by the Leningrad Oblast budget, an arrangement Drozdenko signed into law.⁵³ The oblast enforced the September mobilisation decree, with Drozdenko assuming the role of chief draft commissioner.⁵⁴ Shortly thereafter, the local government announced that the governor would appoint a 'special envoy for mobilisation' to delegate part of the coordination tasks.⁵⁵ On 22 September, Drozdenko unveiled a series of additional compensations that the oblast's budget would pay to the wounded conscripts.⁵⁶

The full-scale war has already had a dramatic impact on the Russian federal states, including Leningrad Oblast. The economic fallout from the war forced some factories to reduce or suspend their operations.⁵⁷ Wage arrears have been growing across the Leningrad economy, with workforce dissatisfaction mounting.⁵⁸ Like elsewhere in the country, several arson attacks

against government buildings have been recorded since the mobilisation order came out. These social and economic developments are yet to amount to the collapse of state authority or the rise of civil resistance, but they may further strain the already stretched resources at the governor's disposal.

Social and economic developments are yet to amount to the collapse of state authority or the rise of civil resistance, but they may further strain the already stretched resources

The invasion of Ukraine has carried severe implications for Leningrad Oblast's international relations. The United Kingdom placed Drozdenko under sanctions due to his material support for the war. The EU and the CBSS suspended Russia's participation in these organisations' projects, in which Leningrad Oblast had been rather active.⁵⁹ Bilateral relations followed a similar trend. The State of Maryland severed its relationship with Leningrad Oblast a few days after Russia had invaded Ukraine.⁶⁰ Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania itself came under scrutiny for its engagements with the Russian region. Germany's federal state had previously enjoyed a twin-state agreement with Leningrad Oblast, whereas its governor, Manuela Schwesig, had repeatedly advocated for the Nord-Stream 2 pipeline. On 11 February 2022, it was reported that Mecklenburg even acted as a state partner of the pipeline consortium to – allegedly – evade sanctions.⁶¹ The launch of the full-scale war compelled Schwesig to suspend the agreement with Leningrad Oblast on 28 February, although it did not end the scrutiny of Schwesig's connections to Russia's energy industry.⁶²

⁵¹ Vinokurov, "Специальная добровольческая операция."

⁵² "В Ленобласти раскрыли названия батальонов. В них ждут добровольцев для отправки на Украину [Leningrad Oblast reveals the names of the battalions. They are waiting for volunteers to send to Ukraine]," *Fontanka*, 29 July 2022.

⁵³ "Добровольцам дивизионов «Невский» и «Ладожский» область сохранит рабочие места [Volunteers from "Nevsky" and "Ladoga" units will keep their jobs in Leningrad Oblast]," *Vyborg TV*, 12 August 2022.

⁵⁴ "В Петербурге и Ленобласти создали призывные комиссии по частичной мобилизации [St. Petersburg and Leningrad Region create draft commissions for partial mobilisation]," *Rosbalt*, 21 September 2022.

⁵⁵ "Дрозденко планирует назначить своего спецпредставителя по мобилизации в Ленобласти [Drozdenko to appoint his special envoy for mobilisation in Leningrad Oblast]," *Delovoy Peterburg*, 28 September 2022.

⁵⁶ "Власти Ленобласти рассказали о выплатах мобилизованным при ранении [Leningrad Oblast authorities speak about payments to the mobilised in case of injury]," *Rosbalt*, 22 September 2022.

⁵⁷ "С завода IKEA в Ленинградской области уволили 520 сотрудников [IKEA lays off 520 employees from its factory in Leningrad Oblast]," *Vedomosti*, 2 September 2022; "На заводе Nokian Tyres в Ленобласти допустили введение простоя из-за нехватки сырья [The Nokian Tires plant in the Leningrad region to introduce downtime due to lack of raw materials]," *Rosbalt*, 30 August 2022.

⁵⁸ András Tóth-Czifra, "Political Implications of Looming Problems with Wages and Jobs in Russia," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 19 September 2022.

⁵⁹ The Kingdom of Norway, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Russia Suspended from the Council of the Baltic Sea States," 3 March 2022.

⁶⁰ "Maryland Ends Sister-State Relationship With Leningrad," *CBS Baltimore*, 28 February.

⁶¹ Florian Gathmann et al, "Gerhard Schröder Casts a Dark Shadow over Berlin's Foreign Policy," *Spiegel International*, 11 February 2022.

⁶² Florian Gathmann et al, "Manuela Schwesig Draws Ire for Role in Nord Stream 2 Pipeline," *Spiegel International*, 22 April 2022.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Russian governors are not autonomous vis-à-vis the Kremlin.** Business and other forms of engagement involving Russian governors cannot be assumed to happen without monitoring from federal authorities. Governors are required to report and implicitly seek approval from Moscow for every interaction with all foreign counterparts. In this sense, interactions with these officials must be assumed to involve the Kremlin even when not explicitly disclosed.

All interactions with the Russian officials must be assumed to involve the Kremlin even when not explicitly disclosed

- **Governors will continue to play an essential role in the war.** Regional governors facilitate federal policies. Most recently, they have played a key role in executing the federal mobilisation decree and containing its social fallout. Consequently, there is enormous pressure on the entire federal system. Reports of civil resistance against the mobilisation, including mutinies, arson attacks, and protests, hint at the challenges yet to come.⁶³ Namely, a new cycle of resistance and repressions may follow in many parts of the Russian Federation, including some contentious some areas such as the North Caucasus.⁶⁴ As prices rise and their social impact deepens, how the federal framework will adapt to these changes imposed by Russia's war on Ukraine remains an open question.
- **Ensure sanctions compliance.** The Kremlin seeks to divide the West and undermine

support for Ukraine. Unity against Russia's war of aggression should also extend to the governors of sanctioning countries. The local governments typically have the authority to engage in international relations, therefore sanctions compliance must be guaranteed also at the local level. Many sub-state governments have voluntarily severed their institutional relations with the Russian counterparts.

Sanctions compliance must be guaranteed at the local level

The central governments should neither infringe nor monitor the governors' external relations, but clear strategic communication about sanctions can ensure their comprehensive compliance.

- **Coordinate sanctions on Russia's governors.** International sanctions on Russian governors have been inconsistent and sparse. Russian governors facilitate their country's war of aggression by promoting federal propaganda, facilitating manpower, and acting as vehicles for financial support. They also ensure the continuation of the authoritarian system by mitigating the domestic consequences of the war. Cutting off their access to resources abroad, as well as diminishing their platform to disseminate propaganda among foreign audiences, are effective measures for all sanctioning entities to consider.

⁶³ Olya Romashova, "Звук горения это звук конца. Кто поджигает военкоматы в России и как силовики пытаются с этим бороться – исследование «Медиазоны» [The sound of burning is the sound of the end. Who sets fire to the military enlistment offices in Russia and how the security forces are trying to combat it - a case study by Mediazona]," *Mediazona*, 27 September 2022.

⁶⁴ Olya Romashova, "'I won't go and kill my brothers!': Russians set fire to draft Centres," *OpenDemocracy*, 29 September 2022; Josh Pennington and Jessie Yeung "Protests erupt in Russia's Dagestan region as minorities say they are being targeted by Putin's mobilization orders," *CNN*, 26 September 2022.

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