

**The intelligentsia and emigration:  
Strategic prospects, unrealized possibilities, and personal risks**

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### **In place of a prologue: I once had a terrible nightmare.**

As if in a bad movie, I had a recurring dream while working on this essay. In the dream, they're getting ready to kick me out again. This time, for a different reason. Not because I'm a "relic of the Cold War," and therefore a stone in the government's shoe. Now I'm going to be expelled for corrupting my audience with my liberal/democratic ideas. A man from Washington is expected to give a speech about it. There are rumors that this envoy of a new policy will demand that members of the "fake mass media," financed by the U.S. Congress, strive to instill the feeling of patriotism in their audience, along with moral values and spiritual moorings. I'm 70 now, not 57 as I was the last time, and the prospect of experiencing it again fills me with dread as I envision my rising from the ashes to which I am about to be reduced and beginning to push the stone up the hill all over again. My colleagues are outraged in private, but when I ask if they will stay silent like the last time, the instinct for self-preservation kicks in, as they hold up their hands in desperation: "You know how it is, what's the point of peeing against the wind..."

Perhaps the most depressing thing this time around was witnessing the intelligentsia abandoning its historical mission, morphing into the post-intelligentsia or specialists engaged in intellectual work. The so-called "professionals."

### **Look for France and you'll find America**

Several characteristics are commonly cited to distinguish the intelligentsia as a historical phenomenon: (a) anti-bourgeois sentiments – contempt for self-interest and material possessions (b) commitment to spiritual values, (c) opposition to the government authorities, and (d) a strong conscience.

It would be wrong to suppose that the entire Third Wave embraced these qualities – and I'm not talking about that part of the emigration, mainly bound for America, which the European "highbrow" emigration called "sausage" emigration. For us – the children of WWII and "Thaw" – these values still mattered. Which is why the Brezhnev stagnation of the 1970s seemed like "monstrous cynicism." A popular expression coined by a famous poet about those years went like this, "We had our shame removed like an appendicitis." Many in Russia remember this diagnosis. When I recently went on the Internet to check the accuracy of the quote, I came across an unanswered query posted by someone beneath the quote, "What would Voznesensky say today?" I can't answer for Andrei Andreevich, while Fyodor Mikhailovich probably would have repeated: "Here the devil fights with God, and the place of battle is the hearts of people" and once again would reach the very point.

In 1977, just as the Soviet Union was celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I finally chose "artistic freedom" in Paris. I couldn't stop thinking about the gravity of this moment. And about article 64 of the RSFSR criminal code (Treason against the state...or a refusal to return...from 10 to 15 years...or the death penalty and confiscation of property...). I was aware of the extent and irreversibility of my crime. Still, there were nuances, alternative trajectories to follow. Half a year later, on July 16, 1978, KGB head Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov, sent to the Communist Party Central Committee a secret communication No. 1439-A, titled "Concerning the Writer Iourienen's Conduct Abroad." According to this missive, "Ever since his decision not to return to the U.S.S.R., Iourienen has been disseminating his anti-Soviet screeds in the hostile bourgeois emigre publications, such as *NTS*, attacking our political system and society..." The resolution

that the Central Committee stamped on Andropov's letter – “To take appropriate measures” – had a tangible impact on my subsequent life. According to the 1972 Counterintelligence Guide for KGB operatives, the term “*v razrabotku*” referred to “clandestine operations directed at persons...suspected in plotting or actually implicated in state crimes; the purpose of *razrabotka* is to expose criminal activities of the persons under review and prevent their criminal acts.”

I could have spared myself much headache if I chose a different strategy. Among my casual acquaintances of that period there was the son-in-law of a French Communist Party leader. A reasonable and mild man, he quietly left for Paris where he peaceably pursued academic life; he even published a book in French taking issue with Solzhenitsyn. Such a strategy wouldn't have worked in my case. Certainly, I could have kept my mouth shut and refrained from piling up an “especially dangerous state crime” on top of another by violating article 70 of the said criminal code, “Anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda...the preparation of literature for such purposes...” But I felt like an underwater monster coming for air – bursting inside, looking for ways to express myself. Where should I turn?

The biggest cultural shock, particularly in the context of French liberalism in the era of Giscard d'Estaing, was the emigrant community. In the Soviet Union, it appeared as a unified entity standing against the Soviet monolith. The reality threw me into despair. Each emigrant “wave” showed hostility to the next one. The First Wave, comprised by those born before the Bolshevik revolution, inveighed against the Second, spoiled by the Soviet upbringing, and both bristled with animosity toward the Third that followed Khrushchev's “Thaw.” Chronologically, I belonged to the latter, in which I had to find my *modus operandi*. But how? The last wave brought in its wake, if not a miniature version of Stalinism as some hotheads claimed, then certainly the hierarchical mentality endemic to the Soviet Writer's Union, with its signature confrontation between the western-minded “cosmopolitans” and nationalist/Orthodox believers or “*pochvenniki*.”

It was the familiar fight between different journals and authors that I had witnessed at home, only at a new level of virulence. With all due respect to the tenured professor at the Sorbonne [Andrei Sinyavsky], I also had some issues with the Soviet regime. However, mine were existential *and* substantive, rather than merely stylistic. But would that have led me to spew out my hatred in words or threaten to snatch my opponent by his gray beard and knock him face down on the ground? How could I have done so without remembering Orwell's totalitarian boot on the face? And this was the fight against Communism? I was afraid of the subversive nature of my vision: eminent intellectuals in emigration looked like uncultured boors, even if they didn't put themselves in the role of criminal authorities in prison demanding the rest of the prisoners “suck up” to them (I first heard this Russian prison argot in Paris).

It's not that I was opposed to the “criminal authorities” fighting the Kremlin while enjoying a few luxuries. After all, it was they, not us young people, who managed to loosen the purse strings of the Western capitalists – not those who were selling the Soviets that proverbial rope by which communists could hang their capitalist opponents, but those rare few truly motivated by the cause of freedom. We who had just escaped “mature socialism” despised not only money and the authorities but also any fight that was institutional rather than existential. Organizations, parties, anything that was a “part” and not “a whole,” anything that meant the disciplinary reduction of our personal universes – was hateful to us. So others took charge. Those who, in spite of their undoubted merits and gifts, could not be characterized as members of the intelligentsia. It seemed at times that the true intelligentsia had remained behind, hiding on the editorial boards of liberal journals and publishing houses, in the kitchens of apartments situated

near the metro station “Airport,” in Bezbozhy Lane, where I was once promised a three-bedroom flat, or in summer cottages (*dachas*) in Peredelkino.

By that point, I had already been inducted into the USSR Writers’ Union as the youngest member of the organization (where the average age was close to my current one). Now I was the youngest émigré, and prone to suspect myself as an immature human being, I tended to doubt the first impression I formed of the new reality. Once *Le Figaro* published my interview and the case of my non-return (*nevozvrashchenchestva*) was announced to the world, I began to receive invitations to give talks and explain myself at emigrant centers. Naturally, I insisted that I had chosen artistic freedom which my homeland denied me. Soon, I met a couple people my age at the *Russkaya mysl*, the *intelligenty* from the Soviet Union, already accomplished writers. “You say your generation has no hope or joy,” they queried me, “What about us?” Good question. I felt guilty about my generation left behind in the Soviet Union, but compared with émigré existence, life didn’t look as wretched back home. Even the Central Committee of the Communist Party showed its concern about the young generation, issuing a resolution about the need to “improve its work with the young creative intelligentsia.” Here, meanwhile, the generational conflict was about to explode. It wasn’t that my age group was being barred from money-making jobs. They were desperate to write, to express themselves in their native language without looking over their shoulder. But their elders, armed with the prejudices of the time and place, stood in the way. “It’s a good thing there’s no *Cheka* at least in Paris, or we’d already be tapping on the walls of a cell” – that’s what the young intelligentsia entrenched in the West in the late-1970s was talking about.

As it turned out, I was not as alone, or as radical, as I had thought in my despair and pessimism. Every one of my peers had a remarkable and unique story to tell about their escape to freedom. But in Paris each faced the same “challenge” – how to remain true to oneself and survive in the process – in the crudest sense of the word. How, indeed? I went to every publisher in the Left Bank and no one was interested in a book of short stories I wrote back home. “They don’t read short stories in France. Write a novel, monsieur!”

I don’t know where things stand right now, but at the time there were no government programs in France to support political emigrants. The Tolstoy Foundation supported non-returnees – until they decided whether they would remain in the Old World or cross the ocean. Alexandra Tolstaya, the youngest daughter of Leo Tolstoy who started the Foundation, was still alive in the U.S. From my adolescence on, I was a fanatic reader of her father’s prose; you can say, I survived an epiphany at his burial place in Yasnaya Polyana. I was also something of a Tolstoy scholar at the university. As one of the half-a-million refugees supported by the Foundation, I felt mystically inspired by the symbolism of the great writer’s ghost protecting me in these new environs. At the time, Princess Irina Dmitrievna Tatishcheva whose ancestors founded Perm and Ekaterinburg, oversaw the Paris branch of Tolstoy’s Foundation. I still remember her striking blue eyes and the proletarian looking “Gauloises” in a black-framed cigarette-holder. She used to squint at us, and not only as a reaction to smoke billowing from her cigarette – our international family didn’t fit in with her idea of proper Russianness. Still, thanks to these aristocrats, we were able to rent our first western apartment in the Belleville neighborhood for half a year. Later, after we decided to stay in Paris and the Old World, we lost our safety net.

Of all the survival strategies I contemplated, physical labor seemed the cleanest to me. To be done clandestinely, of course, for I didn’t have a work permit yet. I had done that kind of work on my first trip to France – renovating apartments in Versailles and washing skyscrapers in

La Défense. I failed to resume my career, however. The man running that underground business, a Communist “fellow traveler,” had read my interview in *Le Figaro*, and turned me down as a “right-wing pig.” Which deeply troubled me, for back in the U.S.S.R. I had considered myself a leftist. Perhaps I should have gone to *Libération*. But then I wanted the widest possible audience and the cleanest break. Besides, the political director of *Le Figaro*, Robert Lacontre, was the newspaper’s Moscow correspondent and had earned the complete trust of Solzhenitsyn, whose authority at that time was unshaken for me.

One story making the rounds in the literary world of Soviet émigré life always heartened me. Konstantin Simonov, a young Stalin-era emissary to Paris, inquired of Bunin, “What do you suffer this poverty for, when in the Soviet Union you would be...?” The Nobel Prize winner’s answer was short and to the point: “For freedom, and independence.”

The conclusion I drew from my first few months of French freedom is that it’s only possible to remain yourself if you remain alone. And I must say, I excelled at that. The Sorbonne’s professor and his wife, the publisher of a liberal democratic journal, to whom I delivered the manuscript of a Moscow acquaintance, took me for an agent provocateur, and pushed me away with the advice to go back to the USSR Writers’ Union. At least there I could earn my bread and butter. Apparently, I insulted this all-powerful editor-in-chief of the most famous Third Wave journal by declining to take part in an international press conference. It wasn’t me, “yet another runaway writer,” they needed; it was my wife whom they fancied to be “the Spanish Svetlana Allilueva.”

I also turned down an offer from the head of the National Alliance (*NTS*), the same offer that the author of *Faithful Ruslan* rashly accepted, to move to Germany as the chief editor of *Grani* (it was rumored that this flattering literary posting was offered to almost every professional writer from the Soviet Union). It was the same with the French offers. “No” to the Gaullist Rally for the Republic (RPR), which offered a spot in its propaganda department. “No” to the human rights organization whose head, a descendant of Prince Metternich, invited my wife and I to join a bisexual commune, which threatened to interfere with our determination to remain a family unit. Parisian feminism, then on the rise, was another matter. A progressive couple, we attended meetings of the *Les Sorcières (Witches)* feminist group and took part in protests against clitorectomies in the Middle East and Africa. We didn’t turn into militants, though. We stuck to translating works of the then-fashionable press *Les éditions des femmes*, “a publisher for women.” Alas, efforts to promote a Russian translation of “The Drawer” by the Anglo-French writer Nicole Ward Jouve, which included the Russian phallocrat Nikita, were unsuccessful, even in the émigré journal *Echo* catering to translated literature: “The émigré community won’t understand it.” Twenty years later I broadcasted this text on my radio program, *Ex Libris*.

Fortunately, I was able to find my own America without leaving Paris. There was no “cult of personality,” and we talked about what really mattered. I remember the first question I heard from Viktor Nekrasov, legendary figure during the Khrushchev Thaw: “So you youngsters don’t like Communism, either, eh?”

The atmosphere in the Radio Liberty offices on Avenue Rapp was one of intellectual professionalism and principled objectivity, equidistant from the emigrant centers of gravity, with no party affiliation required. It was for a reason that the bureau was dubbed a branch of the Writers’ Union – with one important difference that former Soviet writers could express themselves freely on Avenue Rapp. Here, my commitment to freedom grew even stronger. Somewhere, the British historian Toynbee called the intelligentsia the “agents of communication” who took upon themselves the mission of disseminating the values of higher

civilizations. Radio gave us the complete freedom to do so – and hadn't Toynbee himself regularly spoken on the BBC? I decided to become a “communicator.” Yes, with an “antenna turned toward the East.” For the sake of the future. Despite the global pre-apocalyptic atmosphere, I felt that the “collective mind” would not allow humanity to destroy itself, that the Politburo would be replaced – not by the “young wolves” capable of doing so but by rational people. Such was the course I set for myself, with the parallel purpose of supporting my family and pursuing own writing. I didn't feel as if I was choosing the lesser of two evils. It seemed like the optimal choice to me.

### **Possibilities: realized and unrealized**

I couldn't have loved France more when I lived there. At the time, I used to say, “Life on Earth would have no meaning without l'Hexagone.” I didn't just live there; I drew into myself France and free world. Domestically and internationally, the American radio embodied internationalism in the true sense of the word. That was important to me, since I began my career at the admirably titled journal *Druzhiba Narodov* (“Friendship of Peoples”).

I was writing a novel at the same time. While émigré publishers recoiled from my work, it made an impression on one French publisher, who had me promise to give this publishing house a new novel every year. Can you? Of course, gentlemen. I felt like I had ten of those in me. I'd be a French writer writing in Russian. The first novel came out in the translation by Aurora/Esperanza Gallego, and it did not go entirely unnoticed by the Francophone media, including separate printings in Switzerland and Canada. It also drew the notice of those far from the literary world, working in a certain government building on Dzerzhinsky Square in Moscow. The man running the French division of the All-Union Copyright Agency (VAAP) at the time was not just a run-of-the-mill functionary – he was a member of the Soviet security forces, and not a low-ranking one. He was a lieutenant-general, later expelled from France, along with 47 of his colleagues, for “activities incompatible with their status.” Prior to that point, however, he put a lot of effort into derailing my career.

One of his first “active measures” was starting rumors in Parisian literary circles that the author of this much-praised novel was never a member of the USSR Writers' Union, just some Rastignac from Moscow. My publisher, the Marquise Hortense de Chabrier, who laughed with me about this rumor, was charmed by the general-lieutenant, who asked her to call him “Nicolá,” and convince her that an international transaction may be beneficial for all sides. She would slow down this émigré arriviste, and in return get a pile of “bricks” (modern Soviet novels) for pennies. Their unsold copies were repurposed for scratch paper. The general achieved his goal: I had to wait four years before my second novel appeared in print. This, after the marquise had made me promise them a novel a year.

How did my family and I survive in this downtime? We lived in dozens of Paris apartments and arrondissements over the seven-and-a-half years. In the gaps between our own apartments, my wife, daughter, and I parked for a while at a “friend's room” in Chinatown, or in a concierge's vacant shoebox in Passy. That room was where Evgeny Vinokurov showed up on my doorstep one day. It was the year Andropov came to power, and travel restrictions had eased for liberals. The Soviet poet wanted to see the fate of the non-returnees with his own eyes. So he was brought to me. I raised my head over the typewriter, ready to start singing old war songs (written by my sudden guest) about friends in distant fields, but émigré etiquette held me back. I

knew that the poet had been instructed before his departure on the “Rules of behavior for Soviet citizens in capitalist countries,” which sternly warned the travelers to shun emigrants.

He was the first Soviet citizen I had met in person over five years of freedom. Indeed, Vinokurov didn’t say a word. His rounded exterior fit well with the characterization of him that came to mind: a thing-in-itself. I learned from the French translator that the man didn’t go anywhere in Paris, spending days and nights in his room and reading anti-Soviet tamizdat. Which is to say, we had things we could talk about, especially since we had some friends in common in Moscow. But he just stood there in the doorway, as if frozen in place. Not a step forward, nor a step back. Sometimes I thought I saw the microexpressions of a person getting ready to speak. Instead, without taking his eyes off of my face, he slowly backed away. The door shut. That was the last time I ever saw of him, although he delivered the bottle of Pernod I gave him via the translator to its intended recipient in Moscow. It was 1982, just four-five years before the onset of glasnost. An abyss separating us was as glaring as the one separating any visitor from over there.

We were chronically broke, but would have been quite happy (after all, we lived, as per the Russian title of Hemingway’s book *The Movable Feast* about Paris in “a holiday that is always with you”) if it weren’t for the anti-Americanism there. I won’t mention the primitive expressions of it, and the jokes the leftist friends hurled at me about “Serge got in touch with the spies.”

Georges Belmont was never a leftist. Having died just six months short of his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, (1909-2008), he embraced a whole century of literature, or rather three literary traditions – French, English, American. He was on friendly terms with Joyce, at whose behest Belmont wrote in 1939 the first article on the novel *Finnegan Wake*. In the lyceum of Louis the Great, and then the Higher Normal School at the Rue d’Ulm, he made friends with just about all French literary figures of the period *entre-deux-guerres* (between the wars) – André Gide, Robert Desnos, Ramon Keno, Jean Polan, Thierry Molnier, Robert Braziak, and also Simon Weil and Samuel Beckett (the Nobel laureate was his English teacher in *Normale Sup* and a student of French, that Belmont taught at Trinity College in Dublin). After the war, Belmont founded the successful illustrated magazine *Jour de France*. The author of ten novels and a poet, he was also one of the best French translators from English. He befriended Henry Miller, Tennessee Williams, Merlin Monroe, Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, Anthony Burgess, Erica Jong and many other Anglo-American writers. Despite all the influence he had on the publisher, he couldn’t speed up the publication of my novel. Perhaps this is why he let the VAAP persuade him to take an all-expenses-paid tour of the Soviet Union where he lounged in the Kosmos Hotel he found so impressive. He was sympathetic to my impossible position, but still upset by my intention to work for the BBC. He grew despondent when he heard that I preferred the American corporation in Munich. “I’m afraid that won’t be compatible with your career as a French novelist, Serge. It’s one thing to work with the Americans discreetly, quite another to go on staff... Paris won’t understand you. They’ll turn away from you. And anyway...aren’t they the CIA?” Here I remembered the very first graffiti in France seen from the window of the train “Moscow-Paris” at the entrance to Gare du Nord. “*Ni KGB, Ni CIA!*.” What a joy washed over my heart: here it is, liberté “in all azimuths”! Belmont pronounced this abbreviation with such horror; after looking back (it was in the famous *Lipp* beer hall) I answered the dear Frenchman who shook hands with the author of *Ulysses*, an impolite question: “Do you think the KGB is better?” No, of course, he did not think so. And yet this is something interiorized by our culture

since the times when Aragon “demanded a GPU for France.” And aren’t the Russians closer to us? Cultured people. Extreme, but still part of Europe...

The historical context is important here. Reagan was already shot and wounded in Washington DC, Pope in Vatican; a South Korean airplane brought down by a Soviet missile; and everybody awaited the apocalypse that the anti-American paranoia-stricken ex-KGB head might unleash on the world. Paris intellectuals assembled to debate topics like “Before the War.” The author of *Yawning Heights* swore on TV to defend the French capital with a Kalashnikov in his hands. And at Belmont’s house on VII arrondissement, a cigarette was suspended inside a glass container to be retrieved with the help of a little hammer and enjoyed to the utmost by the man who had given up smoking after WWII – when and if the airborne Soviet rockets started on their deadly course toward France.

At any rate, when the long-awaited launch of my second novel commenced, I returned there from Munich where I worked as an analyst in the Research Department of Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe. Needless to say, my third novel never came out in French. In contrast, my “analytical papers” translated well, but this was of little comfort to me at the time.

And so, I lost the city I had made my own. My fellow writers met similar fates. Each had enjoyed some success, but what does that mean in Paris where hundreds of new novels hit the store shelves every year? You have the novelist calling on everyone to fight against communism, and then he goes off to Frankfurt-am-Main to work for an organization embarrassing in its forced Russophilia. A novelist who publicly renounced literature in favor of searching for God and took up his staff to journey to the Holy Land – could he hold out any longer, chronically broke and switching arrondissements, apartments, and couches every so often? Need, of course, is the mother of invention, but not when seven household members are sharing one bed. One child would have been enough. That child being the future patient for a psychoanalyst, in whose office she will try to sort out her multilingual childhood, doomed by her father to instability. Then, of course, there is *douze France*. Despite the efforts of the “new philosophes” deeply affected by *The Gulag Archipelago*, the country was definitely not at the front lines in the fight against what we considered to be absolute evil. It was ruled by Paris, with its characteristic focus on what the French called *nombrilisme*, navel-gazing. Paris laughed at its neighbors, but to me, Western Germany and Belgium, not to mention highly cosmopolitan Holland, were much more open to the world. The Czech writer from Prague managed to find life, freedom, and happiness when he turned himself into a successful French novelist. But the prospect of such a metamorphosis didn’t appeal to us. Our needs arose within a superpower with global ambitions; that is why we left the national “softness” of France, like the first love of political refuge, for the sake of broader horizons. Not with the crude appeal of “follow the money,” but with a call to anti-communist internationalism, the desire to become true “citizens of the world” and take part in its re-creation. After all, we, too, had once read the “Theses on Feuerbach”: *Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden interpretiert; es kommt aber darauf an, sie zu verändern*. Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world; the point is to change it...

Thomas Mann emigrated from his beloved Munich the year Hitler came to power. The neighborhood on the right bank of the Isar spent the next half-century continuing to shout about the absence of the great German and his dramatic decision. The headquarters of Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe were located on the left bank, at the edge of the English park, where no one was dancing the can-can invented by Soviet propaganda, although the nudists were initially shocking in their complete lack of eroticism.

The corporation had a Research Department there, in addition to “antennae aimed at the East.” As an analyst of the Russian unit, this former Parisien was engaged in the study of social and cultural processes in the USSR. These were shaped by the struggle for power in the Kremlin. Although the behind-the-scenes struggles went unseen, they could be felt in the bewildering fights between journals – in literature, theater, and cinema, in the positions of cultural figures and the facts of cultural life. The doctrine of Hermes Trismegistus, “as above, so below,” proved true and fruitful once again. My writings were translated into English and distributed by subscription, gaining some unexpected renown in the world of research centers and various think tanks. Not widespread renown but sufficient to garner invitations from one American university or another. Although the prospect of an academic career in Arizona or Michigan lost its luster once new leadership offered me the opportunity to take over the culture programming on Radio Liberty.

The cultural domain wasn’t exactly overlooked within the corporation, but for all the talented authors arriving from the Soviet Union, the program with a title mirroring the heading of a column in the *Friendship of Peoples* – “Culture, Lives, and Time” – was produced with little enthusiasm and to modest acclaim. This is unsurprising, given that the main cultural guru on the most important foreign radio station was an emigrant of the previous wave, seemingly a nice enough person, later identified as a Soviet agent. The latter fact shows that KGB knew the value of “culture,” in contrast to the American leadership which had to be convinced that a poet in Russia is indeed more than just a poet.

In this case, however, the new administration was eager for reform. The same could not be said about some of my colleagues, editors and hosts from the Russian service. The Americans used to call them “barons.” Protective of their worthy older colleagues, the “barons” summoned the young analyst to a meeting where they presented him with an ultimatum: turn down management’s offer. Or else – they were ready to stage a boycott. Contributors would be warned not to work with us, and I’d land on my back in the analyst basement (the program office was located on the first floor) after breaking my legs against the barriers I sought to fly over.

Such was the milieu in which a new radio program emerged: “*Over the barriers*: a cultural and political journal.” A daily cultural program, still broadcasting today, the title of which I took from Boris Pasternak’s second prose collection. I did so not only because the name was familiar to the Americans. The radio program pioneered in 1986, on the eve of the Gorbachev’s “revolution from above.” The Soviet Cultural Foundation was founded with assistance from Raisa Gorbacheva, headed by the academic Likhachev. The country’s intelligentsia, the part that was in favor of perestroika, saw the coming changes as a “cultural revolution,” or, as Andrei Voznesensky called it in his historic interview with Radio Liberty, “a revolution by culture.” The epithet “political” in the second half of the radio program name was a nod to the American management. By making this concession, I secured permission to put out a weekly “supplement” – the program “Ex Libris” designed to showcase the so-called “new literature” (Vladimir Sorokin, Viktor Pelevin, and others digging the grave of socialist realism). I set one more condition – to return the real names of authors who had been operating under pseudonyms out of concern that their names might alienate the Russian audience. It seems incredible for an American radio station, but the New York bureau, where representatives of the long-lived second wave of emigration held sway, still operated that way in the mid-80s. The Munich administration took the high road in this, happily, and the archaic practice was abolished. Thereafter, there were no more mandatory pseudonyms on Radio Liberty.

As for the “barons,” their threat turned out to be more than just hot air. The authors under their sway declined to cooperate with the new culture programming – in the best-case scenario.

Worse still, they used their reputation to attack the new radio program, for reasons suggested to them by the “barons” who castigated us as the kind of emigrants who supported the liberal initiatives of the Kremlin (Anatoly Gladilin’s book “That Beast Pell Killed Me” has more on this). By contrast, such giants of emigration as Alexander Zinoviev, Vladimir Maksimov, and Andrei Sinyavsky somehow united against, as they joked, the new GPU (Glasnost, Perestroika, Uskoreniye).

We also had some firepower, and a transcontinental one, at that. Our “all-star team” in the New York office boasted the services of Pyotr Vail, Alexander Genis, Sergei Dovlatov, and Boris Paramonov. In Paris, we had Anatoly Gladilin and Viktor Nekrasov. Vladimir Matusевич, appointed the new director of the Russian Service, brought over the former BBC broadcaster Igor Pomerantsev and his Friday program. The editor in charge of these programs did two or three of his own. The creative intelligentsia in Moscow and Leningrad took notice and began to participate in my Munich show. At first, only those took part who were permitted to travel abroad, or more precisely, sent, to the West to promote the “new way of thinking for the country and the world.” Things continued to evolve over time.

Daniil Granin, with whom I had a secret meeting in 1986 in Bamberg, West Germany, was the first to express his confidence that the changes for the better would succeed. He did so off the record. The next year, a large group of middle-aged Soviet writers, who had never left the country before, were brought to Paris. The group included the intelligentsia of the liberal-democratic persuasion, as well as *pochvenniki* nationalists, some of them die-hard Stalinists. Under the aegis of the French Communist Party and the KGB, they met with a group of “communizing” French in the Palace of Soviet-French Friendship, decorated with a bust of Leonid Ilich Brezhnev. With their complete mutual ignorance of each other, only behind-the-scenes contacts made sense. The nationalists were bolder than their liberal compatriots in making contact with likeminded figures from Frankfurt. I was less lucky. Sergei Chuprinin shared a Java (a Soviet cigarette) with me; I shook Anatoly Kurchatkin’s. Just one member of the Soviet delegation was prepared to engage in a confidential conversation, however. This was the head of the delegation, Sergei Filippovich Bobkov, a poet and the secretary of the Writers Union for foreign affairs. He was also the son of the former head of the Fifth Directorate, the KGB’s unit focusing on political dissidents. At that time, he was the first deputy chairman of the KGB with the rank of a general in the army. When I asked about the future of perestroika, Sergei eloquently rapped on the lacquered wood of the handrail affixed to the stairs of the Parisian palace. In 1991, however, he would speak in the Writers’ Union in support of the State Committee on the State of Emergency. Oddly enough, his father managed to avoid being coopted into action by the SCSE.

With the words “Radio Swoboda” Soviet ideologists could still intimidate the Russian people. The first to give an interview on our radio program were two Andreis – Voznesensky and Bitov. Meeting them left mixed impressions. The last decade of Soviet power had damaged these two gifted members of the metropolitan intelligentsia to the point where they could not readily recover. Neither of them came to the actual location of the subversive radio station, citing ill health as an excuse. The prose writer gave an interview in a Lowenbrau brewery, the poet in his hotel on the Isartor – where he pointedly refused any payment (“Oh no, I couldn’t – CIA money?”) The new way of thinking was settling in slowly, even in these two celebrated troubadours of perestroika.

The new attitude set in steadily but firmly, reaching an ever wider strata with the aid of the “over-the-barrier” *intelligenty*. In 1988, the author of these notes took part in a meeting between Soviet and émigré writers in Strasbourg. The “over-the-barrier” event, “Literature and

Perestroika,” conducted under the aegis of Mitterand’s government and the European Union, was staged with unusual pomp. But while the Soviet delegation included Andrei Voznesensky, Andrei Bitov, Lyudmila Petrushevskaya, and Oleg Chukhontsev, there were only three from the émigré side: Anatoly Gladilin, Dmitry Sezeman, and I. Many with a wider renown refused to participate, decrying the “Kremlin’s machinations.”

The writers on the Soviet side were, naturally, united in their support of the Gorbachev and Yakovlev initiatives, as well as in their concern over the sustainability of reform. Voznesensky, the head of the delegation, unexpectedly cut his visit short to fly back to Moscow: “Perestroika is under threat!” The feeling that everything was hanging by a thread, and the country could regress to the conditions worse than that before Gorbachev, put a damper on the rosy forecasts and hopes for revving up the pace of perestroika. The emigrants were more optimistic. During the public debates in the Palace of Europe, I suggested that, if the avalanche of banned books publication continued, we would see *Lolita* published in the USSR. My Soviet compatriots saw this as an absurd flight of emigrant fancy: “Never!” Upon return to Munich, I discovered that the Soviets had stopped jamming Radio Liberty. In 1990, censorship was abolished in the USSR; *Lolita* was published a year earlier.

The “new thinking” won out, both in terms of crossing forbidden thresholds, and also in the growing awareness that there really was free speech at Radio Liberty, financed not by “dark forces” but by the U.S. Congress. Or which is the same thing, by American taxpayers. As a result, the headquarters of Radio Liberty in Munich became the first mandatory stop on pilgrimages to the West. After that, the creative intelligentsia were met with open arms at receptions, publishers, and universities all over Europe and America. There was something ritualistic about visiting the “hornets’ nest” operated by radio saboteurs. There were times that members of the intelligentsia, having used the last of their money on the trip to our city, spent the night in the English park made famous by the Soviet “counter-propaganda,” waiting for me to arrive in the morning for work. The visitors expressed a surprise at the open enmity they encountered. Many times, I heard a joyful “Hell yes, Liberty!”<sup>1</sup> when crossing our forbidden threshold. The joy of transgression, and not only that. Aside from the vulgar support ensuring the freedom of speech to everyone over the air waves, it was also an act of valorization in a deeper sense. Chekov’s achievement of “squeezing the slave out” may sound off-putting, but there is no doubt that appearing on Radio Liberty in the heyday of perestroika raised the self-respect and strengthened the ego of the *intelligent*, mutilated for so long by the Soviet regime, assuring the intelligentsia’s emancipation from the fears, hang-ups, and prejudices of the old system. I speak with confidence from my own experience in the Parisian branch of the corporation.

Be this as it may, it was in the assembly room of Radio Liberty that Bella Akhmadulina read her poems to the staff. It was there, with the same audience of professional anti-Soviets, that Bulat Okudzhava officially threw away his party membership card, announcing his withdrawal from the Communist Party, of which he had been a member since 1941. In this same venue the KGB general Kalugin gave a repentant speech in beautiful English, having turned up at the Munich headquarters right off the Oettingenstrasse, shocking the American leadership. Interestingly, this former chief of counterintelligence of the KGB’s First Chief Directorate, a leading proponent of perestroika, asked forgiveness for the explosion, engineered ten years earlier at the Radio, to an audience of hundreds that included his own agents. After Oleg Tumanov, the “best of them,” in the general’s view, was recalled, these unfortunate people still loyal to the “Center” continued to combine their radio broadcasting with illegal activities.

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<sup>1</sup> The reference is to the celebrated song, written in 1963 by poet and screenwriter Vladlen Bakhnov.

There was more stylistic freedom on our radio program, although possibly less political latitude, than on Radio Liberty in general. The range of self-expression in this sense was narrower, which was due to the somewhat rigorous approach of its supervising editor – I saw a threat of relativism and the loss of basic principles in the euphoric fraternization spawned by perestroika. The lions, indeed, were embracing the lambs. We didn't host any supporters of the "socialist choice" (as none such were to be found among the intelligentsia), nor any expressing the emerging anti-American, anti-Western, attitudes of the time, the great-power arrogance, not to mention the revanchists of totalitarianism, represented by the writers of the newspaper *Zavtra* ("Tomorrow"), who, strange as it may sound, also tried to get on our "Over the Barriers," persistently but unsuccessfully.

During perestroika, the journal *Druzhba Narodov* published an article by the head of the non-fiction department (and my one-time direct manager) under the bold title, "Life in the Shadow of the KGB." It would have been more appropriate for Radio Liberty, or an even better fit for the history of our "culture." Soviet intelligence services watched its progress day in and day out, even after "their" kulturtrager was replaced by the author of these lines. How so? The radio's management, realizing the importance of this department, gave it the best of everything – the best announcer, the best director, and the best sound engineer. Well, this lady, a descendent of the White émigré community in Paris, with whom, throughout all the years of perestroika, I worked every day in the studio where my trusting guests came, would periodically travel to Vienna, allegedly to visit her friend there. Her reports were probably initially of interest to the case officers who liked to know about "subversive" radio events in advance, at the planning stage. For example, the radio play based on Alexander Kabakov's "*Nevozvraschenets*," published in a limited release by *Iskusstvo Kino* ("Art of Cinema"). Or the series of essays by Mikhail Epstein. Or the musical production based on the yet-unpublished novel *Norma* ("The Norm") by Vladimir Sorokin. Our authors had a high profile with the radio audience, which numbered in the tens of millions at the time and worked overtime to emancipate the collective consciousness. Our successes in removing barriers were such that the name of our radio program (for which, I repeat, we are indebted to Boris Leonidovich) was adapted by the journal *Ogonek* ("The Spark") for the name of a column, and replicated by many other perestroika media sources, including factory newspapers, where transcripts of our shows were printed in full. You might say that we were working to outlive our own usefulness, sawing away at the branch we were sitting on. But that was, after all, the end goal of the founding fathers of Radio Liberty – to provide the future with a model, a standard, a template for democratic media. To turn the "surrogate" institution of free speech, a replacement, defective one (defective, as it was an emigrant institution), into a full-fledged metropolitan media source. In other words, the self-destruction of an auxiliary resource – akin to artificial lungs – was programmed into the project from the beginning, before its debut on air at the time of Stalin's death.

And so it was. The land of Gulliver, to which we had been connected every day for the last 40 years, gained the ability to breathe on its own. Those who had been observing us lost interest. The land was burning beneath their feet at home. One fine day in beautiful Vienna, the case officers failed to appear for their usual meeting with my selfless co-worker, which shook her life to its very foundation. Her subsequent suicide seemed to foreshadow the closing of Munich's Radio Liberty. In Lenin's famous definition, a newspaper is "not only a collective propaganda agent and collective agitator, but also a collective organizer." The word "information," this media's *raison d'être*, is strangely missing. In 1995, 42 years from its creation, the main and multifunctional center of the émigré intelligentsia in Munich was shut

down. The staff received a final payment and a letter from the president of the United States, in which he, “on behalf of a grateful nation,” thanked us each by name for our contribution to the development of democracy in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union: “The world will feel the effects of your faithful service and your loyalty to the cause of freedom for long years to come. Thank you for your outstanding efforts.”

It was too early to rest on our laurels. There was nothing to do in Germany without America. What about returning to liberated Moscow? With the onset of the Yeltsin’s decade, I fancied as a model for Russia the transition from authoritarianism to democracy that Spain underwent in the second half of the 1970s, even though the 15 years gap separated the two upheavals. Thanks to my biographical circumstances and Spain’s blessed king, I witnessed how Spanish communist emigres had return from Paris to Madrid. That happened just the way Alexander Glaser, sponsor of the unofficial art and literature, dreamed about it – “on a white horse!” Yesterday’s emigres flooded into Spain’s politics. My Spanish father-in-law, Ignacio Gallego, now a parliamentarian, worked on the new constitution, the first draft of which was penned by Camillo Jose Sela, the writer turned senator. The said constitution, with a few amendments demanded by communists, was adopted by the Parliament and signed into law by Juan Carlos I. Jorge Semprun, who was once expelled from the Communist party for his “bourgeois deviations,” was summoned from Paris to assume the post of culture minister. Alas, nothing of the kind happened in the new Russia. The Yeltsin administration chose to ignore the Third Wave emigrants, never mind possible ministerial appointments. The first “liberated” Russian culture minister, a nomenklatura liberal Evgeni Sidorov (now he has a rank of special envoy), visited me in my office at Radio Liberty in Munich. Yet he did so not to urge me to return and march under the new banners (which I looked at skeptically anyhow) but to remind me that our paths had crossed in the Central House of Writers way back the dark 1970s.

And so, I elected to follow America and moved to Prague. During the transit period there was no interruption in broadcasting, no gaps or noticeable seams on air, and the “brand” was preserved. The transfer of the corporation to Prague was understood as the continuation in the life of the same organism in a new place, more cost-efficient and convenient for the administration. In reality, something completely new emerged in Prague, in terms of both form and substance.

Simultaneously and in parallel with this individual process, the very phenomenon of the intelligentsia was undergoing a transformation, internally and externally. If we accept as true the idea that the existence of the intelligentsia is a side effect of a closed society, then it was inevitable that the path to democracy would transform the old type intelligentsia into intellectuals, or, more precisely, “professionals.” The world opened, and the emigrant community saw the arrival of the apolitical and non-ideological migration of “professionals,” en masse choosing optimal conditions for self-realization and personal prosperity. The West didn’t create any obstacles. Russia had ended communism and earned the right to enter the free world as an equal. Even in strategically important spheres like radio broadcasting in Russian, highly qualified professionals with Russian passports began to join the ranks of employees.

A quick flash-back in the USSR. In 1968, the former secretary of Leo Tolstoy, Frenchman Victor Lebrun (1882-1978), visited the Soviet Union. After his talk in the famous Communist lecture hall (Kommunisticheskaya auditoria) of the Moscow State University, I, a twenty-year-old student of Tolstoy and god-searching young man, introduced myself to Lebrun. The latter expressed an interest in visiting the Tolstoy museum in Khamovniki where visitors were greeted by a stuffed mock-up of bear and a breath-taking citation, “*I defy the existing order*

*and do so openly.*” Here I am, sitting with Lebrun in the back of a taxi, ready to start a conversation about the nature of freedom, when the taxi door is flung open and a fellow student jumps into the car and demands to know where I am taking the foreign visitor. We used to call such sneaky fellows “I-want-to-know-everything” guys, whose nosy inquiries invited the retort, “I know nothing and have nothing to tell you.” In the early 1990s, this guy emerged in Paris as director of the Russian department of the French state agency “Radio Franc Inter,” a position he occupied for some six years. Nowadays, this man lives in France as a pensioner, works hard to shed extra pounds and votes for the status quo in Russia.

Don’t know how things stood on Deutsche-Welle, but something similar happened at the head-quarters of the BBC in London, as well as at the Radio Liberty in Prague. As the American administration celebrated its victory in the Cold War, the West met East in Prague where emigres from Munich and migrants hired in the former Soviet Union, veterans of the fading intelligentsia and the Soviet ideological front lines tried to get along. The generational conflict only exacerbated tensions in this forced convergence, which some of the veterans saw as an infiltration. The hidden drama of the situation came to the surface at the start of the 2000s when the KGB man emerged victoriously in the Kremlin. Dissidents and veterans of the Munich Radio Liberty were declared remnants of the Cold War, relics of the distant past. Which is why they, i.e., four of us – Mario Corti, Lev Roitman, Tengiz Gudava and I — whose firing in 2004 did draw some international attention, became dissidents squared, equally objectionable to those seeking to purge the “information field” and to the opposite side whose leader had deeply looked into the eyes of the Russian President and confidently inferred the purity of this Christian man and committed democrat.

Our dismissal was framed as an honorable retirement, so we all could go our separate ways. As for the author of these lines, he sighed with relief. I had always felt myself to be, as they say in American universities, a writer-in-residence. So I went to America and became simply a writer. That is what I do – self-publish, sometimes not without some success.

In 2009, only three of us were left. The writer, an expert on Sumerian culture and human rights activist Tengiz Zurabovich Gudava, who never made peace with his separation from the mission, as he saw his work in radio, furiously fought against the infiltration and demanded his reinstatement. He died in Prague in 2009 under “murky circumstances,” the death declared to be the result of a car accident.

My last act as the deputy director of the Russian Service for cultural matters was the radio publication of the book by Ruben David Gonzalez Gallego, *White on Black*.<sup>2</sup> The author, paralyzed from birth, wrote this autobiographical work by typing with his pointer finger (his only working digit) on a computer. He won the Booker Prize – Open Russia in 2003 for the best novel in the Russian language. The book became an international phenomenon. I’ll never forget an editorial meeting led by Maria Klein when the news reached us from Russia about the honors. I didn’t expect my colleagues to rush in with congratulations. But complete silence? Even from the veterans of the Third Wave and comrades in arms? While still on the job, I had already felt myself in a deep exile as a vestige of the past. That silent treatment radiated fear. In Moscow, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, was already under arrest, his public organization “Open Russia” deemed undesirable on the territory of the Russian Federation. Even in my Soviet years, at the editorial meetings of “Druzhba narodov,” I didn’t encounter such deafening silence. Neither in Paris nor

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<sup>2</sup> The Hardcover US edition (2006) from Harcourt publishing house and the Paperback edition (2007) from Harvest Books.

in Munich where freedom and fearlessness reigned, had I experienced anything like that. If I dwell on this episode, it is because this biographical juncture signified an end of an era for me, “the surrender” of the postsoviet *intelligent*.

In Russia, the stunned readers sent Ruben Galiego’s book to the Kremlin, demanding to improve the plight of children with disabilities. Most importantly, the publication has focused attention on, and spurred action on behalf of, people with disabilities. In Russia, their numbers are greater than the entire population of the Czech Republic – 15 million people.

The end crowns the work, as they would say in ancient Rome.

## Freedom

Eight years ago, in Washington, D.C., the aforementioned world-famous author was, as he regaled the story in an interview to Radio Liberty, thrown from his wheelchair by an unknown force while entering a subway car. He fell on the rails, and the chair weighing 100 kg fell on top of him. He miraculously survived, three years later moving from the U.S. to Israel.

The subtitle of these notes refers to “personal risks.” Well, as the Spanish racing driver said, he who takes no risks, does not drink champagne. I can’t forget the words of Ruben’s grandfather and my former Spanish father-in-law, who eventually became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Peoples of Spain. He was perhaps the least risk-averse person I’ve ever met, who never succumbed to any professional paranoia. Although he was on Franco’s black list, he made dozens of illegal visits to Spain during Franco’s rule, and lived to tell the tale. It was on the way to meeting him that Julian Grimau was arrested on a Madrid tram (I remember donating my lunch money in 6<sup>th</sup> grade to support his family). My father-in-law laughed at me when I asked if he carried a weapon or employed the services of a bodyguard. “If the state wants to kill you, it will kill you. You can be sure of that. Just take this under advisement and go about your business as usual,” said my communist relative to me, who ideologically was on opposite side of the notorious «barricades».

I don’t blame the state, one or the other. In such murky cases, Lenin urged us to ask – *cui prodest*. In this instance, no one clearly benefits. And yet, the case of his paralyzed grandson speaks to the fact that there is no guarantee for a person, even a completely helpless one, in our current zeitgeist. Everything has already happened in the Big history, including the *Nacht und Nebel* directive. And yet the Spanish communist was right. Let the opposite sign, but the deed should be done in the same spirit: circumspectly and serenely.

The interrogation I underwent while applying for a status of political refugee in France had a delicate sounding name – *procès-verbal*. It engendered some tension, yes, but was mitigated by a break for lunch. The polished gentleman who hosted me didn’t understand why I declined the filet mignon. I did drink, however. They had an incredible Burgundy in that office. But what did I know back then? Still, that’s how I remember it. We returned from our lunch. The Frenchman of about my age who typed up our “verbal process” smoked all his blue Gauloises and started bumming Gitanes from me. When we ran out of the cigarettes, the man across the table from me got up and said, “You’re free to go.” I was stunned. “What do you mean?” He spread his hands, “Liberty, monsieur! Don’t worry, everything will work out for you in France. I spent all night reading your book, it reminded me of our “nouveau roman.” You know the style? Robbe-Grillet, Butor, Sarraute...she’s also Russian, by the way.” I had no objection to becoming the next Sarraute (although Robbe-Grillet would, of course, be better). I was more concerned

about something else. He told me himself that the Soviet satellites do not spare their refugees, and even the Soviets do not behave very well here on the premises... Monsieur only smiled when I mumbled about a bodyguard, but he did arrange for a car.

An employee of the office drove through the rain-covered streets of Paris at a terrifying speed. He, himself, was terrifying as in the movies, with his scarred, bald head and pistols in the shoulder holsters. At the end of the road, he did show an unofficial kindness by offering me an umbrella. The instrument hadn't yet become notorious as a tool for poisoning. Still, I declined. He took off. One window nearby beamed with a warm light. Waiting for me inside were my family and new friends, Anatoly Gladilin and Vladimir Maramzin. I stood motionless under the cold downpour that smelled like Paris, repeating the same word over and over again, still scared to believe that I was indeed "free at last."

### **About the Author:**

Sergei Sergeevich Iourienen – prose writer, journalist, radio commentator, translator, editor, and publisher. Born January 21, 1948, in Frankfurt-on-Main, Germany, he spent his early childhood years in Leningrad. Lived and was schooled in Grodno (1955-1967) and Minsk (1957-1967). Studied in the School of Philology, Moscow State University (1966-1973). Attended the Literary Studio affiliated with the Moscow Writer's Union. Worked as a correspondent in Belorussia and Tadzhikistan; editor and deputy chief editor in the journal *Druzhba narodov* (1974-1975). In 1975, travelled to Hungary with the delegation of Moscow young writers, and lived two months in France the following year. Delegate of the Sixth All-Union congress of young writers. Member of the USSR Writers' Union since 1977. First book *On the Way Home* (1977). Asked for political asylum in France, while continuing literary work in Paris (1977-1984), Munich (1984-1995), and Prague (1984-2004). Hundreds of publications in Russian émigré and Western periodicals. Over a quarter of a century worked at the Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe as correspondent, commentator, analyst, and editor-in-chief of the culture desk. In 1986, Iourienen founded the long-running and still active everyday radio program "Over the Barriers," along with a literary supplement "Ex Libris". Creator and broadcaster of many other successful programs, for two decades he oversaw the culture programming for the Radio Liberty-Russia. Since 2005, lives in the U.S.A. (New York City, Washington, DC, Ridgewood, N.J., New York State). Deputy editor of the magazine "New Shore" (Denmark). Founder and publisher of Franc-Tireur, U.S.A. Author of over 30 books, including novels *Free Rifleman* (1980), *Trespasser* (1982), *Empire's Son* (1983), *Hurt Me* (1986), *Fugitive Slave* (1990), *General Secretary's Daughter* (1991), *Hearts' Union* (2000), *Fascist has flying* (2001), *Suomi* (2005), *Lintenka, or Heaven-bound* (2007), *Dissidence mon amour*, and others. Translated into several European languages. Recipient of five literary awards, including the Vladimir Nabokov Prize (1992) and "Russia Prize (2009). Member of the American PEN Center.