

ACTING FROM EXILE

Friday 29 September, 4:30 p.m. – 6 p.m., Nacre Room



Marc Semo, Ahmet Insel and Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean

The diversity of diasporas

The academic, Ahmet Insel, introduced the discussion on the modalities of action in exile, specifying that *'we must not confuse economic migrants and exiles, as the latter are created for socio-political reasons'*. Through the examples of Russia, Turkey and the Kurds, the debate must shed light on the issues facing exiled populations, *'the theoretical means of action and real practices, as well as incorporation into host societies'*.

Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean started out by addressing the case of Russia, *'where we have the impression that nothing is happening, that people are passive, accept or support the current situation'* but affirms that there is *'also a Russia that resists, abroad or in prison like Alexei Navalny or Ilya Yashin'*. If these *'networks of Russians who are resisting the war are not visible, it is because the regime is doing everything towards this end'* explained the Russia specialist. The situation is very difficult in Russia today, there are *'more than 20,000 cases*

of detention for protest against the war in Ukraine' because the targets are *'those who seek to escape mobilisation, those who help Ukrainian refugees and artists'*. The number of Russian exiles since 24 February 2022, which is difficult to establish with any certainty, due to *'rapid departures, in less than 24 hours, often to visa-free countries, with returns to Russia shortly afterwards, due to a lack of resources'*, is estimated at *'between 300,000 and 1.5 million'*. All of these people form *'a patchwork of exiles because not all of them are politically engaged, some simply believe they no longer have*

MODERATOR:

Marc Semo, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the 'ideas-debates' pages, Le Monde

SPEAKERS:

Hamit Bozarslan, Historian and political scientist

Ahmet Insel, Academic, author of *La nouvelle Turquie d'Erdoğan*

Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean, Director of the IFRI Russia-Eurasia Center

a future in Russia'. As for the *'hard core of opponents who carry the anti-Putin, anti-dictatorship and anti-war message'* life is very difficult, explained Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean. Between the problems of *'residence permits and access to money because of sanctions'*, the opponents must also find solutions *'to remain legitimate and to speak for those who are inside'*. In the current context, *'it's up to the diaspora to find the right words, to do the information work'* and *'to show that there is another Russia, for peace and democracy'*.

After pointing out that a *'diaspora is formed over a long time, with moments of rupture and reconfiguration'*, Hamit Bozarslan returned to the complex history of the Kurdish people, *'exiled since the 1930s and 40s'*. Although a Kurdish intellectual community was formed in Europe as of the 1960s, *'the 1971 coup in Turkey heralded another wave of departures'* explained the historian. But the decisive turning point was the year 1979, he explained, the date when *'our world was refounded'*. The examples are legion: *'end of Maoism in China, first victory of neoliberalism with the election of Thatcher, Iranian revolution, intensification of the Lebanese war, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan'*. From the start of the Iranian Islamic regime, Ayatollah Khomeini launched a *'jihad against the Kurds'*, and they were victims of *'chemical bombs at the end of the Iran-Iraq war, which left more than 100,000 dead'*. Following the 1980 coup, the Kurdish language was banned in Turkey, repression ensued and *'hundreds of thousands of Kurds had to flee'*. Also coming from Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, the very diverse Kurdish populations then *'transformed Europe into a Kurdish cultural capital'*, giving rise to Kurdish literature and cinema, which were non-existent because they were censored everywhere. With the establishment of institutions in Paris, London or Stockholm, *'the diaspora also became the political capital, the focus of organisations that want to escape state control'* and



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would seek *'to break the absolute silence of crimes against the Kurds and to raise awareness among international public opinion'*. Hamit Bozarslan ended his speech by specifying that *'if we have been talking about the Kurdish diaspora since the 1980s, it has only been effective since the years 2000–2010 since a diaspora requires generational differentiation, internal heterogeneity and diversity of classes and genders'*.

Ahmet Insel, in turn, detailed the conditions of exile of Turkish citizens, particularly since the two putsches of 1971 and 1980, which caused *'a massive exile of politically persecuted people'*. However, the exiles of this generation *'had the prospect of rapid return to Turkey, as soon as political and legal conditions permitted'*.

At the same time, the Alevi population, a heterodox branch of Shiite Islam in the country, formed *'an exile of people persecuted socially and not legally'* in the direction of Europe. However, the most significant exiles have taken place since 2016, *'following the failed coup d'état against the Erdoğan regime,'* explained the Turkish economist. These exiles fled *'for socio-cultural reasons'*, when faced with an *'Islamist-nationalist autocratic power that has become unlivable'*. The Turkish president and his party are waging *'a devious cultural war, to make Sunni Islam dominate in the public space and form a pious and docile youth'*, which is push-

Diasporic nationalism is often exacerbated by the fear of a loss of socio-religious identity

Ahmet Insel

ing all *'secular citizens on both the right and the left to leave the country, as they refuse to send their children to a public school system that imposes strong religious instruction'*. These exiles *'who left without being chased'* can therefore maintain links with Turkey, returning there regularly because *'they do not engage in political activism and want to integrate sustainably into their host country'*. Paradoxically, the European Turkish diaspora still remains *'the majority pro-Erdoğan'*, being largely composed of *'immigrant workers from the 1970s with close ties to their hometown'*. Generally speaking, explained Ahmet Insel, *'diasporic nationalism is often ex-*



Watch the full debate on YouTube



Hamit Bozarslan

acerbated by the fear of a loss of socio-religious identity'. As a result, two Turkish diasporas *'that are totally divided between pro- and anti-Erdoğan and do not speak to each other'* live in Europe today.

Asked about the fear of people who have fled a repressive regime, Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean explained that only active political leaders have something to fear. For example, the journalist Marina Ovsianikova, who publicly opposed the war in Ukraine, now lives under close protection in France. For less identified exiles, *'the problem arises when we want to return to Russia, she explains, 'the repressive laws are very strict and are aimed at scaring everyone.'*

Ahmet Insel concluded the debate by indicating that, with the exception of the president's personal enemies, Turkish exiles do not live 'in fear of seeing their loved ones hunted', as they are protected by 'Turkish ambivalence, which considers the exiles as traitors but not those close to them as allies through contamination, like the Nazi and Stalinist regimes did'.



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