



**OPEN RUSSIA
ANNUAL REPORT 2016**

THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE...



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Mikhail Khodorkovsky photo by Anastasia Khodorkovskaya

In 2017, who knows if President Trump will do a deal with President Putin, to make the world a safer place; or will they have a falling out and we will all have to take shelter? Are you happy to just let things happen to you, or you want to take your future in your own hands?

At Open Russia, we have always been about looking beyond the news, thinking about a better, alternative future. And in 2016 we did many things that we believe will act as a catalyst for that future.

There is an alternative, because when one Kremlin door closes, another door opens.

Summing up the year, Mikhail Khodorkovsky (MBK) explained how he sees the country now, and how he sees it in the future:

“Above all, we have to restore the inter-societal links that are being systematically severed by the authorities. We have to help society retain its ability to govern itself and give young independent politicians a chance to gain experience and present themselves as an alternative to society.

“What’s more, we must have a clear reform plan and good working relations with international partners (not the current regime’s ties with individual corrupt politicians and fringe groups).”

In an interview with Charlie Rose, MBK gave his thoughts about *that* relationship, the one everybody’s talking about –



“My opinion is that Putin has already worked out the model that he would like to use with Donald Trump. He worked it out on Berlusconi. He’s going to look for some kind of personal understanding, personal relations along the lines of like ‘here we are, you and I, way up on top altogether just the two of us and everybody else is somewhere there below us.’ I’m not sure whether the American political system could handle this kind of style of relations.”

And in an interview with CNN MBK spoke about that *other* relationship



“I’d say I don’t know for whom this is a problem. The fact that he [Rex Tillerson] knows them too well could be a problem for America [and] it could be a problem for Sechin and Putin. And the issue here depends on values. If Mr Tillerson in his new job will hold up the beacon light of values, in that case I think that Mr Sechin, whom he knows well, wouldn’t have it easy. Because Mr Sechin’s values are not just different, they are hostile towards the common values in America.”



Talking with Radio Svoboda MBK was confident about the future –

“I’m convinced that sooner or later tens of millions of Russians will choose to steer a course towards a European-style rule-of-law state – a state with a regularly replaceable government, an independent judiciary, local self-government, and the like.”



In December, Open Russia presented the inaugural “Journalism as a Profession” awards at a ceremony in Tallinn, Estonia, where Mikhail Khodorkovsky also launched the Open Media project.

On the day of the awards ceremony, all of those journalists that had been shortlisted took part in master classes given by two leading investigative journalists:

Michael Rezendes of The Boston Globe, described his work: “I’m very much in favour of people who want to practice accountability journalism, practice the kind of journalism where we hold powerful people to account for what they do and what they say.”

Dana Priest of The Washington Post had some good advice for her listeners: “It’s important to build a professional relationship with the people you are going to criticise.”



In the evening, the prizewinners were announced for the “Journalism as a Profession” awards, set up and administered by Open Russia. Journalist and music critic Artyom Troitsky was the master of ceremonies.

The jury, chaired by Maria Slonim, selected winners in seven categories:

Investigative journalism – Denis Korotkov, Fontanka.ru, for *They fought for Palmyra* (29.03.16)

Reporting – Elena Kostychenko and Yuri Kozyrev, Novaya Gazeta, for *No escape from the gods of the swamp* (27.05.16)

Photoreportage – Oleg Klimov, Meduza, *Ghost Town on the Kuril Islands: Life at a Military Camp on Iturup* (10.01.16)

Current affairs (op-ed) – Andrei Arkhangelsky, Colta.ru, *Bottom Line with Martin Alekseevich* (10.03.16)

Regional theme – Margarita Loginova, Pyotr Manakhin, Taiga-Info, *Mini Soviet Union: helping the children of migrants to survive in Siberia* (10.08.16)

Interview + portrait – Dmitry Rebrov, Colta.ru, *Alexander Suvorov: learning to suffer* (18.05.16)

Foreign journalism (an article about Russia in the foreign press), Hajo Seppelt, Florian Riesewieck and Felix Becker for *Secret doping: a showdown for Russia* (ARD)



Mikhail Khodorkovsky, founder of the Open Russia movement, used the occasion of the ceremony to **announce** the launch of the Open Media project.

He expressed his admiration for “those who, with their pens or their keyboards, are fighting totalitarianism, fighting for human rights and against the bigotry which, sadly, has

triumphed in our country.”

The Open Media project has been **launched** with 5 startups:

Open Economy – Yuliya Yarosh

Investigation Management Centre – Andrei Konyakhin

Infometer – Nikita Dulnyov

Gauss – Nikita Safronov

Culttrigger – Yevgeniya Shermeneva

BORIS NEMTSOV FORUM, BRUSSELS



The [Boris Nemtsov Forum](#) in Brussels looked at ways to strengthen EU-Russia people-to-people relations. Several hundred representatives of Russian and EU civil society organisations, EU officials and MEPs took part. Major media outlets gave the Forum extensive coverage, including [Euronews](#), [France24](#) and [Politico](#).

Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament, gave an opening [address](#) and summed up the aims of the Forum with one line – “Russia needs the EU and the EU needs Russia.”





In his opening **remarks**, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, agreed, saying that, “The vast majority of Russia’s citizens want neither to fight nor to fence themselves off from the world.”

Zhanna Nemtsova **spoke** eloquently about her father, saying that, “He in fact unites all of us and I’m sure his name will unite us in the future.”



Boris Nemtsov Forum website

The 4 working groups of the Forum looked at some of the most pressing EU-Russia issues. **Arkady Ostrovsky**, **Marie Mendras**, **John Lough**, and **Hrant Kostanyan**, summarised the discussions, which recommended that sanctions against Russia should be more targeted, that there is a need for visa liberalisation (especially for civil society), and the EU needs to give more support towards Russian civil society.



The event that took place in Helsinki on 12 November could well be described as historic. More than 80 social activists and politicians from various regions in Russia adopted the articles of association, manifesto and programme of action of the new movement Open Russia.

[Read about the inaugural conference](#)

The Open Russia manifesto was adopted at the inaugural conference held in Helsinki on 12 November 2016.

[Read the manifesto](#)



Open Russia won't waste its energies on attempting to destroy the current regime. The regime will destroy itself. But we know what to do before and after that event occurs.

[Read the action programme](#)



In May at [Oslo Freedom Forum](#) 2016, Open Russia hosted a panel discussion entitled “All the Putin’s men: media and elections in Russia”. Speakers included [Andrey Goryanov](#), [Aleksandr Artemyev](#), [Maria Baronova](#), [Oleg Kashin](#), [Maxim Katz](#), [Polina Nemirovskaya](#). Panelists discussed the upcoming Duma elections in Russia.

[Watch more](#)

In summer, MBK talked to [Euronews Global Conversation](#) and [BBC Newsnight](#). In conversations with [Isabelle Kumar](#) and [Evan Davies](#) Khodorkovsky discussed Russia’s relations with Europe, the upcoming Duma elections, the future of EU sanctions against Russia, and the consequences of Brexit for Moscow.

[Watch more](#)





Masha Gessen:

“When the Putin regime disappears, its ideology may simply crumble, creating an opening for Khodorkovsky’s pragmatic politics of good people and good governance. But [MBK] may also be completely wrong. If that’s the case, all he will have accomplished over the course of the next decade is supplying meaningful jobs for several dozen Russians and public engagement for thousands. That’s the biggest investment anyone is making in Russia’s future these days.”

Read more

On June 9, at [the Atlantic Council](#) headquarters, [the Institute of Modern Russia](#), the Atlantic Council, and Free Russia held a panel discussion on the prospects for Russia’s 2016 parliamentary election. [Vladimir Kara-Murza](#), [Pavel Khodorkovsky](#), president of the Institute of Modern Russia, [John Herbst](#), [Miriam Lanskovy](#), and [Steven Lee Myers](#) discussed the vote, the opposition’s plans, and the international community’s role in ensuring free and fair elections.



Watch more



MBK was a guest of the [FT Festival of Finance](#) and talked to [Lionel Barber](#):

“We should understand that the Russian economy has had, and still has, many opportunities. But there are two things that need to be borne in mind. First of all, the Russian economy under the current regime is not stable, including the question of property rights. Secondly, under the current regime, you are unprotected in law.”

Watch more



In the first few months of 2016, Open Russia launched a number of initiatives that will form the core of its activities, looking ahead at the next generation, an alternative Russia that can take its place in the world as an equal – highly educated, open minded, democratic, thoughtful, and talking about everything to everybody, without fear or favour.

[Find out more](#)

Open Russia University

Education is the key to success in this globalised world. The [Open Russia University](#) is about preparing tomorrow's leaders.

It's an online educational humanities project, taught in Russian by leading academics, scientists, writers and economists, and open to all Russian speakers, of any age, wherever they may be.

And judging by the number of admissions we've had, open minded is the way to go!

[Read On](#)



Open Elections

Let's vote for our future! Let's not allow anybody to take our future away from us. It's in your hands. [Open Elections](#) is the democratic elections project of Open Russia. Russia held elections to the State Duma [parliament] elections in September, and Open Russia supported a number of candidates campaigning on a liberal democratic ticket.



You can read the campaign summary [here](#)

The Institute of Modern Russia



There can be no future unless we think about what we want it to look like. So we invited the brightest Russian minds to do just that.

The [Institute of Modern Russia](#) (IMR) the think-tank of the Open Russia movement, published its [Constitutional Reform report](#) – the first of a series, looking at an alternative Russia. In their introduction, the authors describe a situation that is at once pessimistic and hopeful.

Later in the year IMR produced its [Healthcare Reform report](#), which examined the crisis in the health service, and suggested a number of major reforms.

[Read On](#)



Open Russia Club

What are thinking Russians really thinking?
What are Russians really saying – when there's nobody around, that is, to keep them quiet ...?

The [Open Russia Club](#) opened its doors at the end of last year, since which time it has rapidly become an established part of Russian cultural life..

The Open Russia Club launched its English-language programme. Highlights included: An Evening with [George Soros](#), where the normally reclusive financier and philanthropist broke with his usual habits,

telling Lenny Benardo about his life, about his collaboration with Mikhail Khodorkovsky, and about his foremost accomplishment – the Open Society Foundation.

[Watch more](#)



At the beginning of 2016, Mikhail Khodorkovsky spoke at the Oxford Union, and gave an interview to *The Times* – gently shaking those two pillars of the British Establishment. What he said, however, established the ground rules for how he sees post-Voldemort Russia.

The Chamber of Secrets

At the Oxford Union, in that hallowed chamber, he studiously addressed the situation with good humour, demonstrating a mastery of his brief – a man who had done his homework.

“We know this regime won’t last forever. It’s even less stable than its Soviet predecessors, revolving as it does around an individual whose paranoia will only increase. [...]

In any case, regime change, whenever and however it comes about, will necessitate a transition to fair elections; this transition must be preceded by the formation of independent political parties and the enabling of free election campaigning, which is impossible under current laws and

enforcement practices. In other words, the reform of the political system must pave the way for free elections, rather than arise in consequence of the latter.”

The full speech is available [here](#) and on [YouTube](#)



[Read On](#)



The Kremlin's own Voldemort

To Giles Whittell of *The Times*, Mr Khodorkovsky made it clear that he is concentrating on looking forward; in contrast to the backwardness of the regime he is battling.

"In the heads of many people in Russia, I am the anti-Putin," he says softly. "As of today I am not an immediate danger to him, but I am still a danger to him. For Putin, having such an alternative to his rule is a threat. If he continues to make the kind of mistakes he is now making with terrifying regularity, this threat will grow. For Vladimir Putin, having such an alternative to his rule is a threat." [...]

It could happen. Khodorkovsky used

to represent a clique of tycoons despised and envied for their wealth. For some, he still does. For many, time has changed that. His years in jail have been a long ritual of redemption that resonates deep in the Russian psyche. He has name recognition and a compelling backstory. He has a plan to replace Putin and the money to put it into action, and no one else does.

This interview was first **published** in *The Times*