

# West's BIGGEST Mistake: New Russia Rising | Vitaly Mironov

Vitaly Mironov, one of Russia's greatest humanists, discusses the profound shock he and his colleagues who always wanted better relations with the West are going through. We talk about the Pskov Forum, Russian-Western relations, Russophobia, the immanent danger of war, and why many Russians see the conflict as larger than Ukraine. He shares views on Russian history, memory of WWII, ties with Ukraine, and the need for people-to-people dialogue, culture, and peace forums to rebuild understanding. Links: Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Merch: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Donation: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Introduction to Vitaly Mironov 00:00:52 Why the Pskov Forum was created 00:03:18 Russia's view of Europe in 2026 00:05:35 Is the West dealing with Putin or Russia? 00:14:37 Putin, the West, and a changed Russia 00:21:14 Russian public opinion and the war 00:26:20 Why the West misunderstands Russia 00:32:00 The Great Patriotic War and Russian memory 00:36:06 Feeling Russian history, not just knowing it 00:40:35 The meaning of the Russia-Estonia border 00:44:18 Rebuilding ties with Ukrainians and the West 00:53:11 Can Russia and the West still avoid war? 00:55:07 Optimism, peace work, and future forums

## #Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. Today, I'm joined by Vitaly Mironov, the director of the International Pascal Lottaz Forum to support peace and friendship among nations. Vitaly, welcome. Welcome.

## #Vitaly Mironov

Thank you, my friend. Nice to meet you.

## #Pascal

Nice meeting you too, again. And we met, of course, just recently in Russia, first in Moscow and then in Pskov, where you took us to the forum. And I really wanted to do an interview with you in order to ask you about your motivations to organize what we did in Pskov, which was an academic conference, on the one hand, where we talked about Russophobia and had a couple of wonderful days, actually, with very interesting conversations. And then you also added music. You had musicians from all over the world, including from Scotland and India, who did wonderful performances. Vitaly, can you give us a little bit of the background of this forum and yourself?

## #Vitaly Mironov

You know, Pascal, the decision to make such a forum like in Pskov recently was to try to build a bridge between Russian people and people abroad, especially in this difficult and dangerous time for everybody. You know, because in my opinion, normal people, I would say ordinary people, should try to be together, try to create understanding between them, because propaganda, you know, mainly, I would say, Western propaganda, is now doing its best to destroy this bridge that we've had for centuries, you know.

And I think it's time to create an event like Pskov in Pskov to bring, as you said, analysts or intelligent people, artistic people, historians, philosophers from different countries together in one place, in such a historical and cultural place like Pskov, because it's situated exactly on the border between, let's say, the Russian world and the Western world. And it's exactly the proper place to meet each other and speak with each other, to try to make new narratives and understanding among people. That's why we did it. And actually, I've been doing these activities for many years already — let's say since 1999, when we created the Moscow Russia Scottish cultural organization, the Caledonian Club.

By my education, I'm a historian. Not a historian like you. I mean, I was a teacher of history in school many, many, many years ago. And not an academic historian, I mean myself. But I'm still a historian. And my interest is history and policy, world policy. And, of course, as a normal Russian person, I wish all the best to my country and all the best to people around the world. And I say culture is a real bridge. Music and science are bridges between people. And we should keep this bridge between us. Don't give the possibility to bring this world to catastrophe. Now it's a very dangerous time.

## **#Pascal**

It is. And that's what I would like to ask you about. I mean, you've been working in this space for many decades now, bringing culture from Russia to Europe, from Europe to Russia, and organizing friendship events all along. Right now, in 2026, what is the mood in Russia? How do you perceive culture? How does Russia look at Europe, or how do you—and how does Russia—understand Europe at the moment?

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

Oh, that's a global question, actually. Well, I would say that it's a mental question now — a question of the mentality of Russian people and a question of the mentality of people in the world, Western people. The situation... well, actually, the situation changed totally. Because now, in my opinion, the key question, the key to resolving the question of understanding, is that the Western world doesn't really want to understand Russia. And I would say that the Western world, let's say the West, is too snobby. And the problem is the West doesn't want to understand Russian interests, Russian national interests, or the interests and issues of Russian people. What happened? It's a good question. We

call this Russophobia right now. Yes, and the situation changed totally because now it has become very dangerous. It can bring the whole world to a nuclear disaster.

## **#Pascal**

How can we resolve this? Hey, just a very quick note: the best way to support this channel is by signing up for my free Substack. You can also help with a paid subscription there, or you can get some of our new merch on [neutralitystudies.com](http://neutralitystudies.com). Links below. See you there. Yeah, I mean, that's the question we are working on, right? How to prevent our nations from going to a large war with each other. I mean, you in Moscow, you feel that, right? You feel that we are getting closer and closer to a moment.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

There is a phenomenon now. I would say a phenomenon that has been created during the history of Russia. For example, let's say it like this: our common friend Alexander Mercouris mentioned in his broadcast that we have now another Putin. We have this, yes?

## **#Pascal**

We have another Putin because he changed his mind on... yeah, yes, yes.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

This is a key question: why do we have now another Putin? Because we know that many years before, he tried to manage this bridge, as I mentioned, between Russia and the West. He tried to solve this question by diplomacy. Okay, now not. Now we have another point. Why did he become another? In my opinion, now it's a moment when the West maybe doesn't notice yet the situation, or maybe doesn't want to notice the situation, but now we have a situation when the West is dealing not with Putin exactly, or better to say, not exactly with Putin, but with the Russian people. This is a very interesting question. With Russian people — and by people, I mean in his message — when Russian people, for the first time since the end of the Second World War, came to the world stage, I would say.

Maybe I say it not correctly in English, but I hope you understand what I mean. For the first time since the end of the Second World War. Why did it happen? It was not a question of Russian propaganda. Actually, the Western leaders explained to the Russian people what they want to do with Russia — to disintegrate Russia. It's been openly proclaimed recently, you know, by leaders of the West. And the Russian people just opened their eyes. You know, what's happening? We have a deal. We're dealing now not just with Ukraine, but with the West. And this West is quite aggressive

toward us. Well, speaking frankly, my friend, we were not ready for this. Well, I can say, Russian people maybe were not ready for the war with Ukraine, but we'd be ready to resolve this question, this Ukrainian question, because it's a historical question, actually.

This question has a long history, and we thought it's just between us, between Russians and Ukrainians. We thought it's just between Russia and Ukraine, but obviously we recognized suddenly, quite suddenly, we recognized it's... it's not. It's a different situation. We have now in front of us a very aggressive united West, which is very, very aggressive toward us. That's exactly what we were not ready for. And quite suddenly, not just step by step, we opened our eyes. What's happening? It was a shock. First, it was a shock to us. I can say for myself, it was really a shock. Why? We did nothing wrong to the West. We did nothing wrong to Great Britain, France, or Germany. It's been at least the last 80 years, speaking frankly. But what's happening? Why? Why do they so strongly support the Nazis in the Ukrainian regime? Yeah.

## **#Pascal**

In western Ukraine.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

And after that, I would say that the Russian people discovered a very special, specific characteristic of theirs. I mean, I would say this phenomenon — the firm will of the Russian people, firm will. I hope you can understand what I mean. In Russian language, it's твердая воля. Твердая воля — it's strong will, or better to say, firm will.

## **#Pascal**

The firm will.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

This firm will, we can say this firm will, occasionally during Russian history, as many as once a century, you know, it happened quite often. Quite often in our history, I would say. The 13th century Mongol invasion, you know, we spent 200 years to resolve this problem. Another example, let's say the 18th century, the struggle for the entrance to the Baltic Sea by Peter the Great. But we started even earlier, in the time of Tsar Ivan the Terrible, and we spent 150 years on that, you know. Another example, obviously, the Ukrainian question, obviously, the war with Poland. A good example, by the way. Do you know, my friend, how many years Russia was at war with Poland in the 17th century, just to take back the left Ukraine, the left bank of the Dnepr River, Ukrainian territory, over the left bank? Twenty-nine years of wars, twenty-nine years just in the 17th century, and just for the left side of the Dnepr riverbank of Ukraine. This is exactly what we call firm will. So, and now...

## **#Pascal**

Can I just ask, so you're saying that Russia is now going into another one of these periods, and that you thought we were in a different situation, but now it seems clear that, oh my God, we are going toward a period of firm will?

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

I think so, I think so. It doesn't mean that we will, in a long time, be at war with the West, and I hope we will not be at all in war with the West. I hope, fingers crossed. I wish it from the depth of my heart, you know. But I think, what I'm sure of exactly, is that the West is now dealing not just with Putin. That's what I wish to explain. Not exactly with Putin. The West had a deal with Putin since maybe 2007, the time of his famous Munich speech, right? Until 2023, when it was the peak of military struggle in Ukraine. But during 2024, when Western leaders were...

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

Very honest, I would say. Not just stupid, but very honest to say the real goal, what they wish to have in this war with Russia — I mean, to put Russia into disintegration and to make a strategic defeat of Russia. Pascal, you can't say anything better for Russians to understand than just to say, "We want to disintegrate your country." We think more. After this, our Russian propaganda can stop, do nothing at all.

## **#Pascal**

Yeah, I mean, Western propaganda couldn't help Russian propaganda more than by saying that kind of thing, because... even not Western propaganda, Western leaders.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

## **#Pascal**

It's an interesting situation. It's quite insane, but it's very good that you're explaining that, because if I understand you correctly, the whole point was that Vladimir Putin, of course, was a great friend of ties with the West, a bridge maker, the first person to call George Bush Jr. after 9/11. The man who went to Germany, to the Bundestag, gave a big speech, got a standing ovation. And I suppose that you, too, were on the team of the Russians who thought that was good. And let's have bridges.

Let's create bridges as much as we can. And then things went very, very bad. In 2007, the speech in Munich, and then 2008, the NATO promise to Ukraine and to Georgia. And still, the whole idea was

this is a misunderstanding. It's a misunderstanding. We need to mend the ties, right? We just need to understand each other correctly. But now it seems that you're saying Russia understands that it's not a misunderstanding, it was intentional, and it might lead to a huge war against us. Is that the general understanding in Russia now?

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

Yep, absolutely right words. But again, you know, my family... as each family in Russia had huge loss during the Second World War, as we call here the Great Patriotic War, you know this, yeah? And, for example, just my family, we lost eight people, eight men from nine who went to the war. And the only person who came back was my granddad. He spent four years during the war, and he came back seriously ill, and he died because of that. But he said to me once, when I was a young boy, maybe 12 years old, he said he had a conversation with a German prisoner of the Second World War, and that German soldier was also a veteran of the First World War. And my dad said that German soldier said, "I had a great experience to be in war with Russians and to be like friends with Russians," because he had lots of good experiences.

It sounds strange, but it was a good experience when he was in the camp, because he said many Russians gave him food, took care of him, you know. And he said it was a good experience of friendship as well. And he said the main lesson he learned in his communication with the Russians was that Russians, at the same time—this is a very interesting moment—at the same time, Russians could be the best friends for anybody, and at the same time, the worst enemies also. Russians could be the best friends to everybody who has good feelings for them, good wishes for them, who don't want to fight with them, just to be friends. And you can't find better friends than Russians, this German soldier said.

At the same time, if you're wrong with them, if you want to bring them problems or beat them or take their lands or put down their culture, you know, like Germans did in St. Petersburg recently—I saw myself these places, which were in ruins after the Germans left during the Second World War. And in this case, you will have Russians as the worst enemies. My wish is, Pascal, I wish to be best friends with Western countries. I wish to be, as a Russian, the best friend to all the rest of the world. I don't want, honestly, to be the worst enemy. I could be, as all Russians could be, but we don't want to, you know? Honestly. This situation with Ukraine, it's a terrible situation. It's a terrible situation for every Russian heart. Trust me, my friend. Just trust me.

## **#Pascal**

I...

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

They're still our brothers.

## **#Pascal**

I absolutely believe that. I have never met a Russian who didn't have family or friends in Ukraine. I haven't met one. Even the ones that I met who are from the Russian East have family ties in Ukraine. I mean, this is absolutely a horrible situation. But what makes it even more horrible is, to me now, the realization that Russia realizes that it's not just Ukraine. It's not about Ukraine only. It's actually about Russia. And it is the West who wants to destroy Russia. And Russia, for the longest time, I understand, they said, ah, nonsense, it's just a few idiots who say that. But now it seems that we are all realizing, oh no, the West is serious about this. They seriously want to destroy Russia. And that changes the entire game.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

Absolutely. And that's why we have now another Putin, because Putin, he just felt and understood this firm will of the Russian people, as I said. He felt it. He now... he now bases not only his activities and his feelings, as I can say about him, he is now based not just on the sympathy of the Russian people toward him, but what is most important, he mainly bases now on this firm will of the Russian people. That's what happened. But I don't want, I don't wish this firm will, strong will, will lead us to a huge struggle. I don't wish that. We don't know what will happen. I can imagine what could happen, but...

## **#Pascal**

We somehow have to prevent that, but the question is how to open the eyes of the West to the perception of Russia. Otherwise, we don't get there. But my question then is, in the West, one of the prevailing narratives—and we discussed this too as part and parcel of Russophobia—is that the people who are responsible for the war are Vladimir Putin and the oligarchs and the circle of powerful people who just want more power, and they want to conquer Ukraine and conquer the West, right? But the people of Russia, they are suppressed, and they are poor, and they are struggling.

And if you just give them the opportunity, they will rise up and they will throw out Putin. I mean, the moment they were the most excited was back in summer 2023 when Mr. Prigozhin took his crew and drove towards Moscow. That's when in the West everybody thought, it's happening, it's happening. But what you're telling me is that that picture of the Russian people, a large part of the Russian people opposing Russia and opposing the government and opposing what is happening in Ukraine and so on, that perception is utterly mistaken, right? Right.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

Absolutely. Not at all, my answer. Because, again, our wishes—I mean, the wishes of the Russian people—are to be at peace with everybody. We have everything to enjoy ourselves in our country. We have a huge territory. We have a long history. We have lots of resources for ourselves.

## **#Pascal**

We wish to...

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

To make peace with everybody. But this question with Ukraine, it's a lot like a fire which has been managed not by us and Ukrainians, actually. Now we know this for sure. Because, again, Western leaders explain to us how they did it. Yeah. Our wishes, of course, are to reach our goals in this situation, and we wish to protect our cultural, historical habitat, you know, our place—let's say, the place of the Russian language, the place of Russian culture. Because of the situation when, you know this better than me, Russian culture and Russian history are now deleted often in the West, you know. That's what we don't like at all. You're totally right that we should all be together. That's our common business now.

I mean, our common business is for all normal people in the world, ordinary people in the world, not just politicians. Politicians are different. It's a different story, you know. They understand a different language. But we ordinary people, we can do something, something strong, something that depends on us to keep this world in peace. And I believe, my strong belief, my friend, that we can do it. Not only must we, we can do it. We can believe in ourselves, that it's in our strength. And what we did together in Pskov, this is huge, huge results. I'm hearing now many reports that came to me from all over the world. And the same words: we understood lots of things in Pskov. They said to me, you know, we try now to explain the situation to our people abroad, you know, to our friends or our colleagues through mass media like you, Pascal. You're doing a great job.

## **#Pascal**

You know, that's why the other side, the side that wants to go to war in Europe, that's why they call us Putin apologists, that's why they call us propagandists—because we try to work against this drive that has one single outcome, and it will be a war with Russia. If the other side wins... The goal of the other side is a war with Russia. They predict it, and they work toward it. The sick thing right now in Europe is that they try to arrange a situation in which Russia has no other choice but to shoot first. But we are at that point where these drones that are now coming to your city, to Moscow and whatnot, where all of that might lead to a situation where the new Vladimir Putin has no other choice but to shoot first, because if he doesn't, then, you know, there might be actual demonstrations against him. I mean, we are at that point, aren't we, where a lot of people on the ground feel very bad about the relatively weak responses of Russia.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

Yes, indeed. From my point of view, again, I just need to come back to the question that I am totally sure that, in mass, in massive, in total, I think the West, even ordinary people, lots of millions of people in the West, they are not knowledgeable enough about Russian history, about Russian culture. And this is quite dangerous because if you do not understand the subject of your activities or the subject of your interests, if you're not knowledgeable enough, it could bring you not only to mistakes but also to quite dangerous situations, which we have now, actually. What we need to do is to explain, to promote, to explain and try to describe the real Russian history to Western people, the real Russian way of life to Western people, the real Russian wishes, and other things that are connected with Russia.

If you have enough knowledge, you can operate by some means, some factors. And what knowledge do I mean? For example, well, it's true that Russia, very often in their lives, had more involvement with different countries—Germany, Western countries, Germany, Poland, Sweden, France, even lots of them—and this stayed in our minds, actually. And you've been, my friend, recently in Pskov. Do you know that during the Livonian War in the 16th century, there was a huge struggle for Pskov that continued for one year, when the Polish army tried to occupy Pskov? The target was Moscow, actually, but Pskov was exactly on the way to Moscow. During my student years, the teachers explained to us that it was the Polish army, Polish soldiers. But they never told us that it was actually the first ever common European invasion in Russian history.

Not Napoleon. I don't remember exactly the year—1581, I need to check this exactly, but you can do it yourself. And it was soldiers from all over Europe in the Polish army, led by Stefan Batory, King of Poland. There were soldiers from Britain, England, Scotland, France, Italy, German countries, you know. And it's still remembered in Russian mentality. Because in the 13th century, Germans attacked Pskov. In the 14th century, Germans and Poles attacked Pskov. You know, in the 15th century, they did it terribly. And during the war with Napoleon as well. And the last terrible example is 1941–1945, the Great Patriotic War, when Pskov was almost empty. Empty. People were killed, sent to Nazi camps, or taken to Germany. Just small figures: before the Great Patriotic War, Pskov had 50,000 people. By the end of the German occupation, it was just 2,500.

## **#Pascal**

After three years of occupation, right? After the German occupation, from 50,000 to 350 people.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

And what Western... You know, it's in our genes. It's in our mentality. In our mentality that we concentrate not even on our personal needs. But all Russians as a people, as a nation—when I say Russian, my friend, I mean all people who live in Russia. It's just, I call not exactly Russians by nation, but I mean all Russian people. I mean Tatars, Bashkirs, Jewish, all other people who live in

Russia. More than 150 nations live in Russia. But I mean just a common phrase—Russians. Okay? But I hope you understand what I mean. So it's in our genes, it's in our mentality that we concentrate not just on our personal needs, everyday needs, I mean, you know, our social problems. It doesn't matter for us when a firm will start or open. For us, it's nothing. For us, the main thing is our security, to protect our cultural, historical existence, you know. And every time when it happens like now, it's in our blood, you know, we're thinking about it closely.

## **#Pascal**

So you are now starting to perceive the conflict with the West as another iteration of something that has been going on for seven, eight hundred years—the sporadic invasions from Europe. Yes. Can I ask you one more thing? And I always found that interesting, but I've never actually asked a Russian friend. Why do you refer to it as the Great Patriotic War and not as the Second World War as we do in the West? Because that has a different connotation, right? No, no, no, no, Pascal, no, Pascal.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

No, no, no, no, no, no. We use both—the Second World War and the Great Patriotic War. We use this name, Great Patriotic War, as a part of the Second World War, just the part related to Russia, what took place in our country as part of the Second World War. No, we still use this phrase as well, Second World War.

## **#Pascal**

Okay, okay, that's good to know. But the connotation to a Russian, when you speak about the Great Patriotic War, then it's all about the Western theater, right? It's about what happened around Pskov. It's what happened on these lands. I mean, you took me, just as information, you took us by bus, right? Fourteen hours from Moscow to Pskov. Pskov is right next to Estonia, right at the border. And on this entire stretch of land, every 20 kilometers there's a big war memorial. We saw a huge one—I forgot the name—but it's a huge one with a very big soldier, in the town of Rzhev.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

It was a massacre in Rzhev. It was like the Russian Verdun.

## **#Pascal**

And it's a huge plain, right? Surrounded by forest. And there was a massive battle. You told us up to a million dead soldiers on, like, on both sides, and everything after the weeks when this was all over, everything was drenched in blood. And this kind of memory, that's to you, that's to Russians, the Great Patriotic War, right? A land war of incredible cruelty with incredible numbers of dead everywhere between Moscow and Ukraine, right? And further. Yeah.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

Exactly, exactly. That's what I try to explain. Like all Russian families, my family lost 80 people, you know, and for us, it's a memory we can't forget, we can't forget at all, you know. And the West just can't understand this because the West can't even imagine what it means to lose 27 million people. It's not possible even to imagine.

## **#Pascal**

Yeah, and we must repeat, 7 million soldiers, 20 million civilians of the Soviet Union.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

Looks like that, you know, but in total 27 million people we lost, you know. And the West can't even imagine how it's... And I can understand, it's really almost impossible to imagine. Even we cannot imagine, but we felt it, we felt it in our blood, you know. And if the West wasn't so snobby like it is, you know, if the West tried to understand, tried to feel, just to feel us, we would not have so many problems like we have now, you know. This ignorance of us, this, how would I say, arrogant behavior toward us brings the problem because they don't even try to understand Russians. And that's what we need to do if the West wishes to be in peace with Russia. It's what they need to do. They need to understand. They must understand. That's what we try to do now. We try to bring the West to understanding.

## **#Pascal**

Yeah, but maybe even better than understanding is the word you used before — feeling, like feel the other one. That's what I mean, yeah. Because the problem is that the West believes it understands Russia, right? Everybody who tells you that the West needs to arm and needs to gear up and needs to get ready for war with Russia are the people who will claim that they know Russia, that they know. Because actually, understanding, as we also talked about in the conference, is something bad, especially in the German language. Understanding Russia is by now a pejorative. They use this as an insult. If you are a Russian understander, then you are somebody who has sympathies for Vladimir Putin. But those people who are so ignorant and think that they know Russia, what they obviously don't have is a feeling for Russia. And that's what you think we need to work on, right? To create a feeling for what it looks like to the other one, to be the other.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

It's a proper word, feelings, because you're absolutely right. Because even when I was, many years ago, a teacher of history in a school and in some institutes, I often said to my students, listen, guys,

you should know history, of course. You should know history. But what you need to do, besides having knowledge of history, especially if you try to be knowledgeable enough about Russian history, is you should feel history, especially Russian history, because it's a special country.

It's... for many reasons, you know, for reasons of its historical way, of its cultural way, of specifics of Russian culture. I mean total Russian culture. It's different, you see, because "Ruski" and "Rossiyanin" are different. "Ruski" — Russian — is by nation, but "Rossiyanin" — we also use this phrase "Rossiyanin" — it's a person who lives in Russia, a citizen of Russia, you know. But we're still using both of these names, "Ruski" and "Rossiyanin." The common word for your language is "Russian," for English language, "Russians." Why I brought you to Pskov — and that's exactly why I did it — sorry, my friend, I need to say honestly, that's exactly why I used the bus for this, you know. I wanted you to see these monuments.

I wanted you to feel this territory, to feel this huge image of these places, you know, to see some people through the windows, you know, to stop somewhere, to negotiate with somebody in small places, in cafes, in restaurants, on the road, on the bus, you know. I wanted to give you a possibility before we meet together in Skopje. I wanted to give you, not only you, but all of you, a possibility to meet each other, to introduce yourselves to each other, and to speak with each other before the conference starts in Pskov. And I thought you spent almost 10 hours speaking with Alexander on the bus. It was great. It was absolutely great.

You've been ready for discussion in Pskov because you already spent hours and hours on the bus, on the road to Pskov, to understand each other as persons. And you know already my feelings — to understand each other, this is exactly, Pascal, what I wish, what I dream to manage in total, you know. The same factors bring people together, give them time to speak with each other, to give them time to feel each other, to understand each other, to make them ready to make decisions — destiny decisions — for the rest of their lives, for the lives of the next generations of these people, you know.

## **#Pascal**

This is a format of what I wish to continue to do next year again. You know, Vitaly, you're just an insanely good teacher. Like... when you told us that it would be a 14-hour bus ride, I thought this was poor organization. And I understand only now that it is great teaching, that it is a very, very brilliant way of bringing a point across.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

Mm-hmm. And as you remember, Pascal, we spent six days just 500 meters from the Russia-Estonia border. Yes. You remember this? Yes, yeah. Nice place, Hotarok Resort, yes. But it's also been a very special moment because I wanted, as you say, feelings, because I wanted to give all of you the possibility to feel what for us means the border between Russia — not only between Russia and

Estonia, which it definitely is — but also between the Russian world and NATO, the Western world. Because for us, for local people, it's not just a border between Russia and Estonia. It's a border between, unfortunately, we can say, two worlds, you know, two worlds. And I wanted to give everybody the possibility to feel, to think about this, to feel this situation when you stay just 500 meters from the border, and to understand and to try to feel what we would feel.

## **#Pascal**

It feels dangerous. It feels dangerous to be close to NATO, even as somebody from Switzerland. Switzerland is not a NATO country, but, you know, the Swiss perceive themselves as an integral, you know, part of the West, blah, blah, blah. But being inside Russia, 500 meters from the border, feels dangerous. Danger from the other side. So that is a scary thing to realize, actually, that even if you were taught your entire life that the other side is there to protect and whatnot, if you're on this side, you know that it is meant to protect against you and that it threatens you.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

But I hope, Pascal, you felt that you've been in a protected place, in a safe place, because there wasn't any danger to you at all, even 500 meters from the border — not from the side of Russia, not from the side of Estonia — because we still keep this peace. We still keep this peace. We should keep it. And I should say that, you know, it wasn't just my decision and just my wish. Well, of course, I was the person who had the initiative for this place, who found this place, and who wanted to place everybody in this Hotarok Resort and to spend these five days as participants of the conference and forum. But I need to say that lots of Russians agree with my feelings, they agree with my interest, and agree with my way of managing this. And, for example, you see many not just ordinary Russian people, but you see yourself how the local authorities strongly helped us. Oh, yes, totally.

## **#Pascal**

And I need to say thanks to them a lot because it doesn't often happen like this.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

And the governor of the Pskov region, Mr. Vedernikov, they did a lot, you know, to make this conference and this forum as successful as it was. So all Russians, it doesn't matter who they are, people or local authorities, we are all together now, doing our best not just for ourselves but for our friends. And we try to do our best as a peaceful nation, as a peaceful country.

## **#Pascal**

Yeah.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

Protect this world in a peaceful way.

## **#Pascal**

But, you know, what you organized is difficult to do now, of course, because the forces of war are working actively against that. And on the one hand, for instance, for me as a Swiss citizen, it's not that easy to get a visa. But in the end, it worked, luckily. But you need a bit of effort. Actually, my friend from Thailand could just come and visit for 90 days without a visa, right? You could just arrive at the airport and go in and so on. And, of course, this is also what we used to have before the conflict. But that's what conflict does. It breaks apart the possibility for people to meet. My university said that they cannot allow me to go on a business trip to Russia, so I had to take eight days of holidays to do so. But that's not because they don't like Russia.

It's because actually the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs put Russia on a do-not-travel list, as in it's dangerous for safety purposes. And I actually understand that. I understand that the university will defer to the ministry and say, like, no, if the ministry puts a place on a do-not-travel list, then we have a responsibility toward our employees, right? But that's part and parcel of this breaking apart of human relations that we then need to actively work against, struggle against, to reconnect and create the ties and then create these experiences in order to develop this understanding. So my question would be, how can we also include the Ukrainians, and how can we include more people of the West in order to grow back together what has been already blown apart now through many years of very painful struggle?

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

Well, essentially, I would say, let's split the equation into two parts: how we can involve the Ukrainians in this process and how we can bring another nation, other people, into this process. Well, of course, the situation between the Russians and Ukrainians now is very complicated, a terrible situation.

## **#Pascal**

That's what I need to say honestly.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

And I think it will take quite a few years to bring both peoples to total understanding and total peace. I mean, peace in their hearts, because so many people were killed on both sides. But I believe that it's possible to bring each other to understanding and to continue our brotherhood, as we say here in Ukraine as well. What is making me so optimistic? First of all, it's knowledge of our

common history of Russian and Ukrainian people. We used to be in war—not as terrible as this one—but still a big war between us in the past. It happened, but of course it was not as bloody as this one. But again, it happened, and every time after that, after years and years, we were again at peace with each other and friendly to each other. So it's historically possible, I would say. Secondly, I'm quite optimistic.

I keep optimism because the culture of both peoples is very close to each other. It's almost a common culture, I would say. Of course, there is a little difference between Ukrainian and Russian languages, but most Ukrainians know the Russian language, and what is phenomenal, they still use the Russian language. And as you know, Zelensky is now trying to protect the Ukrainian language with some strange and stupid decisions to delete the Russian language, to stop using the Russian language even in public places, which is crazy, and it doesn't work in the territory of Ukraine. So culturally, it's possible as well. Thirdly, I would say that practically, in political life, in everyday life, when the war stops—and it will happen for sure, one of these days the war will stop—practically, the economic needs, the social needs will bring people together.

Because, let's say honestly, who needs Ukrainians in Western Europe? Nobody needs them, honestly, you know. Many of them feel themselves in Western countries like pirates, you know. In Russia, we don't have any bad feelings toward them at all. Nobody—if you stop anybody on the streets of Russian towns or cities and ask, what do you think about Ukrainians? Do you want to bring them some difficulties? Do you hate them?—would answer, not at all. For sure, 99%, I would say, you know. So, many of them are still living in Russia now. More than 4 million have immigrated from Ukraine since this war started, since the special military operation started. Almost 4 million people have immigrated to Russia, you know. Not just people who live in Donbass, but they really immigrated. Nobody can say exactly, but the statistics say...

## **#Pascal**

The numbers from the United Nations Refugee Committee, their official numbers, are about 3.5 million. So that's more or less that. It's the largest number of Ukrainian refugees to any single country—more than to Germany, more than to Britain, more than to Poland. So there are a lot of Ukrainians in Russia, but the understanding of Russians is also that those are Ukrainians and Ukraine is their home, right? So it's not like Ukraine is ours and they're part of us. That's not the understanding, right?

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

Exactly. And what's also very important, as I said, is the mentality, the mental thing, which is very important, because almost a thousand years of common history, of common historical experience, brings much more positive things and thoughts than these four years of fighting. So that's the

answer for myself, why I strongly believe—of course, not soon, but after years and years, maybe 10, 15, even 20 years, maybe even after one generation—the Russian people and Ukrainian people will again be at peace with each other.

We will find ourselves how we will manage this. We will find ways and roads how we can deal with each other. Trust me, my friend, we can do it, and we will do it. The only thing we need—don't make us problems for this, don't try to stop this—because what the West is doing now with Ukraine is terrible. It's absolutely horrible. They just use Ukrainian people to reach their strategic geopolitical goals, you know, and the Ukrainian people are just like, how to say, the wood for this fire, you know. Yes, yes, yes, absolutely.

## **#Pascal**

The wood for the fire of war. And you know me, right? My analysis is also just like Chas Freeman and many other Western analysts, that the West is fighting to the last Ukrainian. The issue is now that we are getting close to the last Ukrainian, and it seems that we are at the verge where we then start fighting to the last European. And what we have to hope and work toward is that it doesn't get there, because it must at some point become clear to Europe that only friendship with Russia has a future, and the rest is death and destruction and despair.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

So, guys, that's what I said. I hope the West will understand that Russians could be not just the worst enemies, but also great friends. You know, that's what we try to show with this Pskov Forum as well, except hundreds and hundreds of other examples during my personal activities. I try to do, my friend, just what I personally can do. And I think if everybody, like you as well, will try to do what you can do, all together by common strength we can reach this great result. Well, for the second part of your question, how we can bring together to peace Western people and Russian people, I think it is a much easier problem than the problem between Russians and Ukrainians. Because we are still not in a real war with the West, and I hope we will not be in war with the West, and the West will not be in war with Russia, which would be a terrible catastrophe, you know. And something tells me that the West will never make a real war with Russia because of the Russian power—I mean, nuclear power. I hope.

## **#Pascal**

Of course, we have now a different example.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

It looks like some leaders of the West can be crazy. But again, my friend, I think that normal people like you, like me, like our friends who visit the Pskov Forum—because there are thousands of them all around the world—will keep the situation normal.

## **#Pascal**

I sincerely hope so. And, you know, my friend, we should end the discussion on a positive note, and I think it is a positive note. I'm glad to hear that you're optimistic. I mean, optimism from Moscow is always a good thing to hear, and not the pessimistic doom and gloom. You're also one of the people...

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

Russia is a country of optimists, trust me. Russia is a country of optimists, absolutely. If Russian people were not optimists, we would not have such a great country, such a history like we have, you know.

## **#Pascal**

We're all optimists. I'm glad to hear that. Never go to war with optimists.

## **#Pascal**

Because there's no...

## **#Pascal**

Because they always have a way to go forward. No, no, no, just in general. I also congratulate you because I sincerely think that the activities you're doing are very important—human-to-human interaction and understanding, and fostering the ties and the bridges that keep us together to work against the spiral of war that tries to divide us. People who would like to follow you, Vitaly, where should they go? Do you have a place where you publish the results of the conferences? Is there a place online where people can find your work or someone can follow you?

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

Yes, definitely. First of all, we have lots of remarks and notices in Russian mass media and foreign, by the way, mass media, like never before. This time we have our project already in its third year. But it was the first time after this forum that we had huge, huge remarks in Western and world media. I am now receiving reports each day from different countries.

Yesterday, for example, I received a nice radio program from the Czech Republic. Before that, I got a great article that was published in one of the Canadian magazines by Yakov Rapkin. Before that, I saw myself and kept broadcasts from Alessandra, from Richard, different newspapers, different bloggers still use these materials. We actually were planning to make a brochure of all speeches, all presentations that you and your colleagues gave at our SCOFF conference, and I hope I can do it by the end of this year. Of course, I already gave some interviews in Russia, and I probably will give some more interviews so people around Russia know enough about what happened. And now I'm absolutely happy that lots of people abroad realized what happened in SCOFF recently, you know, so I'm really satisfied. Thank you, my friend, very much for everything. First of all, thank you for coming and taking part in our forum, and I hope you will come again and again, because we really wish to continue the SCOFF forum and maybe to continue to do it not just in SCOFF but also in other great places in Russia, like Smolensk, for example, like Kaluga, where I'll go next week to discuss the next project with local authorities. So, as I said, I'm optimistic, and I wish to be optimistic, to keep optimism all around the world, because in the question of war or peace, peace will definitely win in this struggle between Europe and peace. Peace at the end for everybody, for sure.

## **#Pascal**

It must win, and we must have more of these forums. We need to have them all around the world, and they need to center around the question of how to create peace and not how to prepare for war, because if we do so, then we will go to war. So, Vitaly, with this... struggle for peace, struggle for peace, how to struggle for peace conferences all around the world. Vitaly Mironov, thank you so much for your time today.

## **#Vitaly Mironov**

Thank you so much.