
Russian mathematician Arutyunov: "Prison or defection: I will not fight the Ukrainians"

"I am 34 years old and in good health, therefore I am among those who stand a very good chance of receiving a conscription notice because my country wants me to die for its interests. I am among those who might be called first", said **Andronick Arutyunov**, Associate Professor of Mathematics at the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, lecturer at the Free University of Moscow and co-president of the independent trade union 'University Solidarity', interviewed by SIR. He replied to our questions from his home in Moscow calmly, clear-headed and confident. He told us the trade union recently adopted a firm stance against the mobilisation announced by Vladimir Putin: "We are not allowed to launch appeals contrary to the laws of the Russian Federation", they write in their statement, "but we urge everyone to please remain human! Do not commit crimes against human nature! And remember that an unjust war is a crime." He remarked: "It is very likely that we will be forced to shut down after this, but we could not remain silent." **Should you be summoned for military enlistment what will you do?** For sure, I will never go and fight against Ukraine. **How could you avoid it?** There are three possibilities: either try to escape from Russia or go into hiding somewhere in this big country; go to prison with a sentence of three to ten years; or enlist and then desert. But there are also intermediate options, involving turning to legal counsel... They talk about general mobilisation, but that's not what it really is. Those who don't want to go, manage not to go. They will not run after every male citizens to convince him to go. **What has happened around you so far?** One of my students went to the 22 September demonstration against mobilisation in Moscow, he was arrested by the police, and at the police station he was handed a summons to enlist. He is still in custody. We are trying to help his father find ways to prevent this young man, a university student, from having to enlist. I know of several such cases. **The weekend saw protests and arrests against mobilisation across the Federation's major cities. People are starting to rebel, more so than at the start of the war. Is that the case?** There have been protests over the past few days in the big cities but also in the national Republics, such as Dagestan, where protesters blockaded Federal routes. For sure, many people who previously supported the war have changed their minds, they realised how serious it is. On social media, many people are saying that war is OK, but "why me or my son or my brother?" **Is it women who are taking to the streets?** Men also take to the streets, but it's problematic because in addition to the risk of being beaten and arrested, they risk receiving a summons to enlist, which is worse. **Is it true that men living in a suburban area of the Russian Federation are more likely to be summoned?** No exact data on this are available yet, but it's true that a higher number of young men have been conscripted in small towns or republics, and that this seems to have turned into a colonial war. Although Putin says that all nationalities are equal in the fight against Nazism in Ukraine, it is in fact a colonial war, where most soldiers were recruited in peripheral regions. This did not happen in previous wars, not even in Chechnya or Afghanistan. **With regard to the concept of "partial", linked to mobilisation: what are the real numbers?** We don't know the real numbers! The legislative decree published by Putin contained several articles, but there was no mention of numbers. Some of those articles have been classified and they concern numbers. *Defence Minister* Sergei Shoigu said that Russia would draft 300,000 people, but there are no documents to back it up. I believe they will summon over 300,000 for military enlistment, but there is no information on the number of people who will be actually enlisted. The Russian government is not like the European ones: here no one really understands what is going on. Ultimately, they might send off to war fewer people, but no one knows what will really happen. Many people are leaving Russia. And those who wanted to go and fight have already left. **So who is being recruited now?** Idiots who don't know how to avoid conscription, 50-year-olds without a job or a dignified life. Is this how a great army is going to be created? Definitely not. They are collecting the "flawed material." **Will the recent protests have an impact?** All protests have an impact. First of all,

because people realise that they are not alone and this is very important. Russians are individualists, they have very few friends. Seeing that there are so many like-minded persons has a positive impact. Whether it will also have a political impact is hard to say. Likewise, the Russian police are not as powerful as they were a year ago. I don't know if the protests will be strong enough to get the upper hand, but sooner or later it will happen. The Russian government is not as powerful as it used to be, only few have remained loyal to it. Moscow's municipal elections of September 11 were proof of this: the turnout was 10%. It means that most people want nothing to do with the government, and therefore are not loyal to the government. I take a walk every day and I don't see cars with a 'Z' except very rarely. Many could be seen after the annexation of Crimea. Not anymore. **Do you think Vladimir Putin's threat of using nuclear weapons should be taken seriously?** Russia experienced the Chernobyl disaster. And I don't hear anyone claim that nuclear weapons would be a good way to solve things. There is a great fear of a nuclear war. I do believe in the best and so I believe that if Putin hits the red button, maybe Shoigu and perhaps Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov will too. But those officers required to launch the warheads will not, because they have children, wives. I believe in the best. **How do you feel about Patriarch Kirill's support to military call-up and his promise of paradise?** I am not a believer, and as an external observer it seems to me that the faithful of the Orthodox Church do not think much of him either. By acting this way there is no doubt that he is working for Putin and for the Russian government. **Are the sanctions making everyday life more difficult?** All items became more expensive, sometimes two or three times more than the original price. There are fewer products to choose from, some things are no longer available, like Coca-Cola, but I wouldn't say that the situation in the shops is disastrous. Of course people are getting poorer.

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