

"Russian World": Russia's Policy towards its Diaspora



Mikhail SUSLOV

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Ifri

27 rue de la Procession 75740 Paris Cedex 15—FRANCE

Tel.: +33 (0)1 40 61 60 00—Fax : +33 (0)1 40 61 60 60

Email: accueil@ifri.org

Ifri-Brussels

Rue Marie-Thérèse, 21 1000—Brussels—BELGIUM

Tel.: +32 (0)2 238 51 10—Fax: +32 (0)2 238 51 15

Email: bruxelles@ifri.org

Website: ifri.org

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Author

Mikhail Suslov is an assistant professor of Russian history and politics at the University of Copenhagen. His research focuses on Russian intellectual history, conservative, right-wing and religiously-motivated political ideas, geopolitical ideologies and socio-political utopias. His most recent papers dealing with (geo)political imagination include “Novorossiya’ Reloaded: Geopolitical Fandom in Online Debates”, *Europe-Asia Studies* (vol. 69, No. 2, 2017); “Of Planets and Trenches: Imperial Science Fiction in Contemporary Russia”, *The Russian Review* (vol. 75, No. 10, 2016). He recently edited *Digital Orthodoxy in the Post-Soviet World: The Russian Orthodox Church and Web 2.0* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2016), and co-edited (with Mark Bassin) *Eurasia 2.0: Post-Soviet Geopolitics in the Age of New Media* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016).

Abstract

This paper examines how the large Russian-speaking population outside Russia has been ideologically constructed and politically instrumentalized by the Kremlin's leadership. It traces the evolution of the diaspora policies and visions from the early 1990s to the present, and argues that the understanding of Russian "compatriots abroad" has never been the same; rather, it travelled a long road from revanchist irredentism of the red-brown opposition in the 1990s, to the moderately liberal pragmatism of the early 2000s, to the confrontational instrumentalization of Russian "compatriots" as a lever of Russia's soft power in the late 2000s, and, finally, back to the even more confrontational, irredentist and isolationist visions after the Ukrainian crisis of 2014. This paper maintains that on the level of ideological conceptualization, the Russian political elite has never developed a consolidated and straightforward understanding of the Russian-speaking diaspora, of whom the elite's perception oscillates between visions of saviors and traitors of Russia. Another complexity is due to the internal heterogeneity of the post-Soviet Russian-speaking diaspora. As a result, it is conceivable that the Russian leadership would persist in its irredentist policies in relation to the Russian speakers in the "near abroad"; however, at the same time Moscow has neither the financial nor infrastructural resources, nor the ideological or "soft power" attractiveness to successfully manipulate "global Russians" who have voluntarily emigrated to Western Europe and North America, and whose number is steadily growing, particularly during Putin's third term as president.

Table of contents

INTRODUCTION	5
PROBLEMATIZING RUSSIAN DIASPORA	8
CONSTRUCTING RUSSIAN DIASPORA	12
FIRST STEPS TOWARDS A DIASPORAL POLICY: 1991-1997	15
TURBULENT YEARS: 1998-2003	18
INSTITUTIONALIZING AND INSTRUMENTALIZING THE "RUSSIAN WORLD": 2004-2011	22
THE "RUSSIAN WORLD" AND THE "CONSERVATIVE TURN": 2012-2016	25
CONCLUSION	28

Introduction

On the eve of the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, 17% of Russians (ca. 25 million) lived outside of the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR), or today's Russian Federation.¹ Yet they nevertheless maintained the conviction that the bigger state, the USSR, was *their* country, in which they felt being privileged as the backbone of the statehood, vested with the *mission civilisatrice* and responsibilities of “elder brothers” towards non-Russian nationalities. This changed overnight when the Soviet empire collapsed, and these Russians found themselves in foreign, often hostile countries, whose political elites could (and not without historical reason) resent their Russian population as a reminder of the colonial rule or occupation.

In the past two decades and a half, the Russian population in Central Asia has diminished due to repatriation, whereas millions of Russian citizens left their country and settled in Europe and North America. Thus, on balance, the numbers of “compatriots” residing abroad remained approximately the same at about 25-30 million, which makes Russians the second-biggest diaspora in the world, after the Chinese. In the case of China, the government regards the overseas Chinese as one of its major geopolitical assets and as a valued source of investment in the domestic economy. Thus, China actively cultivates relations with them even at the level of the cabinet of ministers.² Likewise, the Russian political elite has been aware of the potential of the “Russian compatriots”, but at the same its ways of relating to them are awkward and confusing. In 2000 one of the scholars of diaspora reasonably summed up difficulties in relation to the diaspora politics as follows: “Russia has still not developed a conceptual understanding, why it needs diaspora...”³ This assessment remains accurate even now.

1. A. Ingram, “Broadening Russia’s Borders? The Nationalist Challenge of the Congress of Russian Communities”, *Political Geography* No. 20, 2001, p. 201.

2. Z. Guotu, “China’s Policies on Chinese Overseas: Past and Present”, in T. Chee-Beng (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Diaspora*, New York: Routledge, 2013, p. 31-41.

3. T. Poloskova, *Diaspory v sisteme mezhdunarodnykh svyazei* [The place of diasporas in the international relations system] Diss. Doctor of Political Science, Moscow: Diplomaticheskaya Akademiya MID Rossii, 2000, p. 339.

This paper presents two factors explaining this. One is the ambiguity of the definition of “compatriots abroad”. There are various interpretations of who are “compatriots” and where is “abroad”. Russians in “near abroad” have hardly anything in common with “global Russians” in the “far abroad”. Furthermore, what criteria define a Russian is debatable. One could be referring to a Russian citizen, or a former Soviet citizen, or a Russian speaker, or an ethnic Russian, or a descendant of a Russian citizen—the list goes on. Wherever imperialism has left its mark, national categories are problematic. In the post-Soviet case this problem is especially daunting, with multiple repercussions for diaspora policies.

The second factor is the structural tension between the political elite and the diaspora. On the surface, one has the impression of a consistently imperialist and manipulative policy of post-Soviet Russia in relation to its diaspora.⁴ Although it is true that many Russian political figures support such a policy and enthusiastically work towards it, it is an illusion. At most, it is a pie-in-the-sky dream that does not reflect the actual situation. Rather, ruptures and paradoxes prevail over consistencies. Diaspora is hard to grasp ideologically and even harder to deal with for the Russian political elite.

The uneasy relationship between Russia and its nationals abroad has historical roots as well, stemming from the colonization experienced by vast, sparsely-populated Eurasian landmasses. Russian settlers who dared to step outside the realm of the tsar found themselves in a legal, political and ideological limbo of sorts: they were at once both traitors who escaped state oppression, as well as the *avant-garde* of the state, its outpost and line of defense against external threats.⁵ The same attitude towards Russians outside of Russia persists today. The political establishment oscillates between an attempt to instrumentalize the Russian diaspora for the purpose of projecting Russia’s power on its neighbors and the fear that Russian diaspora would develop into a “shadow” Russia, capable of questioning the legitimacy of the Kremlin.

With this in mind, the paper intends to examine the evolution of the state policy and ideology in relation to the Russian “compatriots abroad”, to reconstruct its ideational context and prognosticate future developments. The argument, in summary, is that there have been several

4. A. Grigas, *Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.

5. “Few Governments Have Been so Determined to Keep People in One Place and yet so Active in Displacing them”. See A. Rieber, “Colonizing Eurasia”, in N. B. Breyfogle, A. Schrader and W. Sunderland, *Peopling the Russian Periphery: Borderland Colonization in Eurasian History*, London: Routledge, 2007.

competing, even mutually exclusive visions of diaspora. The logic of the recent ideological thrust towards conservatism, anti-Westernism, and isolationism offers a specific interpretation of diaspora as a part and parcel of the geopolitical and civilizational entity of the “Russian world”. This vision excludes possibilities for constructing diaspora as a de-territorialized partner of globalizing Russia.

Problematizing the Russian Diaspora

The concept of diaspora was formulated in social sciences as a gross overstretch of one particular historical phenomenon, the Jewish dispersion after the destruction of the First Temple in the 6 century BC, onto a host of similar phenomena. Today, it consists of at least three important elements: displacement beyond the borders of a native land, restricted access to power, and some kind of a political project which imparts diaspora a sense of meaningful existence and internal cohesion.⁶ Efforts to superimpose this definition on the Russian case result in a number of questions that prejudice the applicability of the term “diaspora” to the “compatriots”.

To start with, the idea of “displacement” is dubious in relation both to the Russians in “far” and “near” abroad. Today’s migrants do not lose their ties with the native country, thereby creating transnational spaces.⁷ Similarly, “global Russians” who voluntarily left Russia in the past 25 years are characterized by a “double presence”.⁸ In the age of cheap airfare and digital communication, masses of those “emigrants” have never lost ties with the country of exodus; they often travel home and maintain relationships with friends and relatives there. For them, the decision to leave Russia does not result in the dramatic change it once did decades ago. It merely affords the opportunity to enjoy the high living standards of the West while also retaining comfortably familiar social ties. Likewise, the idea of displacement is not fully relevant to the Russians in the “near abroad”: in this case, it was not that individuals moved outside their borders, but rather that borders which moved across their communities.⁹

Additionally, when referring to members of the diaspora as powerless underdogs, one must discuss the paradox of integration. On the one hand, any access the diaspora may have to power and information in the abroad

6. W. Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return”, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1999, p. 83-99.

7. C. Bretell and J. Hollifield (eds.), *Migration Theory: Talking across Disciplines*, New York: Routledge, 2014 (Third edition).

8. A. Chernetskaia, “Khudozhniki postdiaspory: dvojnoe prisutstvie” [Artists of post-diaspora: Double presence], in *Russkoe art-zarubezh'e. Vtoraia polovina XX-nachalo XXI veka* [Russian art diaspora. Second half of the 20th century-start of the 21st century], Moscow, 2010, p. 82-86.

9. D. Laitin, *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the New Abroad*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.

relies on the diaspora’s ability to integrate into the host society. Such a level of integration is possible in liberal-democratic regimes, grounded on the principle of citizenship, where ethnic background poses no pretext for discrimination. For example, even in Estonia and Latvia, most severely criticized for mistreating its Russian population, there are a number of examples of well-integrated Russians who have risen to power, such as Nils Ušakovs in Latvia. Those who are successful in integrating at this level are all more valuable to the Kremlin as a powerful ally and medium for Russian soft power. However, a paradox emerges in that the more integrated a diaspora community is, the less susceptible it is to the state-backed Russian information environment and any manipulation that may result from vulnerability to it. In other words, one cannot have a cake and eat it, too: the Kremlin cannot have a powerful Russian diaspora and easily manipulate it at the same time.

Finally, the political mobilization of the Russian “compatriots” is very low. This is partially because of the diaspora’s above-mentioned structural complexity. It is hard to find a common ideological denominator for the heterogeneous group, one part of which consists of the Russian business *fronde* in the “West”, and the other the *déclassé* Russians in Central Asian republics. Another reason is the doubt that these groups have a meaningful voice in domestic Russian policy-making. To give an example, by various estimations, the number of Russian passport holders in Sweden is close to 100,000, and yet the turnout for the last State Duma elections in September 2016 was 514, that is ca. 0.5%. Yet official state sources report a high turnout rate among “compatriots” at up to 90% in some countries.¹⁰ For anyone familiar with the actual situation, this appears to be a ridiculous lie. The lack of trust in Russian politics among the diaspora is augmented by the lack of a special electoral district for members of the diaspora, who are ascribed to various regions inside Russia instead. In Sweden, for example, Russians have to vote for the electoral district in Altai *krai*, yet very few “compatriots” even know where this district is, and fewer still know the candidates to whom they are supposed to entrust their votes. The issue of a separate voting district for “compatriots” was raised in 1994 by the State Duma’s committee, but stalled afterwards precisely because it would give them voice in domestic affairs, something the political leadership fears. This brings us to another paradox, one of the political subjectivity of the Russian diaspora: in order to achieve the desired level of political mobilization, a diaspora must have a political project, but because

10. “Vybory v Gosdumu: kak golosovali rossijskie grazhdane za rubezhom” [State Duma: How Russian citizens abroad voted], World Congress of Compatriots Living Abroad, 20 September 2016, <http://vksrs.com>.

Russian elites (reasonably) fear losing control over this project by giving a voice to those disloyal to Kremlin, a true political project is not present.

By extension, members of the Russian diaspora from all social strata could be markedly conservative, but it does not make them automatically pro-Kremlin or uncritically pro-Russian. In fact, attempts to instrumentalize the diaspora in the “far abroad” have created a cleavage among Russians abroad, some of whom have become “professional compatriots” whereas others distance themselves from Russia and express skepticism of any initiatives originating in Russia.

As it becomes clear at this point, the Russian diaspora is not a diaspora in the strict sense,¹¹ and nor is it “Russian”. This “Russian” diaspora is in fact a post-Soviet diaspora, its homeland no longer in existence. So, when today’s Russia, which is a nation-state of Russians, tries to appropriate this effectively non-Russian diaspora, it creates tensions, ironies and confusions. Yet, this lack of a fixed definition of the diaspora provides the political elite with endless opportunities to construct and reconstruct it as it suits the current political situation. Scholar of political science Vladimir Malakhov, for example, identifies five possible and even competing definitions of compatriots: citizens of the Russian Federation living abroad; emigrants from the Russian Empire and Soviet Union; Russian-speaking former Soviet citizens; Russians by nationality; and finally all former Soviet citizens.¹²

The difficulties in constructing the Russian diaspora are reflected in how its size is imagined. The size of the diaspora is an extension of the paradoxes of integration and political subjectivity; the Kremlin wants both to represent “compatriots” as a formidable force of tens of millions of people, while also fearing that this would result in an alternative Russia beyond its direct control. So the figure can range as widely as between 150 million of the former Soviet citizens beyond the border of Russia, to 15 million ethnic Russians, to some 5 million emigrated citizens of the Russian Federation according to official Russian statistics. In 2013, Ludmila Verbitskaya, the head of the board of the *Russkiy Mir* [Russian world] Foundation, stated that there were 300 million Russian speakers in the world.¹³ Georgy Poltavchenko, St Petersburg’s mayor, puts

11. N. Kosmarskaia, “Russia and Post-Soviet ‘Russian Diaspora’: Contrasting Visions, Conflicting Projects”, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2011, p. 54-74.

12. V. Malakhov, *Kul’turnye razlichii i politicheskie granitsy v epokhu global’nykh migratsij* [Cultural differences and political borders in the age of global migrations], Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2014, p. 37.

13. “VII assambleia Russkogo mira”, [7th assembly of the Russian world], *Golos Rossii*, 3 November 2013.

the number at 35 million. Russian Member of Parliament (MP), the head of the State Duma Committee on the Compatriots Abroad, Leonid Slutsky speaks of “more than 30 million”; Konstantin Kosachev, the former head of *Rosstrudnichestvo*, a state agency for relations with compatriots abroad, gives a figure of “approximately 30 million”.¹⁴ This disparity is exacerbated by the lack of reliable statistics both in Russia and in other countries.

14. See for instance “IV Vsemirnyj kongress sootchestvennikov, prozhivaiushchikh za rubezhom” [4th International congress of compatriots residing abroad], World Congress of Compatriots Living Abroad, October 2012, <http://vksrs.com>.

Constructing the Russian Diaspora

The intrinsically problematic nature of the Russian diaspora provides for a variety of possible ways in which it can be imagined and constructed. Depending on the chosen ideological constructs, various aspects of diaspora could be highlighted: Soviet legacy, Russian language or Russian ethnicity. When all three parameters coincide, we will have a relatively straightforward construction of a group of Russians in the former Soviet republics – the main object of the Kremlin’s policies of instrumentalizing diaspora, passportization, repatriation and irredentism.

This becomes further complicated when the political leadership attempts to make sense of this group, which is marked by the common Soviet background and often (but not necessarily) decent knowledge of the Russian language, but is not ethnically Russian. This pertains primarily to the group of the former Soviet citizens from Central Asian countries, most of whom are Muslim. In this case, one would either embrace and ideological or ethno-nationalistic stance on this group. Ideologically, Central Asian nationals would be welcomed by those who support an inclusive, post-Soviet imperial approach. Consider for example the words of Russian TV anchor and spokesman of the official line Vladimir Solovyov, who maintained that since Russia declared itself the legal heir of the Soviet Union, it by default has taken upon itself the responsibility for all Soviet citizens.¹⁵ Alternatively, the exclusively ethno-nationalistic approach would envelop the Muslim population of Central Asia in a Russian sphere of influence. Nationalists, however, fear the latter option as it would imply the entitlement of millions of former Soviet citizens from Islamic republics to the same access to (imaginary or real) benefits and privileges as other compatriots, including the right to obtain the Russian citizenship – an attractive option for residents of these countries.¹⁶ Against the background of the growing “migrantophobia” and Islamophobia in Russia, this way of

15. “Večer s Vladimirom Soloviovyim” [A night show with Vladimir Solovyov], video posted on Youtube on 30 November 2016, [Youtube](#).

16. In particular, the legislation stipulates the possibility to issue special documents, certifying the status of a Russian compatriot, similar to the “karta Polaka” for the Poles, residing outside of their country. This legislation is heavily criticized.

defining compatriots is unbearable for nationalists such as Mikhail Remizov.

It is even more troublesome for the political leadership when a group of people possesses all three parameters (Soviet provenience, Russian cultural affinity and ethnicity), but left Russia voluntarily and is hence not seeking Moscow’s protection. These are the so-called “global Russians” who settled in “the West” in pursuit of better economic conditions, quality of life or greater freedom of expression. In fact, this category is legally invisible and ideologically confusing, because neither the inclusive post-Soviet nor ethno-nationalistic approach can satisfactorily grasp it. The group is ethnically diverse, indifferent or hostile to the Soviet legacy. “Global Russians” may well retain or renounce citizenship as a result of their conscious decision to leave Russia. The element of free will to emigrate pushes them outside of both identity projects of Russia as a nation-state, and Russia as an empire.

Furthermore, “global Russians” cannot be framed as wretched victims of discrimination by the hosting countries. As a consequence, official statistics attempt to downplay the group’s size and importance, reporting about some 4.5 million people, who emigrated between 1989 and 2015. It should be noted that in the recent years following the Ukrainian crisis and the “conservative turn” in Kremlin’s policies, the number of emigrants according to the official reports surged from a few tens of thousands in the 2000s, to 350 thousand in 2015.¹⁷ The official statistics register only those who declared a change of their status. However, analysts believe that the actual number of voluntary emigrants is about three or four times as much. To give an example, the Russian officials documented 16 thousand emigrants to Germany between 2011 and 2014, whereas German sources indicate 97 thousand.¹⁸ As a result, there are more Russian-speaking Nobel Prize winners living permanently abroad than inside of Russia, including, among others Andrei Geim (the Netherlands) and Konstantin Novoselov (UK).¹⁹ Likewise, the milieu of composers and musicians from Russia is a visible constituency of the Russian emigration circles, arguably surpassing that inside of Russia both in numbers and in terms of the number of

17. See, for instance, “The Problem with Russia’s Best and Brightest”, Stratfor.com, 29 June 2016, www.stratfor.com.

18. O. Vorob’eva and A. Grebeniuk, “Emigratsiia iz Rossii v kontse XX-nachale XXI veka” [Emigration from Russia from the end of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century], Komitet Grazhdanskikh Initsiativ, 6 October 2016, <https://komitetgi.ru>.

19. See also “Nauka na eksport: 6 russkikh uchēnykh, kotorye dobilis’ uspekha za rubezhom” [Science for export: 6 Russian scientists who succeeded abroad], Theory and Practice, 4 April 2012, <https://theoryandpractice.ru>.

influential émigrés.²⁰ Russian-speaking programmers are responsible for the development of a large proportion of internationally renowned software products, including Google (Sergei Brin), PayPal (Max Levchin), Evernote (Stepan Pachikov), Telegram (Pavel Durov) and others.²¹ By some estimations, the financial resources of the emigrants from Russia surpasses Russia’s GDP.²² In fact, a very few oligarchs are actually living in Russia, whereas a sizable proportion of them, oppositional to the Kremlin’s policy, has left Russia for good, including, for example, Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Leonid Nevzlin, former owner of Yukos and present owners of the opposition news portals Grani.ru, Meduza, and Otkrytaya Rossiia.

Ideologically processing the category of “global Russians” presents another conceptual dilemma between the geopolitical interpretation of the “Russian world” as a territorial entity on the one hand, and the cultural-economic, deterritorialized vision of a partnership with diaspora. The latter choice “sees” the emigrants and privileges them in comparison to the Russians in Russia proper, whereas the former alienates them as “traitors” not belonging to the “Russian world” (Table 1).

Table 1. Constructing “compatriots”

Parameters of diaspora	Ethnic Russians in the “near abroad”	Non-Russian former Soviet citizens	“Global Russians”
Soviet legacy	yes	yes	irrelevant
Russian language	yes	yes or no	yes
Russian ethnicity	yes	no	irrelevant

20. E. Dubinets, *Motsart otechestva ne vybiraet. O muzyke sovremennogo russkogo zarubezhia* [Mozart is not choosing his fatherland: On the music of contemporary Russian emigration], Moscow: Muzizdat, 2016.

21. A. Tillmann, “Russian contributions rich in Silicon Valley”, Russia Direct, 6 November 2016, www.russia-direct.org.

22. V. Inozemtsev, “Russkij mir protiv Russkogo mira” [The Russian world against the Russian world], *Sotsis: Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, No. 5, 2015, p. 150-155.

First Steps towards a Diaspora Policy: 1991-1997

The question of “compatriots abroad” is a major bargaining chip in the Russian domestic and international political process, and as such, it is reliant upon the configurations of the political forces at the top of the state. For a better understanding of the impact of state policies on this matter, four periods should be analyzed. In each of these periods, the resultant policy was shaped by specific political struggles and ideological debates.

The first period, which lasted roughly from 1991 to 1997, was marked by the struggle between the Russian President and the Parliament, with the Administration of Moscow on the side of the latter. The Congress of the Russian Communities (*Kongress russkikh obshchin*, KRO) led the debates on compatriots. KRO was the hotbed for oppositional left- and right-wing nationalists such as Dmitri Rogozin, Sergey Glazyev, Nataliya Narotchnitskaya, Sergey Baburin, General Alexander Lebed and others. It put forward an irredentist and revanchist agenda by calling Russians “a split nation”. The powerful mayor of Moscow at the time (1992-2010), Yuri Luzhkov, played this card as well, taking a more moderate and centrist position. KRO and Luzhkov easily found the common language with the help of Konstantin Zatulin, who in the early 1990s initiated the establishment of the Council of businessmen at the Administration of Moscow, and later on became one of the leaders of KRO, also connected with popular General Lebed.²³ In 1993 Zatulin was elected as a member of the State Duma, and in 1994 he was appointed as the head of the Duma Committee for the compatriots abroad. The position of this committee was to a large extent shaped by General Lebed’s take on the Transnistria conflict, in which he became involved (1992) as the commander of the 14th Army, dislocated in this region. Lebed was arguably the first to use the rhetoric of the Russian people being brutally suppressed by the fascist regime of the newly independent but formerly Soviet republic.²⁴

The famous Russian writer and intellectual Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who in 1994 authored an article entitled “The Russian Question in the End of the 20th Century”, expressed a similar concern with the integrity of the

23. “Zatulin, Konstantin”, biography published on Lenta.ru, <https://lenta.ru>.

24. See, for instance: “Put’ Generala Lebedia”, Spetznaз Rossii, 4 October 2012, www.specnaz.ru.

Russian people. He voiced the figure of 25 million Russians abroad and insisted that it had not been the demise of the Soviet Union itself, which was a problem, but the state of “disjunction” (*razorvannoe sostoianie*) of the Russian nation, caused by the fall of the communist regime.²⁵ Solzhenitsyn’s nationalist approach was not satisfactory for imperialist revanchists in KRO, but his rhetoric nevertheless was later on eagerly adopted by KRO’s leaders in order to attack Yeltsin and the official Russian leadership for neglecting interests of Russians stranded on post-Soviet space.²⁶

In the next year, the Duma issued the Declaration on the support of compatriots abroad, coached in terms of protectionism. In this document compatriots were defined broadly as former citizens of the Soviet Union who maintain spiritual relations to Russia regardless of their nationality and their present legal status in the countries of residence. The legislator used the term “rossijskaia diaspora”, not “russkaia”, thereby highlighting the civic and downplaying the ethno-national aspect of the Russian people.²⁷ In line of this, the Council of Compatriots was established at the State Duma. To support these initiatives, the Administration of Moscow backed the creation of the Foundation “The Russians” (*Rossiiane*) and the Institute for Diaspora and Integration, with the same Zatulin as its head.²⁸

In order to counter-balance the Duma committee, and to snatch initiative from it, President Yeltsin decreed a program “On the Main Directions of the State Policy in Relation to the Compatriots Abroad” (1994), which was intended as an addition to the double citizenship policy, in accordance with the newly adopted Constitution, whose article 61 stipulated that the state “guarantees defense and protection to its citizens abroad”.²⁹ In line with this, the program differentiated between emigrants *per se*, and compatriots, who emerged as a result of the new territorial and political configuration after the fall of the Soviet Union. This category was

25. A. Solzhenitsyn, “Russkij vopros v kontse XX veka” [The Russian Question at the end of the 20th century], *Novyj mir*, No. 7, 1994, <http://magazines.russ.ru>.

26. Rogozin uses the phrase “dispersed Russian nation” in his doctoral thesis: D. Rogozin, *Problemy natsional’noj bezopasnosti Rossii na rubezhe XXI veka* [Issues of Russia’s national security on the turn of the 21st century]. Diss. Doctor of political science, Moscow, 1998, p. 169.

27. “O Deklaratsii o podderzhke rossijskoj diaspory i o pokrovitel’stve rossijskim sootechestvennikam” [On the Declaration on the support to Russian diaspora and on the protection of Russian Compatriots], 8 December 1995, <http://docs.cntd.ru>.

28. V. Skrinnik, *Rossii i zarubezhnye sootechestvenniki: Problemy konsolidatsii i integratsii v novykh geopoliticheskikh usloviakh* [Russia and compatriots abroad: Problems of consolidation and integration in the new geopolitical situation]. Diss. Doctor of Political Science, Bishkek, 2008.

29. This program grew from the report of Sergei Stankevich (1993), devoted to the status of Russians in Latvia (S. Stankevich, “Eltsin byl velikij intuitivist” [Yeltsin had great intuition], *Vzgliad*, 1 February 2011, <https://vz.ru>).

framed as “victims of historical perturbations” and political repressions.³⁰ So, the Program dwelled on the paternalistic style of treating the post-Soviet diaspora on the territory of the former Soviet Union, while disregarding the “global Russians”. However, due to the resistance from both the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign affairs, the double-citizenship policy was abandoned and the Program remained largely on paper only.

So, in the beginning, the vision of diaspora was couched in the oppositional to President Yeltsyn right-left revanchists, who dreamt about the restoration of the Soviet Union and consequently constructed the category of “compatriots abroad” in the inclusive imperial way, with the view of using the victimized Russians in the “near abroad” as a means to anesthetize the trauma of the disintegration of the country.

30. “Ukaz Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federatsii ot 11.08.1994 No.1681 ‘Ob osnovnykh napravleniakh gosudarstvennoi politiki RF v otnoshenii sootchestvennikov, prozhivaiushchikh za rubezhom’” [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 11.08.1994 “On the main directions of the state policy in relation to the compatriots abroad”], <http://kremlin.ru>.

Turbulent Years: 1998-2003

The decisive period for the formation of the skeletal structure of Russia's compatriot policies was between 1998 and 2003, which was associated with the major power shift in post-Soviet Russia when Vladimir Putin became the President of Russia.³¹ This was also the moment when the ideological construction of the Russian diaspora was undertaken by the circles of pro-Kremlin spin-doctors Pyotr Shchedrovitsky and Gleb Pavlovsky, who were commissioned to write an attractive and attainable diaspora program. This program advanced the term "Russian world" to dub "compatriots" and it became quickly appropriated by the Administration of the President, and in particular by its chief ideologist Aleksander Voloshin and his assistant Vladislav Surkov. This program was designed to snatch the agenda and initiative from the oppositional bloc of Yuri Luzhkov, Yevgeni Primakov, and Alexander Lebed, and to offer an attractive line of the compatriot policy to President Yeltsin and his possible successor on the eve of the electoral season of 1999-2000. Inasmuch as Luzhkov's take on diaspora emphasized the role of Russians in the "near abroad", so did Shchedrovitsky's program need to stress a different selling point: a business-like partnership with successful "global Russians" in "far abroad".

This change of perspective took place against the background of heated debates on the federal law on compatriots. This was conceived in the State Duma Commission on Compatriots in 1997 and bore ideological traits of the red-brown opposition (an alliance of radical nationalistic and communist revanchist forces, including the Communist Part of the Russian Federation, the Liberal-Democratic Party, the Congress of the Russian Communities and some smaller entities); thus it was first declined by the upper chamber, and then, after a second approval by the Duma, vetoed by the President. Only on 5 March 1999 did it overcome the veto to become the law "On the State Policy in Relation to Compatriots Abroad". This law followed the post-Soviet imperial approach, having defined three cohorts of compatriots:

- 1) citizens of the Russian Federation, who permanently live outside of the Russian Federation;

31. M. Zygar', *All the Kremlin's Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin*, New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2016.

2) citizens of the former Soviet Union, who reside in countries that had been part of the Soviet Union except Russia;

and 3) emigrants from the Russian Empire, Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation and their posterity, who no longer have the Russian citizenship.

The first and the third groups were relatively unproblematic in terms of policy, whereas the second one embodied the inclusive approach, embracing all former citizens of the Soviet Union and proclaiming Russia's responsibility for its imperial legacy and paternalistic policy in relation to compatriots. Following this logic, and in order to consolidate the success of the “red-browns”, Dmitri Rogozin proposed a Federal Law on the National and Cultural Development of the Russian Nation in 1999, whose article 5 postulated that the Russian people is the “divided people”, and article 6 stipulates the necessity of reunification of the Russian people on the grounds of free will and international legislation.³² Similar initiatives were advanced by the MPs from the Liberal Democratic Party of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.

Yet the political climate had changed. The new Russian President had a reputation of a liberal, and the oil prices began to surge. The Russian leadership became entrenched in an idea that purchasing that which they needed was easier than taking it by force. The image of Russia as a country that cares about business more than its old imperial trifles put the program of Shchedrovitsky at the fore. The essence of this approach was the idea of partnership between Russia and its diaspora. Shchedrovitsky argued that today it was the Russian diaspora that was more important than core Russia, because the diaspora was better adapted to globalization. Russians living outside Russia form a specific type of the community, based on the double difference: they are different from the locals as well as from the Russians living in Russia proper. Moreover, this difference makes them valuable for Russia because they provide Moscow with access to the knowledge and capital of other nations, amortize the trauma of globalization, and mediate “Russianness” on the international level.³³

In his theorization, Shchedrovitsky tried to find positive sides in the post-Soviet *diasporization* of the Russians, when moving borders stranded millions of the former Soviet citizens in foreign and often hostile countries.

32. Federal'nyj zakon Rossijskoj Federatsii “O natsional'no-kul'turnom razvitii russkogo naroda” [Federal law of the Russian federation “On the national and cultural development of the Russian nation”], State Duma, 1999, <http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru>

33. P. Shchedrovitskij, “Russkij mir i transnatsional'noe russkoe”, [The Russian world and the Transnational Russianness], in P. Shchedrovitskij (ed.), *V poiskakh formy*, Moscow: TsNIIatominform, 2005 [1999].

Shchedrovitsky argued that the huge Russian diaspora was actually a great boon for Russia, providing for re-conceptualizing the “Russianness” as a de-territorialized, networked community, in which peripheral “islands” of the Russian-speaking population play a greater role than the core Russian lands, securing the access to capital and information, facilitating international dialogue, and thereby mitigating the blow of globalization.³⁴ The way that Pyotr Shchedrovitsky and his circle portrayed the “Russian world” offered a radical revision of the traditional imperial relations between the centre and the periphery. Without a stretch one can say that this was the diaspora, which was invited to exert influence on core Russia, not the reverse.

Another think-tank, which worked on the issue of diaspora on the eve of the elections of 1999-2000, was the mildly conservative network of intellectuals, grouped around the *Foundation for the Effective Politics*, established by another political analyst Gleb Pavlovsky. According to his vision, the “Russian world” is a world of specific culture, bequeathed from the defunct empire, and commensurable with other post-imperial cultural “worlds” such as the British Commonwealth, *francophonie*, or *hispanidad*. Pavlovsky rendered quite valuable services to President Yeltsin and Putin during the election campaign in 1999-2000.³⁵ So, most likely it was Pavlovsky who communicated the “Russian world” idea to the Presidential Administration, and specifically to Vladislav Surkov, then the assistant of the chief ideologist (vice-head of the presidential administration) Aleksander Voloshin.³⁶ The Presidential Administration jumped at the opportunity to utilize the agenda on diaspora policy, and the “Russian world” concept seemed the appropriate instrument to do so. Soon after the elections, the Governmental Commission on the Compatriots was reanimated to counterbalance the Committee of the State Duma and to marginalize it from the process of preparing the First International Congress of Compatriots. In August 2001, the president signed the “Conception of Support for Compatriots”, and in October 2001 the Congress took place.

34. P. Shchedrovitskij, “Russkij mir. Vozmozhnye tseli samoopredeleniia”, [The Russian world: Some possible goals of self-determination], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 11 February 2000, <http://www.ng.ru>. P. Shchedrovitskii, “Russkij mir. Vosstanovlenie konteksta” [The Russian world: To restore the context], in *Archipelag.ru*, 2001, www.archipelag.ru.

35. M. Laruelle, “The ‘Russian world’: Russia’s Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination”, in *Center on Global Interests*, May 2015, <http://globalinterests.org>; S. Zdioruk et al. “Ukraina ta proiekt ‘russkogo mira’: Analitychna dopovid” [Ukraine and the Russian world project: Analytical research], Kiev: NISD, 2014, www.niss.gov.ua.

36. “Russkij mir i mrachnaia ten’ Surkova” [Russian world and the dark shadow of Surkov], Blog Sententsi.DSP, <http://eugen1962.livejournal.com>, 11 November 2015.

Putin’s opening speech at this congress became an important milestone in Russia’s policy towards the diaspora. By some accounts, this speech became a last-minute decision, which emerged from the struggle between the parts of government supporting a limited and reticent “down-to-earth” policy and the Administration of the President, which insisted on a sweeping ideologically-motivated vision of Russia’s relationship to its compatriots abroad. In the end, the program of the Administration won. It was informed by ideas from its allied think-tanks as well as from the opponents of the President, Luzhkov and his team. So the speech of the President was ideologically eclectic, but its spirit was bequeathed from the liberal-centrist camp of Shchedrovitsky and Pavlovsky, rather than from the right-left opposition of Rogozin, Lebed and the like. Putin spoke about a new era in relations between Russia and its diaspora, based not on protectionism but on the principles of mutually beneficial partnership in economy and culture, but he also delved into the old rhetoric of the protection of the rights of Russians abroad.³⁷

To recap, on the eve of the electoral campaign of 1999-2000 the pro-Yeltsin party drew on the alternative, mildly-liberal conceptualizations of Russia’s diaspora, associated with the names of Pyotr Shchedrovitsky and Gleb Pavlovsky. They offered the business-oriented and businesslike project of constructing diaspora as a network of equal partners, sharing the same economic interests and the same culture of communication. This vision emphasized economically successful and intellectually influential “global Russians”, while somewhat downplaying the importance of protection-seeking Russians in the “near abroad”.

37. “Vystuplenie Prezidenta Rossii Vladimira Putina na pervom Vsemirnom kongresse rossijskikh sootchestvennikov” [Speech of the Russian president Vladimir Putin at the first World Congress of Compatriots], World Congress of Compatriots Living Abroad, 11 October 2001, <http://vksrs.com>

Institutionalizing and Instrumentalizing the “Russian World”: 2004-2011

Between 2004 and 2011 the policy towards diaspora changed along the following lines: first, its strategic planning became further centralized within the Administration of the President and influenced by the chief Kremlin’s ideologist Vladislav Surkov; second, it was crucially impacted by the “Orange revolution” in Ukraine in 2004, which turned the Russian leadership towards a more defensive-aggressive and anti-Western position; third, with the creation of the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation and federal agency *Rossostrudnichestvo*, the compatriot policy was fleshed out into a relatively powerful framework.

In Vladislav Surkov’s rendition, the “Russian world” concept was informed by the idea of “sovereign democracy”. Drawing on the ideas of Carl Schmitt, Surkov theorized sovereignty as the central political value of absolute importance. According to Surkov, “sovereign democracy” provides equal rights in global (geo)political competition, in which the “West” all too often capitalizes on its normative power: “to be a sovereign nation is profitable”.³⁸ The “sovereign democracy” concept fixes the meaning of the “Russian world” as a useful (but not the central) element of national security and a soft-power weapon in the “information war” with the West. This interpretation presupposes a different logic of territorial organization, according to which a sovereign state influences neighbouring sovereign states with the help of its diaspora “tentacles”, but in order to consolidate this influence, the “tentacles” must be well structured, organized and *tightly* attached to the body of the home country. In accordance with these observations, proponents of the “Russian world” in the 2000s wanted to design it as a mechanism that translates the “presence” of Russians abroad into the “influence” of Russia abroad. Hence came the idea of institutionalization of the Russian diaspora,³⁹ which resulted in the

38. V. Surkov, *Suverenitet—eto politicheskij sinonim konkurentosposobnosti* [Sovereignty is the political synonym for competitiveness], Moscow: Lenand, 2006, p. 10.

39. S. Mazur, “Konkurentnye preimushchestva trenda Russkogo mira”, [Selling point of the Russian world idea], *Baltiyskij mir*, No. 3, 2010, p. 61-62.

establishing the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation (2007), and *Rossotrudnichestvo*, a new federal agency in charge of the compatriots’ policy (2008).⁴⁰

However, one should not overestimate the resources wielded by these institutions. For example, according to the official estimation, in 2013 the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation supported 10,000 compatriots within 100 projects in 32 countries,⁴¹ with the budget of some 500 million rubles in 2011 (ca. €13 million).⁴² In the recent years, due to financial constraints, *Russkiy Mir*’s budget is shrinking to 430 million in 2015 (€7 million, according to the exchange rate of 2015). To be sure, this foundation is not the only one which distributes money to back Russia’s policies towards its compatriots abroad. *Rossotrudnichestvo* wields some 2 billion rubles with plans to scale up the sum to 9,5 billion in 2020 (€48 million to €157 million according to the exchange rate as of April 2017).⁴³ Other agencies and government-organized-non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) also contribute financially to the diaspora policies, for example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spent 0,4 billion rubles in 2011, the Ministry of Science and Education allocated 2,5 billion rubles for the period between 2011 and 2015, the NGO *Russkiy Dom* has sizeable budgets of 0,5–1 billion rubles as well. It would be reasonable to estimate the total expenditures of ca. €200 million. It should be kept in mind that the Kremlin has leverage over loyal oligarchs to ensure they pay extraordinary contributions in times of trouble. The case in point here could be the Foundation of St. Basil the Great, owned by Orthodox entrepreneur Konstantin Malofeev, known for his support of the pro-Russian rebellion in Ukraine. Still, if we compare financial resources, available for the support of the Russian compatriots abroad, and the British Council with its total turnover of nearly 1 billion British pounds and 9,000 employees worldwide,⁴⁴ all Russian agencies put together look fairly modest.

In 2010 an attempt was made to relate to “global Russians” and, at the same time, to cater to the wishes of the more nationalistic part of the Russian political establishment, when the federal law on compatriots was considerably amended to emphasize the compatriots’ historical, cultural,

40. S. Saari, “Russia’s Post-Orange Revolution Strategies to Increase its Influence in Former Soviet Republics: Public Diplomacy po russki”. *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 66, No. 1, 2014, p. 50-66.

41. “PravFond: Namereny i v dal’neishem rabotat’ na blago sootechestvennikov” , pravfond.eu, 30 May 2014, <http://pravfond.eu/?p=1643>.

42. “Russian Federation 2011 / Short-Term Prognosis”, Tartu Ulikool, 2011, www.ut.ee.

43. “Putin uvelichil biudzhnet Rossotrudnichestva do 9.5 mlrd rublej” [Putin raised budget of Rossotrudnichestvo to 9.5 milliard rubles], Grani.ru, 5 June 2013, <https://grani-ru.appspot.com>.

44. “Annual report. 2014-2015”, British Council, 2015, www.britishcouncil.org.

ethnic and spiritual bonds with Russia.⁴⁵ The new definition of compatriots retained the first and the third cohorts (i.e. citizens of the Russian Federation outside of the country, emigrants from the Russian Empire, Soviet Union and Russian Federation, and their descendants). The description of the second, most problematic cohort was rephrased in the following way: “People and their descendants, who [...] as a rule, belong to the nations, historically dwelling on the territory of the Russian Federation [and] who have freely chosen to enter in spiritual, cultural, and legal relationship with the Russian Federation”. As we can see from above, the lawmaker (somewhat hesitantly) excludes the most unwanted category – former Soviet citizens living in the Central Asian republics, by mentioning Russia in its present shape as the host for the peoples; by extension, for example, Uzbeks are not part of the « historical peoples » of Russia, so they cannot claim that status of compatriots.⁴⁶ The law attempts to narrow the category of compatriots by abandoning the imperial criterion of citizenship and introducing instead a half-hearted ethno-cultural principle of “spiritual relationship” with Russia. This move, however, is hardly a felicitous one in terms of technical implementation and ideological consequences because instead of a clear-cut legal definition, it offers a nebulous idea of a “spiritual relationship”, which can neither satisfy nationalists, nor supporters of an inclusive “imperial” approach.

All in all, after the “Orange revolution” in Ukraine in 2004, Russia’s compatriot policy became increasingly reinterpreted to suppress the elements of partnership while highlighting its confrontational element as Russia’s soft-power instrument in its struggle with the West. In spite of the palpable financial resources and impressive institutional support, this reorientation hindered the meaningful dialogue with “global Russians”, who were split between loyal “professional compatriots” and the majority, refusing to be treated as Russia’s pawns in its geopolitical games. The amendment of 2010 marked a decisive departure towards the conservative direction from post-imperial legal inclusiveness towards a “semi-ethnic” cultural exclusiveness.

45. Tat’iana Poloskova, “Rossiia i diaspora”, [Russia and diaspora], *BFRO*, 2011, p.147, <http://www.bfro.be>.

46. P. Sporyshev, *Rossijskaia diaspora kak ob’ekt vneshnej politiki Rossii*. Candidate Dissertation, Moscow: Moscow State University, 2012, p. 113.

The “Russian World” and the “Conservative Turn”: 2012-2016

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the war in Donbas were the most momentous events not only in the contemporary history of Russia but also in the evolution of its compatriot policy. The concept of the “Russian world” powerfully emerged in the mass imagination, but at the same time, it became disconnected from the concept of diaspora and “compatriots abroad” in many meaningful ways to be discussed in this paragraph. To start with, the “Russian world” concept became central to Russia's geopolitical ideology in the past few years. To give one example from Russian social networks, in the first two weeks of May 2014 the “Russian world” was mentioned 2,000 times, whereas the competing concept of “Eurasia” 1,300. In less than one year, between 22 February and 2 March 2015 the “Russian world” returned 40,000 hits, by far outbidding “Eurasia” with its 600 hits. The same dynamics is observable in the press as well.⁴⁷

The implicit geopolitical meaning, civilizational rhetoric and anti-Westernism of the “Russian world” concept came at the fore when Russia was reconsidered recently as a “state-civilization”.⁴⁸ This rhetoric frames the vision of the “Russian world” as a distinctive civilization⁴⁹, situated on a distinctive territory, ruled by a single political subject, and struggling with other civilizations for resources and influences. Its meaning became associated with the idea of “recollecting the Russian lands”, which is far from, perhaps even opposite to its initial meaning as the network community of deterritorialized Russian-speakers. The central geopolitical trope of embracing the “Russian world” became irredentist, striving for “reunification”, an appropriating the annexation of Crimea to this end.⁵⁰

47. Calculated by the author with the help of the Integrum Profi and Integrum Social Media services.

48. A. Tsygankov, “Crafting the State-Civilization”, *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 63, No. 3, 2016, p. 146-158.

49. M. Laruelle, “Russia as a ‘Divided Nation’, from Compatriots to Crimea: A Contribution to the Discussion on Nationalism and Foreign Policy”, *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 62, No. 2, 2015, p. 88-97.

50. M. Panfilov, “Zhiteli Krasnodara: Krymchane, dushoiu my s vami!” [Inhabitants of Krasnodar: People of Crimea, we stand up together with you!] *Komsomol'skaia pravda-Kuban'*, 20 March 2015;

There came to be an understanding that Russia could be and is interesting, important for and competitive in the rest of the world “as Russia proper”, not as a gamut of all possible mixtures or a diluted solution of “Russianness”. This heightened sensibility towards borders and territories prompted Boris Mezhuev to speculate on the geographical zone where “hardcore” “Russian world” could be found: most notably, in the South and South-East of Ukraine, Eastern Belarus and Northern Kazakhstan near to Solzhenitzyn concept?⁵¹ This vision supports the idea of Russia as a divided nation, which has long been debated on various platforms, and confirmed with utmost authority and finality in the notorious “Crimean” speech of President Putin on 18 March 2014. This prism refocuses the attention from the collapse of the Soviet Union as such into the violent dissection of Russia’s national body.⁵²

The washing-out of the initial diaspora component in the “Russian world” concept is manifested in the opinion of Maksim Kononenko (a.k.a. Mr. Parker), once a colleague of Gleb Pavlovsky, whose argument comes to the assertion (in glaring contradiction to Shchedrovitsky, Jr.) that Russians living abroad are no longer Russians.

“You have to choose”, he addressed the emigrants, “between the Russian world and London. There is no London in the Russian world. There is no Latvia in the Russian world. The Russian world is where Russians are. There are no Russians in London or Latvia. Russians are sitting at home”.⁵³

Thus, the new interpretation imparts irredentist meaning to the concept, calling for a relative isolationism and closure of the borders of the “Russian world”. The disappearance of the “diaspora” element in the “Russian world” was articulated in its conspicuous absence from the recent *Concept of the Foreign Policy of 2013* as compared to its previous version of 2008.⁵⁴

In summary, diaspora ideology evolved after 2012 to become aligned with the consistent nation-state policy of “hardening of the borders”, irredentism, repatriation and the policy of the exclusion of the diaspora.

A. Prokhanov, “Sviatost” russkogo oruzhiia” [On the holyness of Russian weapons], *Zavtra*, 23 October 2014.

51. Interview with Boris Mezhuev, 1 June 2015, from the personal archive of the author.

52. A. Fomin, “Russkij vopros”, [The Russian question], *Baltiiskij mir*, No. 3, 2010, p. 17-22.

53. M. Kononenko, “Russkij, vozvrashchaisia v Rossiuu” [Russian, come back to Russia!], *Izvestia*, 19 February 2015, <http://izvestia.ru>.

54. “Kontseptsia vneshnej politiki RF” [Concept of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation], Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 18 February 2013, <http://www.mid.ru>.

This process resembles how post-colonial India excluded its diaspora, but in the 1990s India embarked on an inclusive de-territorialized policy.⁵⁵ Russia is travelling in the opposite direction. At the same time, this confrontational policy successfully mobilized the “near abroad” part of Russia’s diaspora, and contributed critically to the annexation of Crimea and subsequent pro-Russian rebellion in Eastern Ukraine. After that, the official policy and ideology of diaspora cast away its liberal layers from the late 1990s and early 2000s, and returned to the beginning of the 1990s, starting to resemble the views of revanchists like General Lebed’ and Dmitrii Rogozin.⁵⁶ By extension, the importance of “global Russians” is downplayed, and there are even attempts to alienate them and reinterpret as “traitors” of Russia, whereas compatriots in the “near abroad” are seen as integral part of Russia proper, temporarily separated from it by the evil will of Russia’s Western enemies. Following this logic, the political elite has returned to the question of double citizenship abandoned in the mid-1990s.⁵⁷

55. I. Abraham, *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Geopolitics*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014.

56. Rogozin is continuing his career in the Military-Industrial Commission of the President of Russia. In 2011 he revived his party, KRO (Kongress russkikh obschin – Congress of Russian Communities) under the name “Rodina-KRO”.

57. “V Dume odobrili proekt uproscheniia polucheniia grazhdanstva nositeliam russkogo iazyka” [The State Duma has approved the project to simplify access to citizenship for Russian speakers], *Russkij Mir*, 10 March 2017, <http://russkiymir.ru>.

Conclusion

Due to the structural complexity of post-Soviet Russian diaspora, several different ideological visions are competing for the role of the “cultural software”⁵⁸ enabling meaningful diaspora policies. It also means that choices have to be made, which prioritize some parts of this diaspora and downplay others. The Kremlin simply lacks resources to consolidate the “Russian world” as a “world” of *all* Russians, wherever they live.

It is likely that the next steps of Russia’s diaspora policy will be aligned with the debates on the draft bill on the “Russian nation”, suggested by President Putin on 31 October 2016. The logic of these debates is mirrored by the very choice of words: ethno-nationalists prefer to name this draft the “Law on Russian (*russkoj*) nation”, whereas supporters of the civic interpretation maintain that this is the “Law on Russian (*rossijskoj*) nation”. In this issue—as well as in the issue of the Russian compatriots – the Russian leadership wants two incommensurable things at once: on the one hand, it tries to consolidate the cultural and political community of “Russians”, but on the other it is at pains to undermine separatist aspirations, unavoidable if ethnic “Russianness” is amplified in earnest. Being locked in this dilemma, the Kremlin’s capabilities in constructing a consistent ideology of the “Russian world” are limited; whenever it makes one step forward, it takes two steps back. There are attempts to construct “compatriots abroad” as Russian national *irredenta*, but at the same time the “Law on the Russian nation” has recently been torpedoed by the State Duma committee, which proposed to rename it more neutrally as the “Law on the bases of the Russian national policies”. Likewise, the Russian Academy of Science, commissioned to prepare a conceptual wordlist in support of this bill draft, accentuated the civic component of the “Russian (*rossijskaia*) nation”, defined as a “multi-ethnic and multi-confessional socio-political entity”.⁵⁹

When we come down to the level of practical implementation of the conceptual visions, one can assume that Russia’s compatriot policy in the “near abroad” is likely to remain risky and aggressive, but at the same time,

58. J. Balkin, *Cultural Software: A Theory of Ideology*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

59. “Uchionye RAN dali opredelenie rossijskoi natsii” [Academics from Russian Academy of Science gave definition for Russian nation], <https://lenta.ru>.

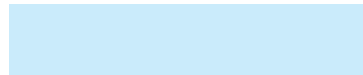
its inability to deal constructively with “global Russians” will grow. Construction of diaspora as the Russian *irredenta* together with the ubiquitous geopolitical style of thinking about politics is making the annexationist policy a very desirable and likely one. It should be kept in mind that Russia is entering into a new electoral circle, and the idea of repeating the success with Crimea, whose annexation evoked mass jubilation in 2014, will be increasingly tempting for the Kremlin.

This line of thinking and acting, however, means that Moscow will maintain a low profile for “global Russians”. Paradoxes of diaspora’s empowerment and integration, mentioned above, imply significant structural limits for manipulating Russians residing in “far abroad”. On top of this, contracting Russia’s economic resources calls into question whether Russia can afford to maintain “professional compatriots” and their publishing outlets.

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