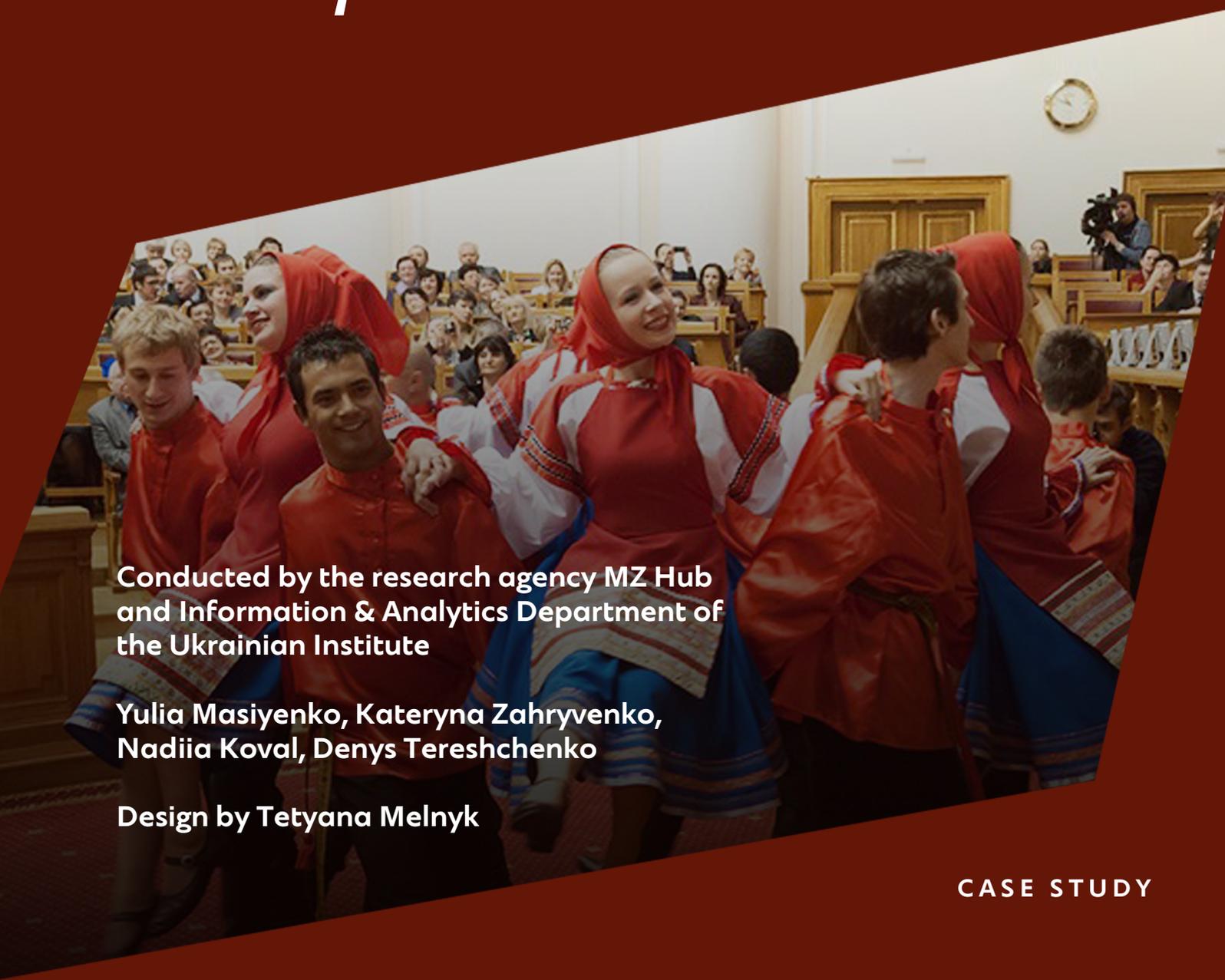


“The Russian flag will be flown wherever Russian is spoken”:

“Russkiy Mir” Foundation

A group of people, including men and women, are performing a traditional Russian folk dance. They are wearing red and white costumes with blue accents. The setting appears to be a church or a large hall with wooden pews and a clock on the wall. The background shows a large audience seated in the pews.

Conducted by the research agency MZ Hub and Information & Analytics Department of the Ukrainian Institute

Yulia Masiyenko, Kateryna Zahryvenko, Nadiia Koval, Denys Tereshchenko

Design by Tetyana Melnyk



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*The cover picture: Performance of a Russian dance group from Uruguay at the VII "Russian world" Assembly (2013).
Source.*

▶ THE RUSSIAN FLAG WILL BE FLOWN WHEREVER RUSSIAN IS SPOKEN

The “*Russkiy Mir*” (“Russian World”) Foundation is a Russian cultural diplomacy institution established as a non-governmental organisation, though closely controlled and coordinated by the Kremlin and funded almost exclusively from the Russian federal budget. The Foundation has become the organisational embodiment of the ideology of the “Russian world”, the geopolitical concept of Russia’s political elites that emphasises the originality and uniqueness of “Russian civilisation”, expressed in the Russian language, culture, and *Weltanschauung*. For several decades, the “Russian world” concept has been used to justify Russian expansionism in its “near abroad” and globally. The Foundation collaborates closely with the Russian state and pro-Kremlin organisations in Russia and maintains an overseas network of Cabinets and Centres of the “*Russkiy Mir*” Foundation with fairly extensive geography, especially in locations where the Russian diaspora is concentrated. The Foundation’s primary objectives are the propagation of the Russian language and the promotion of Russian culture in the broadest sense. It accomplishes this through the allocation of grant funding to NGOs, educational and research institutions, and media outlets functioning abroad. In addition to the distribution of funds, the Foundation also operates its own media, including a website, a TV and radio company, and a magazine. In general, the Foundation’s activities spread conservative elements of Russian culture, aimed at uniting Russians and Russia’s sympathisers abroad rather than systematically cultivating a lasting positive attitude towards Russia among international audiences. It is the instrumentalisation of the expansionist and revisionist principles of the ideology of the “Russian world” and the lack of open dialogue on equal terms with other countries and cultures which prevents the Foundation from engaging in genuine cultural diplomacy that could genuinely improve attitudes toward Russia among the populations of foreign countries.

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ASSEMBLING THE “RUSSIAN WORLD”: FROM CONCEPT TO POLITICAL STRATEGY

“The trouble is not that the USSR broke up – that was inevitable. The real trouble, and a tangle for a long time to come, is that the breakup occurred mechanically along false Leninist borders, usurping from us entire Russian provinces. In several days we lost 25 million ethnic Russians – 18 percent of our entire nation – and the government could not scrape up the courage even to take note of this dreadful event, a colossal historical defeat of Russia, and to declare its political disagreement with it – at least in order to preserve the right to some kind of negotiations in the future. No... In the heat of the August (1991) ‘victory’, all this was allowed to slip away.”

A. Solzhenitsyn, “The Russian Question at the End
of the Twentieth Century”

The 2007 Russian President’s Decree establishing the “*Russkiy Mir*”¹ Foundation was the first attempt to institutionally reevaluate the importance of public and cultural diplomacy to Russia’s foreign policy². This was precipitated by the failure of Russian foreign policy in neighbouring states, as witnessed by the Rose Revolution of 2003 in Georgia and the Orange Revolution of 2004-2005 in Ukraine. These two events demonstrated the weakness and impotence of Russia’s soft power and its lack of attractiveness even in the former Soviet republics and sparked an in-depth debate within Russia about the need to rethink Russian policy in the post-Soviet space.

As early as 2005, in a speech to the Russian Federal Assembly, Putin described the collapse of the Soviet Union as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century, citing the enormous number of Russians who remained outside the country. Therefore, the new institution, the “*Russkiy Mir*” Foundation, was tasked with promoting the Russian language and culture

¹ The literal translation of the Russian “русский мир” into English as “Russian world” does not fully convey the meaning of this concept, as it misses a number of connotations present in the Russian language (such as those related to the multiple meanings of Russian word “мир”, which can mean “world”, “peace”, and “community”). In the absence of a suitable alternative, we adhere to the official English name of the foundation, “*Russkiy Mir*” Foundation, by transliterating the Russian expression. Whenever “русский мир” refers to the ideology espoused by this Foundation and wider circles of Russian elites, we translate it as “Russian World”, bearing in mind all the limitations and attempting to explain the plethora of meanings later in this chapter.

² The “*Russkiy Mir*” Foundation has been studied in various contexts of research on Russian propaganda, among others Van Herpen, M. (2015) *Putin’s Propaganda Machine: Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy*; Laruelle M. (2015). *The ‘Russian World’. Russia’s Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination*. Center for Global Interests.; Lutsevych, O. (2016). *Agents of the Russian World. Proxy Groups in the Contested Neighbourhood*. Research Paper, Russia and Eurasia Programme; Smaglyi, K. (2018). *Hybrid Analytica: Pro-Kremlin Expert Propaganda in Moscow, Europe and the U.S. A Case Study on Think Tanks and Universities*. Institute of Modern Russia; Suslov M. (2018). “Russian World” Concept: Post-Soviet Geopolitical Ideology and the Logic of “Spheres of Influence”. *Geopolitics*. 23:2, 330-353; Popovic M., Jenne E. K., and Medzihorsky J. (2020). *Charm Offensive or Offensive Charm? An Analysis of Russian and Chinese Cultural Institutes Abroad*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 72:9. Our research aims to create a comprehensive portrait of the organisation, including its ideology, structure, and key activities.

among Russian diasporas/minorities abroad, particularly in the former Soviet republics. For this purpose, the concept of the “Russian world” as one of the tools aimed at correcting the consequences of Putin’s alleged “catastrophe” came in handy.

The Foundation’s avowed mission is to “**promote the Russian language**, which is Russia’s national heritage and an essential component of Russian and world culture, and to support Russian language research programmes abroad.” In addition to **promoting Russian language** and teaching methods, providing access to Russian educational materials, and assisting Russian language teachers, the Foundation’s list of tasks also includes more comprehensive ones:

- **Promotion of “objective” information about contemporary Russia** and “compatriots” (i.e., Russians living abroad) in order to build a favourable public perception of Russia throughout the world.
- **Support for the activities of Russian diasporas abroad**, protection of their identity, and preservation of the Russian language as a medium of interethnic communication.
- **Support for the Russian-language media** mostly focused on achieving the Foundation’s objectives.
- **Collaboration with the Russian Orthodox Church** and other denominations to promote the Russian language and culture.

First of all, it must be acknowledged that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century. For the Russian people, it became a real drama. Tens of millions of our fellow citizens and compatriots have found themselves outside Russian territory³.

Executives and supporters of the Foundation have said on multiple occasions that “Russkiy Mir” was founded as a Russian counterpart to renowned Western institutions such as the British Council, Alliance Française, and Goethe-Institut⁴. Particularly noteworthy is the case of the Alliance Française: founded a few years after the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, it was tasked with restoring French foreign policy prestige through the promotion and support of the French language and culture. In order to realise the expansionist ambitions of “assembling the Russian world,” however, “Russkiy Mir” has politicised language and culture well beyond any precedent.

³ Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. (April 25th, 2005). Website of the President of Russia. www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931.

⁴ Vyacheslav Nikonov: Creation of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation. (2007). VIPERSON. <http://viperson.ru/articles/vyacheslav-nikonov-sozdanie-fonda-russkiy-mir>.

The “Russkiy Mir” Foundation has **the main structural characteristics of institutions engaged in cultural diplomacy**, i.e., the statute, goals, objectives, long-term programmes, grants, and conferences, the declaration of aspirations for cooperation with leading academic and cultural institutions around the world etc. At the same time, the Foundation does not appear to share the values and spirit of comparable Western institutions, nor does it adhere to the ideas of openness and cultural interchange. Moreover, its ideology aims for geopolitical expansion and is marked by aggressive attitudes towards other cultures⁵. The precise political objectives of the Foundation are also indicated by its name, which directly refers to the eponymous revanchist ideology, and by the peculiarities of its organisation (see the following chapter) as well as by the content of analytical and ideological documents published on the Foundation’s website⁶.

The vast majority of these ideological works have not been translated into other languages, which is remarkable. The foreign-language editions of the website mostly give general information about the Foundation, as well as some broad statements regarding the preservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of cultural identity. However, the Foundation’s imperial-civilisational and revanchist principles, goals, and values are not translated. Consideration of the structure and activities of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation should therefore begin with an examination of the ideology and values of this concept: what exactly is the “Russian world” ideology, and how is its meaning conveyed in the public communication of the Foundation’s staff, key Russian politicians, and Foundation documents.

The Russian world as a revitalisation instrument for Russia

The history of the “Russian world” concept has been already examined in-depth⁷; therefore, for the sake of this study, we will merely cover the essential points. Various literary and philosophical aspects of the “Russian world” notion can be traced at least several centuries back. The political argument for the “Russian world” as a civilisational framework for development and a means of (re)interpreting Russian-speaking communities in other countries was first

5 Popovic M., Jenne E. K., and Medzihorsky J. (2020). Charm Offensive or Offensive Charm? An Analysis of Russian and Chinese Cultural Institutes Abroad, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 72:9, 1445-1467, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2020.1785397>.

6 Nikonov V. (ed.). (2010). Meanings and Values of the Russian World. Collection of Articles and Materials of Round Tables Organised by the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation. <http://russkiymir.ru/events/docs/Смыслы%20и%20ценности%20Русского%20мира%202010.pdf>.

7 Laruelle M. (2015). The ‘Russian World’. *Russia’s Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination*. Center for Global Interests.; Suslov M. (2018). “Russian World” Concept: Post-Soviet Geopolitical Ideology and the Logic of “Spheres of Influence”. *Geopolitics*. 23:2, 330-353. DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2017.1407921.

advanced in the history of post-Soviet Russia at the end of the 1990s⁸ by political technologists Pyotr Shchedrovitsky and Yefim Ostrovsky. As they assert, it was a method for creating a concept of Russian policy toward the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS):

I can tell you when precisely the word emerged. It appeared around New Year's Eve of 1998 when we were preparing a concept of Russia's policy in the CIS at the request of one of the government officials. In the text of this concept, the existence of a particular socio-cultural reality was suggested as the basic formula, the fundamental myth that set the principles of policy in the CIS (it was being transformed at the time). The critical point of understanding was that the same number of Russian ("russkie") people lived in Russia as abroad⁹.

Nonetheless, numerous conservative intellectual, political-technological, and journalistic societies contributed to the conception and development of this idea. The deliberate avoidance of unambiguous distinctions and definitions, i.e., providing straightforward answers to the questions of what the "Russian world" is and who or what belongs to it, is a remarkable aspect of the discussion around the concept of the "Russian world." Foundation's ideologists and leaders actively employ an extensive array of abstract concepts to describe the "Russian world"; for instance, it may be regarded as a language, a culture, a universe, an empire, a world power, a supraethnic formation, a community, or peace. The term's polysemantic character renders its accurate translation impossible¹⁰. Its immensity and abstractness make it impossible to operationalise, but they are meant to represent a deeper meaning that implies competition with other "great worlds" (Anglo-Saxon, Arabic, etc.).

The fundamental contradiction between the broadest possible definition of "Russian world" necessitated by geopolitical claims and the highly restrictive, conservative, and archaic definition of cultural Russianness upon which the very term is built is, in our opinion, the source of this vagueness. In addition, according

8 In an interview with the online publication "Russkiy Arkhipelag" (Russian Archipelago), Shchedrovitsky himself made this claim. You can also read about this in the article "Русский мир" ("Russian World") in the Russian-language Wikipedia, from leading researchers of soft power institutions, journalists, and the leaders of the organisation.

Russian World: Restoring the Context. (2001). Russian Archipelago. https://archipelag.ru/ru_mir/history/history01/shedrovitsky-russmir/.

Laruelle, Marlene (2015). "The 'Russian World': Russia's Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination," Center for Global Interests Papers.

From "Kalinka" to Donbas. Elena Sorokina - on the Concept of the "Russian World". (2021). Radio Svoboda (Liberty). <https://www.svoboda.org/a/ot-kalinka-do-donbassa-elena-sorokina-o-kontseptsii-russkogo-mira/31428922.html>.

Nikonov V. Not a Memory of the Past, but a Dream of the Future. Meanings and Values of the Russian World. Collection of Articles and Materials of Round Tables Organised by the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation (2010). <http://russkiymir.ru/events/docs/Смыслы%20и%20ценности%20Русского%20мира%202010.pdf>.

9 Russian World: Restoring the Context. (2001). Russian Archipelago. https://archipelag.ru/ru_mir/history/history01/shedrovitsky-russmir/.

10 Kozdra M. (2018). The Boundaries of Russian Identity Analysis of the Concept of Russkiy Mir in Contemporary Russian Online Media. *Lingua Cultura*. Vol.12, №1. <https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v12i1.2004>

to Foundation documents, improving global attitudes toward Russia/the “Russian world” is a secondary objective of the “Russian world’s” development. It is asserted, for instance, that Russia needs a “positive image” to “strengthen the positions of our civilisation in global competition”¹¹ or that it is crucial to “appeal not only to Russian citizens but also to compatriots living abroad, to citizens of the former Soviet Union, and, ideally, to a wider audience of those who are potentially not indifferent to Russia”¹².

Nonetheless, in 2010, during a discussion over the Foundation’s purpose, its then-executive director, Vyacheslav Nikonov, directly appealed to the initial concept that attempted to make sense of the large number of Russian speakers living outside Russia and drew an expansionist conclusion:

“Today, the Russians are the largest diaspora nation in the world. According to the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation, the Russian-speaking diaspora (which includes, for example, Germans from Kazakhstan) has already surpassed the Chinese. In addition, the number of persons who speak Russian worldwide is comparable to the population of the Russian Federation. **In fact, this is second Russia outside of Russia.** But it is sand. It is a scattered, atomised civilisation that our Foundation, like many others, is trying to unite. But sand is also used to build cement and concrete, which can be fused into the glass or something very tough when subjected to severe external forces”¹³.

It is this idea that **as many Russians (“russkie”, in the cultural and civilizational sense, not necessarily ethnic Russians) live outside Russia as in Russia itself, which is a possible source of the rebirth of power and hope for Russia, is the semantic core of the “Russian world” concept.**

Indicators of affiliation with the “Russian world”

The concept of the “Russian world” raises the problematic questions of what principle should be used to determine a person’s or community’s belonging to the “Russian world” and what policy should be implemented in response. In fact, in order to answer these questions, in the first years of the Foundation’s existence, its founders and activists relentlessly engaged in organisational introspection, holding numerous round tables. The resulting texts entitled “Meanings and

11 Russian World: Meanings and Values. Materials of the Round Table on March 19th, 2010. Meanings and Values of the Russian World. Collection of Articles and Materials of Round Tables Organised by the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation (2010). <http://russkiymir.ru/events/docs/Смыслы%20и%20ценности%20Русского%20мира%202010.pdf>

12 Ibid.

13 Russian World as a Civilization. Materials of the Round Table on December 22nd, 2009. Meanings and Values of the Russian World. Collection of Articles and Materials of Round Tables Organised by the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation (2010). <http://russkiymir.ru/events/docs/Смыслы%20и%20ценности%20Русского%20мира%202010.pdf>

Values of the Russian World¹⁴ (2010), posted only on the Russian-language version of the Foundation's website, can be considered the Foundation's programmatic document. The publication of the results put together as a raw synopsis of round tables that were attended by the Foundation's leaders and staff, political technologists and philosophers, philologists-activists from the regions, heads of key research institutions, propaganda journalists, and the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill, on the one hand, demonstrates the inability of these groups to reach a compromise, and on the other, suggests a plethora of meanings that have yet to be analysed and summarised.

The primary criterion of the "Russian world" is still (the Russian) language. The round tables reports explicitly state that the Russian language is the "binder" of the **Russian world since it contains its historical codes and meanings**¹⁵. In the Foundation's printed materials about the current status of the Russian language, a sense of threat and dissatisfaction with the status of the Russian language in the world predominates. The topic of (losing) the worldwide stature of the Russian language takes on an aggressive, even bellicose tone for the Foundation's leaders and activists. Typical statements that refer to this issue:

- **Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian language suffered from a "rapid loss of positions", which was allegedly a "catastrophe in Eastern Europe":** "Russian is the only major language that has not only lost its position in the world over the past two decades but also lost it rapidly"¹⁶.
- **The Russian language is "punished" in the countries of the former Soviet Union** for "actual or perceived sins of tsarism and the USSR," while the allegedly civilising role of the Russian language in the former Russian Empire or the Soviet Union is forgotten¹⁷.
- **The Russian language's adversaries will be defeated.** According to Vladimir Kochin, the Foundation's executive director, "The Russian language is a political matter. Its promotion worldwide is a very significant political task about which our President has frequently spoken. **Of course, our case is righteous.** The enemy will be defeated, and the victory will be ours"¹⁸.

14 Meanings and Values of the Russian World. Collection of Articles and Materials of Round Tables Organised by the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation (2010).

15 Gromyko A. Russian World: Concept, Principles, Values, Structure. Meanings and Values of the Russian World. Collection of Articles and Materials of Round Tables Organised by the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation (2010). <http://russkiymir.ru/events/docs/Смыслы%20и%20ценности%20Русского%20Мира%202010.pdf>.

16 Nikonov V. Not a Memory of the Past, but a Dream of the Future. Meanings and Values of the Russian World. Collection of Articles and Materials of Round Tables Organised by the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation (2010). <http://russkiymir.ru/events/docs/Смыслы%20и%20ценности%20Русского%20Мира%202010.pdf>.

17 Ibid.

18 Kochin V. (2016). The Russian Language Is a Political Subject. The Strategy of Russia. №6. https://istina.msu.ru/media/publications/article/93c/16e/22524072/str_6_2016.pdf.

- **A classic example of the enemy of the Russian language and Russia is Ukraine**, where after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a generation of “young people hostile to Russia who have been educated in the West” has grown up¹⁹.
- **The Russian flag will be flown wherever Russian is spoken,”** In an interview with the newspaper “Izvestiya” (“The News”) in 2015, Vladimir Kochin joked about a plan by the Russian Ministry of Education and Science to spend 3.75 billion roubles on promoting the Russian language abroad. “Promoting the Russian language is a multifaceted endeavour; we will not receive this funding. If we had such resources, the Russian flag would already be everywhere”²⁰.

However, the language criterion cannot be sufficient, given the Foundation’s repeatedly articulated desire to attract to the “Russian world” also descendants of the previous waves of emigration who have lost their language but still identify as Russians or people who are simply interested in the Russian language and culture.

The second essential criterion is religious affiliation, specifically with the Russian Orthodox Church. The inclusion of Patriarch Kirill’s speech at the Third Assembly of the Russian World in the programmatic documents of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation is thus no coincidence. Kirill’s definition of the “Russian world” based on this religious criterion includes not only Russia within its contemporary borders but also Ukraine, Belarus, and even Moldova.

It seems that if we consider the Russian Federation within its modern borders the only centre of it (of the “Russian world” – Authors), we will be sinning against the historical truth and will artificially alienate many millions of people who are aware of their responsibility for the fate of the Russian world and who consider its establishment their life’s work. The core of the Russian world today is Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and St. Rev. Laurentius of Chernihiv expressed this idea in a famous phrase: “Russia, Ukraine, Belarus is Holy Rus.” It is this understanding of the Russian world that is enshrined in the modern self-designation of our Church. It is called Russian not on ethnic grounds; rather, this name indicates that the Russian Orthodox Church carries out a pastoral mission among peoples who accept the Russian spiritual and cultural tradition as the basis of their national identity or as an essential component²¹.

19 Ibid.

20 “If We Are Given Big Budgets, the Russian Flag Will Be Everywhere.” (July 22nd, 2015). Izvestiya (“The News”). <https://iz.ru/news/589034>.

21 Patriarch Kirill. Russian World and Our Values. Meanings and Values of the Russian World. Collection of Articles and Materials of Round Tables Organised by the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation (2010). <http://ruskiymir.ru/events/docs/Смыслы%20и%20ценности%20Русского%20мира%202010.pdf>. P. 29.

However, this criterion is also insufficient due to the diversity of religious traditions in Russia, including a large number of Muslims residing in it, and the wish to engage with representatives of other Christian denominations related to the Russian language and culture within the project.

The cultural dimension of the “Russian world” is typically not discussed in terms of ancient or modern phenomena, trends, or representatives of Russian culture, but rather in terms of the “values” and “meanings” that the “Russian world” carries. In this effort to define values, the ambivalence between the Foundation’s broad goals and its limited resources, which was previously mentioned, is also well observed. On the one hand, it is stated that the “Russian world” presupposes harmony and mutual respect, as well as peaceful coexistence with other states: “It would be desirable if this civilisation (the “Russian world”) brought to the world the ideals of freedom, dignity, justice, sovereignty, and mutual respect for states, faith, and traditions”²². On the other hand, it is emphasised that the defining characteristic of the values of the “Russian world” is their unmistakable Russocentrism in the broadest sense, i.e. that they must be “produced within the country itself”²³.

On the Foundation’s website²⁴, the understanding of the ideology of the “Russian world” is presented in a rather diverse way:

- **“Mir’ is a community”,** a term associated with “communality”, “conciliarity”, and “collectivism”. It is noted that **the key problem of contemporary Russia is individualism and the rupture of social ties; therefore, the restoration and strengthening of the community is precisely the basis of the concept of the “Russian world”.**
- **“Russian world” is also about loyalty to Russia** because **everyone’s vocation is to help the motherland and to care for one’s neighbour** (“what each of us can do for the Motherland”)
- **“Russian world” is the absence of enmity, notably in the Russian sense** (“Russian reconciliation, rapport, Russian order, overcoming the ruptures of the 20th century”), examples of which are the unity of the Churches under the auspices of the Russian Orthodox Church, and reburial of significant émigrés.

In his article “Russian World: Concepts, Principles, Values, Structure,” Alexey Gromyko²⁵ (head of the Foundation’s European programs at the time) described

22 Nikonov V. Not a Memory of the Past, but a Dream of the Future. Meanings and Values of the Russian World. Collection of Articles and Materials of Round Tables Organised by the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation (2010). <http://russkiymir.ru/events/docs/Смыслы%20и%20ценности%20Русского%20Мира%202010.pdf>.

23 Ibid.

24 Information portal of the “Russkiy Mir” foundation. <https://russkiymir.ru/fund/>.

25 Alexey Gromyko (born in 1969) is the Director of the Foundation’s European programs and the Chairman of its Institute of Linguistic-Civilizationist and Migration Processes’ Expert Council. He is also the grandson of Andrey Gromyko, Foreign Minister of the USSR from 1957 to 1985 and Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet from 1985 to 1988. A. Gromyko is a migration historian, a Doctor of Political Science, the Director of the Institute of Europe at the Russian Academy of Sciences.

and even categorised the values of the “Russian world” in a more structured manner. This attempt once again reveals the fundamental internal contradiction of the concept: on the one hand, multiculturalism and multiethnicity are declared to be the functional value of the “Russian world,” but at the same time, they are only possible under “Russian dominance”²⁶. And the majority of the listed values (see the table below) are extremely conservative (their exact content not being disclosed or elaborated upon). They are presented as a categorised, flimsily substantiated list of concepts immanently opposed to Western values, notably conservative, authoritarian, and even somewhat archaic. Thus, “functional values” conceal imperialism, “political values” conceal an authoritarian leaning, “spiritual values” imply Orthodox irrationalism, and “worldview values” imply passivity and patience (humility).

Core values of the “Russian world” according to Alexey Gromyko

Functional values	Multinationality and polyethnicity with Russian dominance Multilingualism with Russian dominance Multi-religiousness with the dominance of Eastern Orthodoxy Multiculturalism
Political values	The sacredness of power Paternalism Sovereignty
Spiritual values	Spirituality as the dominance of the spiritual over the material Messianism (Moscow is the Third Rome) Idealism Humility Martyrdom
Worldview values	Contemplation Justice Providentialism (up to fatalism) Sacrifice
Behavioural values	Benevolence Sociability Openness Lenience/tolerance Generosity Hospitality

His work for the Foundation focuses primarily on academic and analytical writing.

26 Gromyko A. Russian World: Concept, Principles, Values, Structure. Meanings and Values of the Russian World. Collection of Articles and Materials of Round Tables Organised by the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation (2010). <http://russkiymir.ru/events/docs/Смыслы%20и%20ценности%20Русского%20Мира%202010.pdf>.

The findings of Michał Kozdra's research²⁷ on the content of the Foundation's website and materials from other official websites are generally consistent with Gromyko's scheme. Kozdra identified several basic dimensions of the concept of the "Russian world": **geopolitical** (with imperial ambitions for supranational and transcontinental presence), **national Russian**, including the peoples of the former Soviet Union, religiously or at least value-wise **Orthodox**, **culturally Russian-speaking** and rooted in Russian culture and literature, and also demanding **loyalty and a sense of unity with Russia** from its participants. This concept seems to be an ambitious Russocentric conservative project, with the Russian language and culture of dominance at its core.

Given the profound duality and ambiguity of the concept, Vyacheslav Nikonov, the unalterable leader of the Foundation, turns to the most unreliable criterion of "Russian world" membership, *self-identification*, in his most often cited definition:

Russian world is multiethnic, multireligious, and polysemantic. This is a global phenomenon that any single concept cannot unambiguously describe. For ourselves, we consider the Russian world to be Russia plus the Russians abroad ('zarubiezhie'). And mentally [it is] everyone conscious of their involvement in the Russian world. In this sense, belonging is defined through self-identification²⁸.

It is also not surprising that the ideologues tend to conceptualise the "Russian world" as a series of concentric circles based on the imagined proximity of countries or communities to the "core values" of language, religion, or others. Thus, according to the former head of Rossotrudnichestvo (Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation), Konstantin Kosachev:

Our dream is to initiate a union, a consolidated "Russian world" centred on the Russians, then, moving outward from the centre, it will include those who studied in Russia, married Russians, started families, have business interests in Russia, or are otherwise professionally or personally connected (to Russia). Then there is another group of individuals simply interested in Russia, its literature, ballet, and space²⁹.

27 Kozdra M. (2018). The Boundaries of Russian Identity Analysis of the Concept of Russkiy Mir in Contemporary Russian Online Media. *Lingua Cultura*. Vol.12, №1.

28 Nikonov V. Not a Memory of the Past, but a Dream of the Future. Meanings and Values of the Russian World. Collection of Articles and Materials of Round Tables Organised by the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation (2010). <http://russkiymir.ru/events/docs/Смыслы%20и%20ценности%20Русского%20мира%202010.pdf>.

29 Quote from Popovic M., Jenne E. K., and Medzihorsky J. (2020). Charm Offensive or Offensive Charm? An Analysis of Russian and Chinese Cultural Institutes Abroad, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 72:9, 1445-1467, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2020.1785397>.

Similar concentric circles can be seen in the geographical definition of the Russian world, which can be found in the previously mentioned article by Alexey Gromyko.

- **Core: Russia** and the post-Soviet Slavic countries, namely **Ukraine and Belarus**.
- **Inner sphere:** other post-Soviet countries and regions.
- **Outer sphere:**
 - Countries with substantial Russian-speaking minorities** (Germany, Israel, USA, UK).
 - Countries with an Orthodox Christian majority** (Serbia, Cyprus, Romania, Montenegro, Bulgaria).
 - Countries without Russian-speaking minorities and the Orthodox Church but with a historical interest in Russian culture and trade** with Russia (e.g., Italy or Finland).

The unconditional appropriation of Ukraine and Belarus by the “Russian world”, which echoes the approach of Patriarch Kirill cited previously and the application of the religious criterion, is notable. Moreover, such spatial structuring reveals Russia’s strategic interests: the revival of the “fraternal peoples” concept and the restoration of control over the countries of the former Soviet Union, followed by the countries with Russian-speaking minorities that are religiously or economically close to Russia.

The passage of the concept of the “Russian world” from political technologists to Kremlin cabinets is highly symbolic. If Shchedrovitsky complained in 2000 that the concept of the “Russian world” (as opposed to the mere statement about a large number of Russians abroad) did not resonate with customers in the late 1990s³⁰, it was picked up in Kremlin-connected circles in the early 2000s³¹. The phrase “Russian world” first appeared in Putin’s speeches in 2001, became fully politicised after the Orange Revolution, and was finally institutionalised in 2007 with the establishment of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation.

Mikhail Suslov splits the evolution of the concept of the “Russian world” in Russian intellectual and political discourse into three stages, beginning with an idealistic image of Russian diasporas as a “Russian archipelago” that had to enrich Russia in the 1990s and progressing to the concept’s adaptation to the concept of “sovereign democracy” and restoration of the spheres of influence in Putin’s policies in the 2000s. During this second period, the concept of the

30 Russian World: Restoring the Context. (2001). *Russian Archipelago*. https://archipelag.ru/ru_mir/history/history01/shedrovitsky-russmir/.

31 From “Kalinka” to Donbas. Elena Sorokina – on the Concept of the “Russian World”. (2021). Radio Svoboda (Liberty) <https://www.svoboda.org/a/ot-kalinka-do-donbassa-elena-sorokina-o-kontseptsii-russkogo-mira/31428922.html>.

“Russian world” began to serve the needs of Russia’s “soft power,” appearing in basic foreign policy documents such as the concept of Russian foreign policy (2008 onwards) and its appendix that defined the priorities of cultural and humanitarian cooperation (2010), as perhaps the most important tool of Russian cultural diplomacy. Finally, in the third stage, the “Russian world” has begun to form the foundation of an irredentist isolationist project that fits the logic of presenting Russia as a non-Western power model. Efforts to consolidate the ostensible “core” of the “Russian world” through gradual subordination of Belarus and armed aggression against Ukraine also occurred during this period. Finally, in his 2014 “Crimean speech,” Putin exacerbated the politicization of the “Russian world” notion by expressing hope that “German citizens will also support the aspirations of the “Russian world”, historical Russia, to restore unity”³².

³² Address of the President of the Russian Federation on the date of March 18th, 2014. Website of the President of Russia . <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

“RUSSKIY MIR” AS A VOCATION: THE FOUNDATION’S ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

“Russkiy Mir” was established as a non-governmental organisation, namely a foundation, by a decree issued by Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2007¹. Its existence has recently been extended until 2025. Its founders are the Russian Federation’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Russian Federation’s Ministry of Education, and the relevant ministers serve on the Foundation’s Board of Trustees.

The Foundation’s management structure is comprised of three bodies (the Board of Trustees, the Supervisory Board, and the Management Board):

The Board of Trustees is the main supervisory body for the Foundation’s activities and the deployment of its funds, and it is **chaired by the deputy head of the Presidential Administration, Dmitry Kozak**. Sergey Lavrov (Minister of Foreign Affairs), Sergey Kravtsov (Minister of Education), Olga Lyubimova (Minister of Culture), and Valery Falkov (Minister of Higher Education and Science) serve on the Board.

The Supervisory Board, chaired by an Adviser to Russian President Vladimir Tolstoy, is the highest collegiate body that determines the main directions of the Foundation’s work. The Supervisory Board includes representatives of the Presidential Administration, rectors of Russia’s leading universities (Moscow State University, Moscow State Institute of International Relations, Literature Institute, St. Petersburg State University, etc.), representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Director of Hermitage, as well as Metropolitan Hilarion (Head of the External Relations department of the Moscow Patriarchate), Margarita Simonyan (Editor-in-Chief of the international propaganda channel Russia Today), and Yevgeny Primakov (Head of Rossotrudnichestvo).

The Management Board is a collegiate executive body that oversees the Foundation’s operations directly. **The Chairman of the Board is Vyacheslav Nikonov, the permanent (de-facto, not by design) Head of the Foundation** (see Box below), who is now the First Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs. In addition, the Management Board includes representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, key academic institutions, and Rossotrudnichestvo. Vladimir Kochin is the Foundation’s Executive Director.

¹ Information portal of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation, <https://russkiymir.ru/fund/>.

The manner in which members of the Foundation's governing bodies are appointed, and their prominent figures' personalities highlight the Foundation's **apparent involvement in the Russian regime's executive hierarchy of governance and the leading institutions tasked with influencing overseas audiences**. Furthermore, the Foundation has become even more closely aligned with the presidential governance hierarchy in recent years. **The management and each member of the Foundation's three governing bodies are appointed personally by the President of the Russian Federation**, according to the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 215 of April 12th, 2021². For example, from 2007 to 2019, the Foundation's Board of Trustees was chaired by Lyudmila Verbitskaya, rector of St. Petersburg University and Chairman of the Russian Union and the International Association of Experts in Russian Language and Literature. Following her death, one of Putin's closest associates assumed her position.

Vyacheslav Nikonov's personality cult

Vyacheslav Nikonov presents his book about his grandfather Vyacheslav Molotov.

[Source](#)



Nikonov is a textbook example of a hereditary party boss ('nomenklaturshchik' in Russian, i.e., a member of the Soviet party elites): his grandfather was Vyacheslav Molotov, a longtime People's Commissar (and later Minister) for Foreign Affairs of the USSR. Molotov and his German counterpart signed the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939, which divided the spheres of influence in Eastern Europe between the USSR and Nazi Germany. Nikonov joined the Communist Party during the Soviet era, but after the Soviet Union's demise, he continued his political career within other parties, eventually ending up in the parliamentary faction of the "United Russia" that has ruled Russia for decades.

Nikonov is a significant actor in Russia's political system: he has been elected repeatedly to the State Duma, where he led the Education Committee for eight years, and he has served as Deputy Chairman of the Duma's Foreign Affairs Committee since October 2021. Nikonov's combination of positions in the

² Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of April 12th, 2021 No. 215 "On Certain Issues of the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation". <https://russkiymir.ru/fund/docs/ukaz0001202104120042.pdf>.

government and non-governmental organisations is typical of Russian elites: he is a member of the Russian parliament's lower house, Chairman of the Management Board of the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation, member of the Foreign and Defense Policy Council's praesidium, President of the "Politika" ("Polity") Foundation,³ and Dean of the Department of Public Administration at the Lomonosov Moscow State University. Having obtained a degree in history, like his parents, Nikonov authored many works full of propagandist and pseudo-scientific statements, in which he stands as a sentimental advocate of his grandfather's policies during Stalin's times, promotes the concept of the "decline" of the West and the need for the establishment of a new multipolar world, as well as ideas of Russia's unique civilizational role. Nikonov appears to use the Foundation not only to carry out the Russian state's policy of expanding the "Russian world" but also to carry out personal propaganda projects, such as the website "Twenty-Eight Moments of the Spring of 1945"⁴, which narrates the author's perspective on the events of April 1945 that led to the Allies' victory over Nazi Germany. Much emphasis is placed on the USSR's unique role in these events, as well as Joseph Stalin and, of course, Vyacheslav Molotov.

Nikonov served as the Foundation's executive director for the first four years before being "promoted" to Chairman of the Management Board in 2011. Nikonov's statements were published every few days by the Foundation's information portal both before and after the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war on February 24th, 2022. These statements mostly repeat the Russian regime's anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western rhetoric with great precision and regularity. Its leitmotif is the idea of an unprecedented confrontation between Russia and the entire Western world, combined with the pressing need to expand the "Russian world" in any way possible. Nikonov's speech to the State Duma plenary session a month after the start of the full-scale war is an example:

"Now is the time to call everything by its name. The clash of two worlds over the future of the planet continues. For Russia, it is a matter of survival, its life-and-death struggle. We have accepted the challenge of contenders for world domination – the United States and its allies, who consider themselves to belong to a higher race and wish to impose their will on all humanity. Today there is a battle between the forces of freedom and the forces of dictatorship ... The clash between the world of Light and the world of Darkness continues. And the world of Light turned out to be larger than expected. One billion people on the planet belong to the West. Seven billion are with us: Asia, Africa, and much of Latin America. The clash of the world of truth, in which the fight is against fascism, against the world of lies, in which fascism is either not noticed or openly supported, continues. And there is no room for compromise here. There is a clash between the culturally open world, in which Goethe and Beethoven are not banned, and the world of bans on Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Tchaikovsky, and Gergiev. They did not understand us. We

3 Foundation President. "Polity" Foundation Website. <http://www.polity.ru/president.html>

4 "Twenty-Eight Moments of the Spring of 1945". Retrieved via Wayback Machine (as of 06.05.2020). <https://web.archive.org/web/20200506044437/https://28.russkiymir.ru/>.

*cannot be bought! We will win. Because our cause is righteous, and victory will be ours*⁵.

Nikonov's hegemony over the Foundation's activities is evident not only in the news feed, which is replete with his statements and comments. Nikonov's creativity has also overrun the "Books" section of the Foundation's information portal, which featured sixteen of his works as of May 2022⁶.

The Foundation's headquarters are in Moscow, and there are two branches, one in St. Petersburg and one in the Far East (Vladivostok), that were established to support academic and pedagogical research, as well as other activities aimed at spreading the Russian language throughout the country. There is no information on the official number of employees or the internal structure of the Foundation, but previous research suggests that the staff may number around 80 people⁷.

The main partners of the Foundation listed on its website as of 2022 are:

- **Rossotrudnichestvo** (Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation), with which the Foundation has close ties not only through mutual participation of the heads in each other's governing bodies but also through the wide range of activities that both institutions undertake jointly. The Foundation explains the division of labour between the two institutions: Rossotrudnichestvo promotes the state's political messages, whereas "Russkiy Mir" focuses solely on cultural and humanitarian cooperation⁸.
- **Associations of Russianists** reflecting the primarily linguistic focus of the Foundation's activities (International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature (MAPRYAL), Russian Society of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature (ROPRYAL), American Council of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature (ACTR))

5 Nikonov V. There Is a Clash of Two Worlds for the Future of the Planet. Speech at the plenary session of the State Duma. (April 05th, 2022). https://russkiymir.ru/news/299605/?sphrase_id=1230901.

6 Books. Information portal of the "Russkiy Mir" foundation. <https://russkiymir.ru/the-modern-world-and-its-origins/index.php>.

7 Data as of 2014, see Lutsevych, O. (2016). Agents of the Russian World. Proxy Groups in the Contested Neighbourhood. Research Paper, Russia and Eurasia Programme. P.14. In 2022, job boards, where the foundation's vacancies occasionally appear, contain information on 20 to 50 employees, and as of March 2022, LinkedIn contains profiles for 23 employees.

8 "If We Are Given Big Budgets, the Russian Flag Will Be Everywhere." (July 22nd, 2015). *Izvestiya* ("The News"). <https://iz.ru/news/589034>.

- **Non-governmental and pseudo-non-governmental organisations and foundations**, for many of which, according to Marlène Laruelle's study⁹, the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation serves as an umbrella platform. All of these organisations may apply for Russian government funding via grants, but they can also receive funds from other sources; they reproduce and disseminate Russian official narratives, and there are no single independent NGOs among them. (Institute of CIS Countries, Russian Foundation of Culture, Foundation named after Likhachov, Foundation of Historical Perspectives, Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation, The Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, International Foundation for Slavic Literature and Culture, Public Diplomacy Corps. Foundation (Kingdom of the Netherlands), Russian-Iranian Public Relations Council, "Eurasia Heritage" Foundation, International Research Agency "Eurasian Monitor")
- **Institutions established to coordinate Russian "compatriots" abroad, such as information portals**, comprise the largest pool of partners, reflecting the Foundation's priority target audience. (International Council of Russian Compatriots, Interstate Union of Hero Cities, Association for Relations with Compatriots "Rodina" ("Motherland"), International Association of Youth Organisations of Russian Compatriots, International Coordination Council of Educational Institutions Alumni (INCORVUZ-XXI), Moscow House of Compatriots, EU Russian-Speakers' Alliance, ruskie.org, Information portal "Russkiy vek" ("Russian Era"), Official Thematic Resource of the Committee on Foreign Relations of St. Petersburg, Portal of the Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots of Germany "Russkoe pole" ("Russian Field"), Dialogue with Russian-speaking Scientists Working Abroad, TV project "Russkoe vremya novostey" ("Russian News Time"))
- **Educational and research institutions**, given that from a legal point of view, the Foundation's main activity is "scholarly research and developments in the field of social sciences and humanities." (Lomonosov Moscow State University, St. Petersburg State University, Sochi State University, Herzen Russian State Pedagogical University, Pushkin State Russian Language Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences, Vinogradov Russian Language Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Religion and Policy, Pushkin House (Russian Literature Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences), Centre for Ukrainian and Belarusian Studies of Lomonosov Moscow State University, Library-Foundation "Russian Abroad", Maxim Moshkov Library, All-Russian Children's Centre "Okean" ("Ocean"))

⁹ Laruelle M. (2015). The "Russian World": Russia's Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination. Center on Global Interests. P. 14.

- **Large cultural institutions** (Russian Publishers Association, State Russian Museum, Boris Yeltsin Presidential Library, State Literary-Memorial and Nature Museum-Reserve of A.S.Pushkin "Boldino", State Film Fund of the Russian Federation)
- **Mass media and publishing houses** (TASS (Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union), VGTRK (All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company), "Zvezda" ("Star"), TV channel "Kultura" ("Culture"), TV "Bolshaya Aziya" ("Greater Asia"), GTRK (State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company) "Kaliningrad", "Istina i zhizn" ("Truth and Life"), magazine "Russkiy reportyor" ("Russian Reporter"), "Moskva" ("Moscow"), "Neva", "Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie" ("New Literary Review"), "Otechestvennye zapiski" ("Patriotic Notes"), "Radio Rossii" ("Radio of Russia"), "Russkiy yazyk za rubezhom" ("Russian Language Abroad"), "Russkiy zhurnal" ("Russian Journal"), "Russkiy ochevidets" ("L'observateur russe"), TOV (Limited Liability Company) Publishing House "Forum", "Yunost" ("Youth"), Russia Beyond the Headlines, Historie&Kultur Forum e.V.)
- **Organisations or resources personally associated with Vyacheslav Nikonov** (Vyacheslav Nikonov's personal website, BRICS National Research Committee, Foundation "Polity" ("Politics"), foundation "Yedinstvo radi Rossii" ("Unity for Russia"))
- as well as the Charitable Foundation for the Preservation of the Art of Russian Romantic Song "Romansiada" and the All-Russian Non-Governmental Organisation "National Delphic Council of Russia".

Thus, one can observe a pervasive network of related pro-government organisations, state educational and cultural institutions, and international and regional media, which carry out numerous projects in the near and far abroad, first and foremost focusing on the Russian diaspora and Russian "compatriots" in the broadest sense, with the support or cooperation of the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation.

"Russkiy Mir"'s over-reliance on government funding¹⁰

State funding of Russian foundations is not transparent. At the same time, once the Russian government effectively barred foreign donor funding for NGOs in 2012 via the "foreign agents" law, government control over the

¹⁰ Since 2013, the Foundation's financial information on certain provisions is available through public sources, in particular on the Russian-language website Checko.ru, which is dedicated to checking counteragents. "RUSSKIY MIR" FOUNDATION. Checko. Checking counteragents. <https://checko.ru/company/fond-russky-mir-1077799019253>.

NGO sector became paramount, and state support for these NGOs expanded rapidly. In 2015 alone, governmental assistance for NGOs almost doubled to 4.7 billion roubles (\$103 million)¹¹. According to Orysia Lutsevych's calculations based on publicly available information, in 2016, the Russian government spent at least \$130 million on projects aimed at influencing foreign public opinion, the vast majority of which targeted the post-Soviet and Balkan countries (not to mention funds of state-owned enterprises, private companies loyal to the Kremlin, or presidential grants)¹².

As with many related Russian organisations, "Russkiy Mir" does not publish detailed financial reports. In accordance with its governing statutes, the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation is funded by the budget of the Russian Federation, private contributions, and is permitted to participate in commercial activities. Almost every year, more than 95 per cent of the Foundation's revenue is derived from the federal budget, as evidenced by its publicly available financial data.

The annual volume of private donations is minimal, fluctuating within a few per cent of the entire budget. Only in 2016 and 2018 did the proportion of external funding grow slightly, but this did not alter the general trend. The Foundation's officials have publicly bemoaned the Foundation's desperate need for private donations, which they claim to account for "just 2 to 3 per cent of the total." They regret that "even in projects directly related to their business interests, our businesspeople are unwilling to invest"¹³.

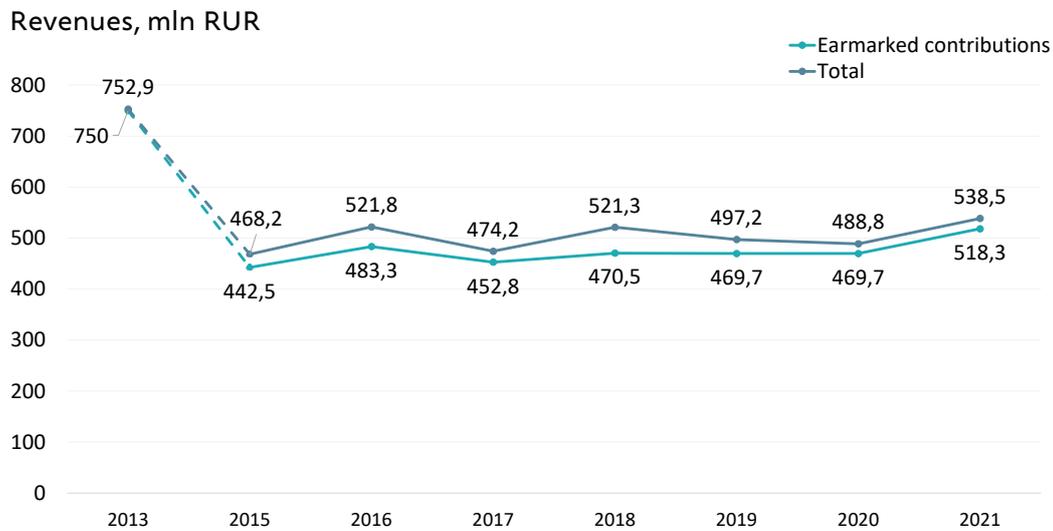
The Foundation does not rely on its business activities, unlike other cultural diplomacy organisations worldwide. The "Russkiy Mir" is more dependent on state support than China's Confucius Institutes. In Russian Centres (of the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation) abroad, for instance, there are no paid services (such as language classes), and almost all initiatives are funded almost exclusively by government allocations and subsidies. In contrast, the current activities of Confucius Institutes are jointly funded by Chinese and foreign parties¹⁴.

11 Lutsevych, O. (2016). Agents of the Russian World. Proxy Groups in the Contested Neighbourhood. Research Paper, Russia and Eurasia Programme. P. 11.

12 Ibid.

13 "If We Are Given Big Budgets, the Russian Flag Will Be Everywhere." (July 22nd, 2015). Izvestiya ("The News"). <https://iz.ru/news/589034>.

14 Zhao Xin. (2020). Confucius Institute and the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation in the Context of Globalization: A Comparative Analysis. *Obshchestvo: filosofiya, istoriya, kultura* (Society: Philosophy, History, Culture). No. 9. <https://doi.org/10.24158/fik.2020.9.25>. P. 4.

Figure 1. Amounts of funding of the 'Russkiy Mir' Foundation: Revenues, 2013–2021.

* There is no information for 2014

On the graph, the line labelled "total" represents all of the Foundation's annual revenues. Included are "target contributions," or budget revenues, individual contributions, and income from the Foundation's commercial activities.

Source: revenue information on the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation on the <https://checko.ru/>.

In 2015, due to fiscal sequestration, the Foundation received over 1.7 times less state funding than in 2013. In the same year, the media stated that this budgeted sum was insufficient for full-scale operations and that administrative expenses would decrease. In 2015, it was reported that the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation insisted on maintaining funding for the Foundation in the amount of 750 million roubles until 2020, but the Ministry of Finance opposed and blocked the decision¹⁵. In terms of the Foundation's performance, however, neither the overall number of Russian Centres abroad nor the volume of the Foundation's projects reduced much. Only the cancellation of all public projects in Ukraine, which had traditionally been the Foundation's top priority, became a significant change. In addition, the Foundation's non-public activities may have been harmed by the financial reductions. However, "Russkiy Mir" began to rely on state support through other programs, such as Ministry of Education funds for educational projects¹⁶.

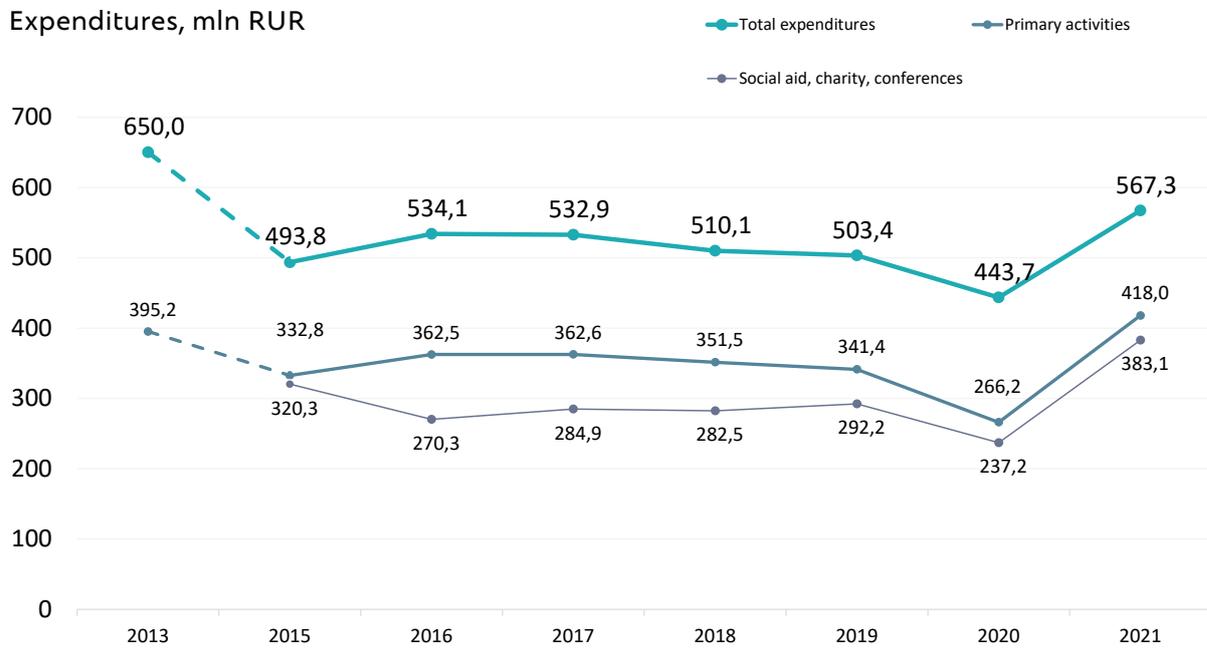
As for the Foundation's expenses, unlike the state agency Rossotrudnichestvo, "Russkiy Mir" as an allegedly (or at least legally speaking) non-governmental organisation reports only to its founders and the President

¹⁵ Ministry of Education and Science in need for money for the "Russian world" (24.06.2015). Kommersant ("The Businessman"). <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2753934>.

¹⁶ "If We Are Given Big Budgets, the Russian Flag Will Be Everywhere." (July 22nd, 2015). Izvestiya ("The News"). <https://iz.ru/news/589034>.

of the Russian Federation¹⁷, so there is virtually no relevant public information, and only the total amounts of expenses are known.

Figure 2. Amounts of funding of the 'Russkiy Mir' Foundation: Expenditures, 2013–2021.



* There is no information for 2014

Source: expenditures information on the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation on the <https://checko.ru/>

The Foundation's primary activities accounted for roughly 70 per cent of its total expenditure structure. The remainder is administrative expenses. As a result of unused balances from prior periods, total expenditures and revenues may not precisely match. The lion's share of the expenditures on the Foundation's principal activities is comprised of provisions such as "social aid and charity" (obviously the support of Russian Centres and Cabinets of 'Russkiy Mir', as well as grants) and "conference organisation"; these two items account for approximately 50-60 per cent of the Foundation's expenditures. In financial statements from 2016 to 2019, there was also a line item for "Other" expenses. In conclusion, the Foundation's complete reliance on the presidential hierarchy of governance and federal budget funding reaffirms that it is a tool of centralised state policy designed to spread Russian influence abroad under the guise of cultural diplomacy.

17 Dmitrieva O. "Dear/"Expensive" Compatriots. (May 29th, 2015). Novoe Vremya (New Times). <https://newtimes.ru/articles/detail/102183/>.

Information Fronts of “Russkiy Mir”

The media is an integral part of the Foundation’s activities. In addition to its extensive cooperation with traditional media and publishing companies (see the section on partners above), the Foundation has established its own media and social networks. Its primary media outlets include the large online portal “Russkiy Mir,” the magazine “Russkiy mir.ru,” the TV and radio firm “Russkiy Mir,” as well as Russian and international social media profiles.

A. Information Portal “Russkiy Mir”¹⁸

The Foundation has a relatively active and lively official portal with as many as seven language versions: Russian, English, Chinese, German, Spanish, French, and Italian. However, the website’s full content is available only in Russian, which appears to hint that the use of the portal is aimed primarily at Russians and those able to speak Russian fluently.

Therefore, only Russian-speaking users can read all information about:

- Foundation activities, its governing bodies, and major partners
- Publications presenting ideological foundations of the organisation’s activities
- Listing of Russian Centres and Cabinets of “Russkiy Mir” with contact information and locations
- Friendly organisations form the Catalogue of the “Russkiy Mir” (not available online as of May 2022)
- Grants, conditions of their allocation, the status of grant applications
- Events, forums, and Assemblies organised by the Foundation
- News of “Russkiy Mir” (the Foundation’s own news and reprints of information of Russian state structures and news agencies)
- Foundation’s official annual reports
- Announcements of future events (Foundation-sponsored or those of interest to it)
- Access to the magazine “Russkiy Mir.ru” and TV and radio company “Russkiy Mir”.

The English version includes information about the Foundation and its key activities, as well as its current management structure and news. The websites in other languages are hardly ever updated, contain outdated information,

¹⁸ Information portal of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation. <https://russkiymir.ru/>.

and provide only very general information about the Foundation's ideology, mission, tasks, and activities. According to the report for 2020, a total of 7,500 publications were published online, but only 2,200, or approximately 30%, were translated.

The homepage of the Russian version of the portal includes news, publications, event announcements, and links to video/audio content. All news messages are geographically and thematically catalogued (e. g., relating to diaspora, culture, history, society, politics). The following categories are used to classify news articles¹⁹:

"In the Russian world": Russian and international news about the "Russian world" as defined by the Foundation. This section is the most frequently updated on the portal, with 15–20 new posts published daily. The content is derived primarily from state news agencies, official Ministry of Foreign Affairs announcements, and partner organisations. In the spring of 2022, the news primarily concerned:

- A) war with Ukraine and prospects for the development of the "Russian world" in the occupied territories, especially blatant propaganda materials and reports on efforts to rapidly russify the occupied territories:

May 31st, 2022 — Philologists from the liberated territories of Donbas of Ukraine will be retrained in Luhansk

May 31st, 2022 — Orphans from Donbas and Ukraine can become Russians under a simplified procedure

May 30th, 2022 — In the Zaporizhzhia region, for the first time in eight years, the memory of Russians ("russkie") who perished in the battle of Kalka in 1223 was honoured

May 30th, 2022 — More than 200 residents of Donbas want to get a job in Primorye under the resettlement programme for compatriots

May 30th, 2022 — Special military operation in Ukraine: the essential for May 30th

May 30th, 2022 — Banners about the Russian history of the city appeared on the streets of Kherson

- B) "oppression" of Russians and Russian-speakers in the world, allegedly anti-Russian steps of other states, "Russophobia:"

May 30th, 2022 — A German journalist working in Russia is shocked by the level of Russophobia in Germany

¹⁹ News. Information portal of the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation. https://ruskiymir.ru/news_a/.

May 28th, 2022 – In Kyiv-controlled schools, Russian-speaking children were taught Pushkin’s oeuvre in Ukrainian

May 28th, 2022 – The Russian Foreign Ministry has accused the IOC of violating the rights of Russian athletes

May 27th, 2022 – Latvia is struggling with Russian names on the map

May 27th, 2022 – Russian Foreign Ministry: The concept of the German centre on World War II distorts the historical truth

May 31st, 2022 – In Belarus, the intention to demolish the monument of friendship between the Slavic peoples was called barbaric

- C) events related to the popularisation of the Russian language and the success of Russian cultural diplomacy in the world:

May 31st, 2022 – Russia has terminated a memorandum of cooperation with the United States in the field of culture

May 30th, 2022 – Russia and Republika Srpska are increasing educational cooperation

May 31st, 2022 – The programme for Russian language teachers started in Istanbul

May 30th, 2022 – The competition for young Russian-speaking elocutionists was held in Strasbourg

May 30th, 2022 – In Dushanbe, the Day of Slavic Literature and Culture was marked by a competition

May 30th, 2022 – In Guangzhou, the results of the competition of short videos dedicated to the Day of the Russian language were summed up

May 30th, 2022 – The “Friendship Marathon” was held in Havana in honour of the anniversary of the Victory

“In the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation: news related to the Foundation’s activities, updated irregularly between 1 and 5 times per month.

“News of Russian Centres”: information about the current activities of Russian Centres and Cabinets of ‘Russkiy Mir’; there are usually 15 news items per week.

Grant projects: about ten messages per month are posted in this section, containing information on activities supported by grants from “Russkiy Mir”.

In terms of audience reach, the **Foundation projected between 1.5 and 1.6 million unique visitors from approximately 190 countries** in 2018-2020²⁰. However, the Foundation does not provide information on the quality of the traffic, such as the average length of user visits, the number of pages viewed, etc. According to SimilarWeb, there were 165.1 thousand unique visitors to the 'Russkiy Mir' website in February 2022, which is roughly in line with the Foundation's estimates. These visitors spent an average of only one minute on the website, and 76% of users left after viewing only one page²¹. This means that three-quarters of the website's visitors are sporadic, non-loyal visitors who only access the page through external links²². In March 2022, access for users from western countries and Ukraine became significantly more difficult. In April 2022, website traffic decreased threefold compared to February, and the average visit lasted only 33 seconds.



Quantitative and qualitative traffic statistics for the Foundation's website.
Data from SimilarWeb website, <https://www.similarweb.com>

²⁰ Annual Reports. Information portal of the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation. <https://russkiymir.ru/fund/reports.php>.

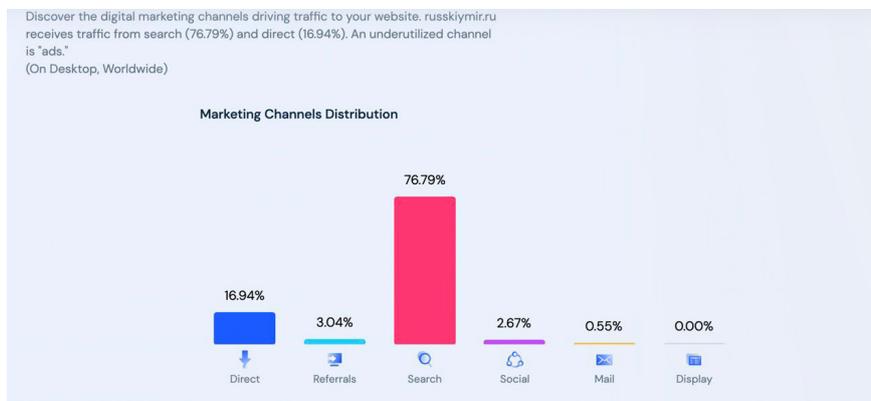
²¹ Russkiymir.ru. Similarweb. <https://www.similarweb.com/website/russkiymir.ru/#traffic>.

²² Russkiymir.ru. Similarweb. <https://www.similarweb.com/website/russkiymir.ru/#traffic>.



List of countries whose residents ensured the highest traffic volumes on the Foundation’s webpage in February and April 2022, respectively. Data from the SimilarWeb website, <https://www.similarweb.com>

According to data, as of February 2022, users from Russia, Ukraine, and partly from the U.S. were prevailing among the website’s audience. After the beginning of the war and the imposition of restrictions on access to the website, visitors are primarily from Russia. The main traffic source before the war (as of February 2022) was search queries (almost 78%), and only 17% were direct visits to the webpage. It is also worth noticing that social networks and email newsletters have almost no influence on traffic. Overall, the information portal is full of information, but it is still unclear whether it is a systematic source of information about the “Russkiy Mir”. Visitors to its website seem to be, in most cases, occasional and to represent rather limited geography. The traffic and its qualities appear non-comparable to the ones of similar western organisations.



Distribution of website visitors by source. Data from SimilarWeb webpage, <https://www.similarweb.com>

B. Magazine “Russkiy Mir.ru” (<https://rusmir.media>)

Russkiy Mir.ru is a monthly illustrated cultural and educational publication of up to 100 pages, with most articles in the infotainment genre. It contains articles on historical monuments, the study of the Russian language, current historical events, travel diaries, etc. The primary thematic blocks are “Russian World” (everything about Russian speakers), “Education” (materials on cultural heritage, museums, travel, etc.), and “Our times” (interviews, reports). Stylistics is intended for a broad Russian audience. In 2022, it was reported that the circulation was 3,000 copies per month, whereas, in the Foundation’s early years, the circulation reached 10,000-12,000 copies. The magazine’s website offers a pdf download option. There is little information about distribution channels or links to the publication’s materials in other media.

The magazine’s editor-in-chief is Georgiy Bovt, a Russian journalist, historian, political expert, and politician. He previously worked for “Izvestia” (“The News”), “Kommersant” (“The Businessman”), “Segodnya” (“Today”), “Profil” (“Profile”), and as a host of radio programmes. Although he almost does not speak publicly on behalf of the Foundation, in 2016, he was awarded the Russian government prize in the field of mass media as “the head of information and publishing – editor-in-chief of the ‘Russkiy Mir.ru’ magazine of the ‘Russkiy Mir’ Foundation – for promoting foreign policy on the pages of the ‘Rossiya v globalnoy politike’ magazine” (together with pro-Kremlin expert Sergey Karaganov)²³. It also appears that Nikonov’s “Politika” Foundation is the magazine’s partner.

C. TRK (TV and radio broadcasting company) “Russkiy Mir” (<https://tv.ruskiymir.ru/>)

TRK “Russkiy Mir” produces video and audio content available via the Internet (on its website and Youtube). It does not, however, have its broadcasting. TRK targets the Foundation’s key Russian-speaking audiences, i.e., Russian “compatriots”, emigrants, and anyone interested in the Russian language and culture. Interestingly, TRK asks the audience to provide content and invites them to become correspondents and produce their own videos on topics related to the “Russian world” in different countries. Main products: cultural news, educational and entertainment programmes, children’s programmes, music.

23 Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation dated December 3, 2016 No. 2584-r “On the Awarding of Government Prizes in the Field of Mass Media in 2016”. <https://web.archive.org/web/20161220080359/http://government.ru/media/files/VoQAYfOBN4IXHGFvLjPoP2HnniA1ncAd.pdf>.

Social networks of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation

Telegram	6.5 thousand subscribers (as of May 27th, 2022)	The channel’s content consists partly of its own productions and reposts of materials from other sources, such as RIA Novosti, TASS, the Russian Foreign Ministry, Rossotrudnichestvo, etc. Typically, several dozen subscribers will view each published article.
YouTube	17.3 thousand subscribers (as of May 27th, 2022)	The vast majority of materials are of cultural or educational nature, but some are about current events and phenomena in the world (for example, the “rampant Russophobia” in the West). The number of views of publications on the channel varies greatly, from several hundred to several tens of thousands.
VKontakte	3,713 participants (as of March 30th, 2022)	Most of the page's content comes from the informational portal “Russkiy Mir.” Each publication receives between 50 and 150 views, and posts receive few likes and shares. The content is updated almost daily and is similar to that of the Foundation's other media platforms.
Twitter (inactive)	1.5 thousand subscribers (as of May 27th, 2022)	Although the account is accessible as of May 2022, the most recent tweets were posted on March 4, 2022. The majority of the posts duplicated the Foundation's news from its website.
Facebook	14.7 thousand subscribers (as of May 27th, 2022)	It is regularly updated with shared posts from the Foundation's information portal or its other online resources, which receive only a small number of likes (several dozen) and shares (just a few).
Russian Centres community on Facebook (inactive)	730 subscribers (as of May 27th, 2022)	The page was meant to consolidate information regarding the activities of Russian Centres around the world, but the most recent posts are from the spring of 2020.
St. Petersburg branch of the “Russkiy Mir” foundation on Facebook	375 subscribers (as of May 27th, 2022)	Posts (mostly reposts from other Foundation media) are updated extremely infrequently, a few times per month, with sometimes lengthy gaps of several months. The publications receive a small number of likes and shares.

An analysis of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation’s social media reveals that their importance in disseminating information about the organisation and its activities is relatively low, while audience engagement and overall traffic are also relatively low. Additionally, after Russia’s ban on Facebook, there was no significant migration of subscribers to permitted social media platforms (e.g., VK).

ARCHAIC CONTENT IN THE CLASSICAL FORM: THE ACTIVITIES OF THE “RUSSKIY MIR” FOUNDATION

The “Russkiy Mir” Foundation uses conventional methods of cultural diplomacy in the Western tradition. It organises its offices – Centres and Cabinets – abroad, provides grants to support individual projects, manages its media (magazine, TV channel, and radio), hosts sizable events for the representatives of the “Russian world,” and arranges Russian language studies abroad. The overarching idea of the “Russian world” dictates the content of the aforementioned activities.

The organisation is proud of its extensive network of representative offices, which can be found from South Korea to Nicaragua and from the United Kingdom to Jordan. The Foundation also works to expand the number of individuals learning Russian abroad, particularly in the CIS. These two indicators are crucial for the organisation’s self-evaluation of its operations, according to published documentation of the Foundation.

Network of cultural representation: Centres and Cabinets of the “Russkiy Mir”

Establishing a network of Russian Centres and Cabinets of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation in cities and towns worldwide is the core way of organising the Foundation’s activities overseas. The Foundation has the authority to “create non-profit organisations, both in the Russian Federation and overseas,” as well as “establish branches and open representative offices both in the Russian Federation and abroad¹,” according to the statute of the Foundation, dated March 29th, 2022. However, in 2015, the Foundation’s leadership publicly stated that “Russkiy Mir,” a non-profit organisation, was unable to have branches abroad due to legal restrictions². As a result, at least in the past, local educational institutions helped open the “Russkiy Mir” Centres and Cabinets. However, the funding for the Centres and Offices was and is nearly entirely flowing from the Foundation, that is to say, from the federal budget of Russia, in contrast, for instance, from the Confucius Institute³. The fact that the Russian government

1 Statute of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation (dated March 29th, 2022). Information portal of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation. http://russkiymir.ru/fund/USTAV_2022.pdf.

2 “If We Are Given Big Budgets, the Russian Flag Will Be Everywhere.” (July 22nd, 2015). Izvestiya (“The News”). <https://iz.ru/news/589034>.

3 Zhao Xin. (2020). Confucius Institute and the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation in the Context of Globalization: A Comparative Analysis. *Obshchestvo: filosofiya, istoriya, kultura* (Society: Philosophy, History, Culture). No. 9. <https://doi.org/10.24158/fik.2020.9.25>. P. 4.

fully funds the representative offices' operations may indicate their significance and priority. The Cabinets and Centres' stated mission is to supply local institutions with equipment, textbooks, instructional materials, direct access to Russian media, etc.

Russian Centres of the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation are well institutionalised. They are established in university Russian studies or Russian language study departments or chairs. They frequently plan contests for language competence, organise academic conferences, offer certification for language proficiency, and hold other sizable activities. In other words, the centres offer systematic data and methodological services pertaining to teaching Russian and access to the "Russian world's" cultural and historical heritage. The Centres should ideologically represent "all the diversity of the Russian world, unified by the dedication to Russian history and culture"⁴, according to the Foundation's perspective. Since they frequently have the status of a separate department or chair, the Centres of "Russkiy Mir" are typically well incorporated within the university systems. They frequently have access to all the academic benefits, including academic councils and the opportunity to defend PhD theses.

Cabinets of "Russkiy Mir"⁵ are smaller organisational units that can be quickly established in libraries and civil society organisations. According to the Foundation's reasoning, establishing a Cabinet is the initial step in organising a fully-fledged Centre. Cabinets are stocked with books according to the requirements of a particular nation. Generally, educational and fictional literature, educational equipment, manuals, and network access are provided. Historically, Cabinets outside the Russian Federation were established by non-profit organisations (educational institutions, libraries, etc.) that requested logistical or financial support from the Foundation. Currently, per its statute, the Foundation has the legal authority to establish its own overseas representation offices.

In its public communications, the Foundation emphasises that Cabinets and Centres of "Russkiy Mir" are distinct structures that it supports and assists but does not manage. In a 2015 interview, for instance, Vladimir Kochin stated that the organisation could not "manage" Centres and Cabinets outside the country but could only "persuade" them. According to him, the work was organised as follows:

⁴ The Russian Centre Is... Information portal of the "Russkiy Mir" foundation. <https://russkiymir.ru/rucenter/>.

⁵ What Is an Office? Information portal of the "Russkiy Mir" foundation. <https://russkiymir.ru/rucenter/cabinet.php>.

We are concluding an agreement with a local university, for instance. According to it, our partners provide a platform and Internet access, appoint personnel to ensure daily operations, and, in particular, organise Russian language classes for students and anyone else interested. We provide equipment, literature, and access to Russian media and television channels to the centre.”⁶

In addition, there are examples of centres funded by foreign partners with ties to Russia. It is nearly impossible to trace any formal indications of such funding. According to DutchCulture, the actual sponsor of the Centre of “Russkiy Mir” that opened at the University of Groningen in 2010 was “Gasunie”⁷, a major Dutch partner of “Gazprom” in the “Nord Stream” project⁸.

Friendly organisations of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation. In addition to the Centres and Cabinets serving as branches, the Foundation is responsible for liaising with Russian and foreign public, religious, educational, media, and commercial organisations “engaged in activities aimed at preserving and promoting Russian language and culture in foreign countries, as well as maintaining their ‘The Whole Russian World’ catalogue”⁹. These organisations are also part of the “Russkiy Mir” network, but their relationship with the Foundation is less formal. As of February 2022, the Foundation’s catalogue included information on approximately 3,000 such friendly organisations¹⁰. In May 2022, access to the Foundation’s online catalogue was discontinued and is now only possible through WayBack Machine tools.

The catalogue comprises primarily non-profit organisations, associations, cultural and educational structures, local media, and digital platforms that protect the Russian language and accommodate the social and cultural needs of “compatriots” living outside Russia. Based on Kochin’s interview, it can be assumed that these grassroots structures serve as local contacts for the Foundation and receive its grants, sometimes in secret, even if the host country bans the Centres (as was the case in 2014 with Ukraine, when the Centres remained only on the territory of the occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions¹¹).

6 “If We Are Given Big Budgets, the Russian Flag Will Be Everywhere.” (July 22nd, 2015). Izvestiya (“The News”). <https://iz.ru/news/589034>.

7 Russkiy Mir Foundation. DutchCulture. <https://dutchculture.nl/en/location/russkiy-mir-foundation>.

8 Gazprom and Gasunie Sign Agreement on Cooperation Within Nord Stream and BBL Projects. (November 06th, 2007). Gazprom. Retrieved from Wayback Machine dated March 04th, 2008. <https://web.archive.org/web/20080304135405/http://www.gazprom.com/eng/news/2007/11/25932.shtml>.

9 Catalogue “The Whole Russian World”. Information portal of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation. <http://109.95.210.181/catalogue/>.

10 Catalogue “The Whole Russian World”. Information portal of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation. <http://russkiymir.ru/catalogue/>.

11 “If We Are Given Big Budgets, the Russian Flag Will Be Everywhere.” (July 22nd, 2015). Izvestiya (“The News”). <https://iz.ru/news/589034>.

From the “core” to the “periphery”: the geographical dimension of “Russkiy Mir”

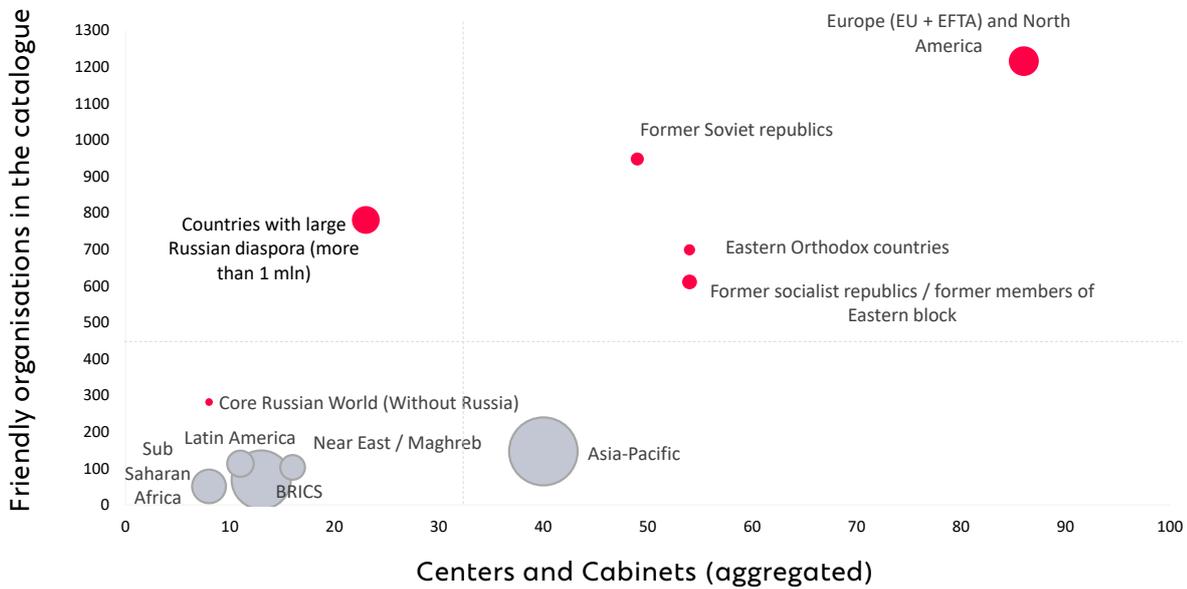
Geographic expansion through establishing and maintaining new Centres and Cabinets is one of the most important indicators of the Foundation’s effectiveness. In 2022, the Foundation had 104 active Centres in 52 countries, 128 Cabinets in 57 countries, and over 5700 friendly organisations in nearly 160 countries (including 2700 such friendly organisations in Russia).

The key geographical clusters of the “Russkiy Mir” network that correspond to the Foundation’s stated priorities are depicted in Diagram 1.

- **The former Soviet republics account** for approximately 20% of the Centres, Cabinets, and 948 friendly organisations listed in the aforementioned “Russkiy Mir” catalogue.
- **Countries with strong Orthodox Churches (Bulgaria, Belarus, Greece, Georgia, Cyprus, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine)** are considered religiously connected to the “Russian world.” They account for the catalogue’s 54 Centres and Cabinets and 699 organisations. Given the relatively small population of these countries, this number is disproportionately high, highlighting the significance of the religious factor.
- **Countries with substantial Russian-speaking minorities (Brazil, Germany, Israel, the United States, the United Kingdom, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan)** account for 23 Centres and Cabinets and 781 friendly organisations in the catalogue.
- **European¹² (EU+EFTA) and North American** countries host up to 86 Centres and Cabinets and 1216 friendly organisations listed in the catalogue. These high numbers can be explained not only by the presence of countries like Italy, France, or Germany, with which Russia seeks to establish economic and political ties in order to secure foreign policy support, but also by the inclusion of a large number of former socialist countries, Orthodox-dominated countries, and countries with substantial Russian-speaking diasporas.

¹² For more details about some of the representations of “Russkiy Mir” Foundation in the countries of Europe, in particular in Great Britain and Italy, see Smaglyi, K. (2018). Hybrid Analytica: Pro-Kremlin Expert Propaganda in Moscow, Europe and the U.S. A Case Study on Think Tanks and Universities. Institute of Modern Russia. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59f8f41ef14aa13b95239af0/t/5c6d8b38b208fc7087fd2b2a/1550682943143/Smaglyi_Hybrid-Analytica_10-2018_upd.pdf. P. 22-27

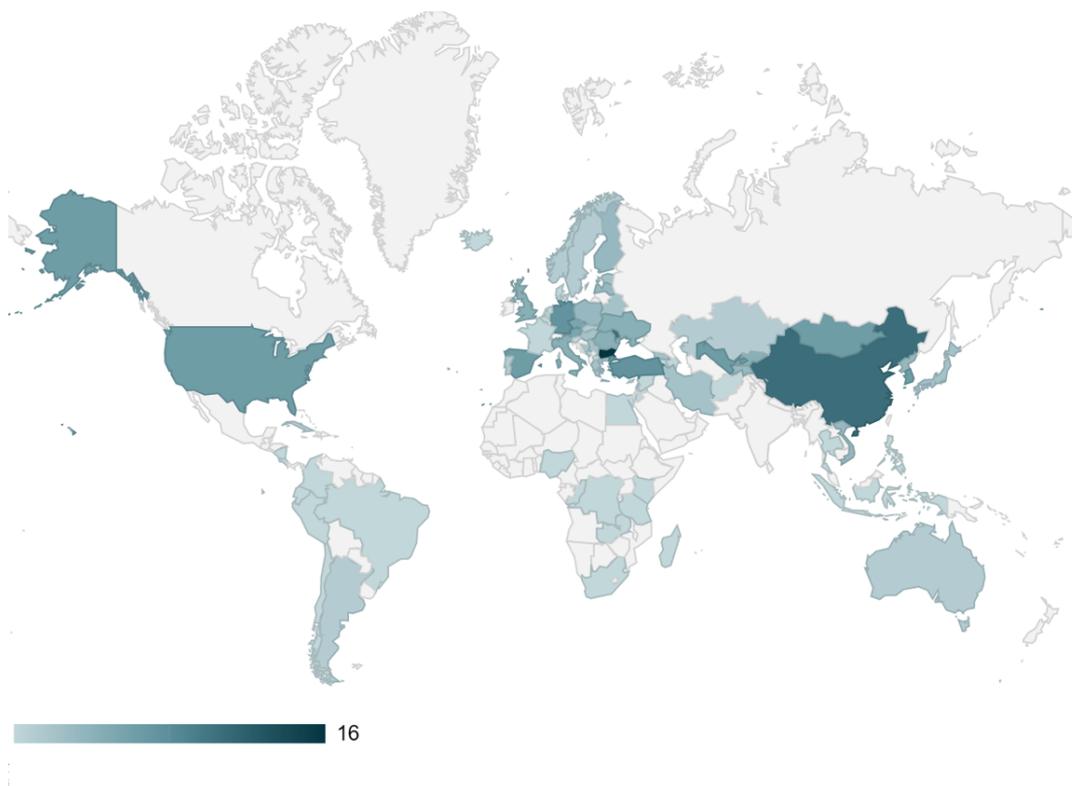
Diagram 1. Key geographical clusters of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation’s network of Centres, Cabinets and friendly organisations



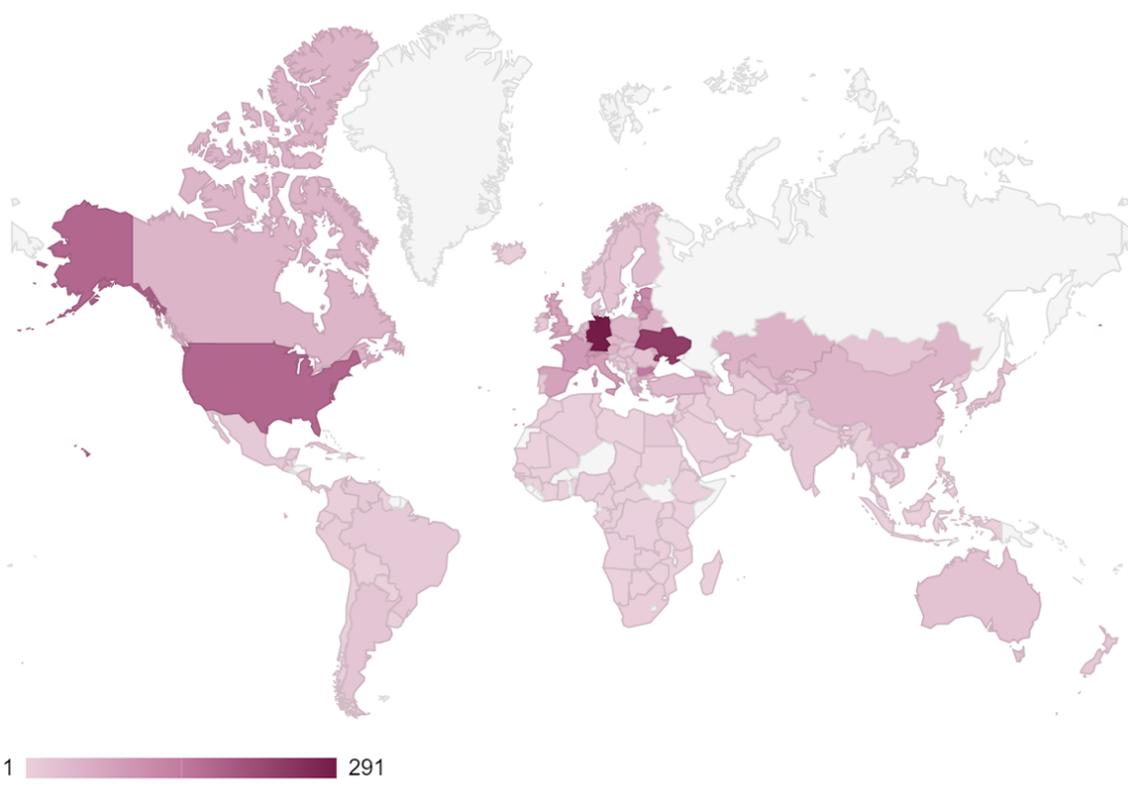
* Size of the circle corresponds to the overall population of each cluster of countries
 Source: the database of the Centres, Cabinets and friendly organisations of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation

In addition to the priority clusters listed above, the geographical representation of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation is distinguished by a number of other essential characteristics. Using data published by the Foundation, Map 1 illustrates the global distribution of Centres and Cabinets in various nations and regions. Additionally, Map 2 includes friendly organisations. Table 3 evaluates the presence of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation per one million inhabitants in every country worldwide.

Map 1. The number of Centres and Cabinets of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation in different countries of the world



Map 2. The number of Centres, Cabinets, and friendly organisations of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation in different countries of the world



	Number of Centres and Cabinets per 1 million population	Number of organisations per 1 million population
Orthodox countries	0,476	6,16
Former Soviet republics	0,317	6,13
Former socialist/Eastern bloc countries	0,274	3,09
«Core» of the «Russian World» (excluding Russia)	0,150	5,30
Europe (EU + EFTA) and Northern America	0,107	1,51
Countries with sizeable Russian diaspora (over 1 million)	0,033	1,12
Middle East and Maghreb	0,030	0,19
Latin America	0,018	0,18
Asia-Pacific	0,010	0,03
Sub-Saharan Africa	0,008	0,05
BRICS	0,004	0,02

Source: the database of the Centres, Cabinets and friendly organisations of the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation

In general, the geographical distribution of the network of Cabinets and Centres of the Russian World and "Russkiy Mir"-friendly organisations corresponds to the Foundation's stated priorities and its interpretation of the "Russian World" concept. "Russkiy Mir" is indeed well-represented in countries that were formerly a part of the Soviet Union or Eastern bloc and where Orthodox Christianity is the dominant religion. Numerous "Russkiy Mir"-supporting organisations can be found in nations with sizable Russian diasporas. Other countries, particularly in the Global South, have a relatively small number of Centres, Cabinets, and

friendly organisations (but at least one such organisation can be found in every country of these regions.)

Nonetheless, there are notable and significant deviations from the general tendency. Bulgaria, for instance, stands out in terms of the number of Centres and Cabinets. Not only is this country dominated by the Orthodox Church, but it was also a member of the socialist camp in the past. Due to linguistic similarity and regional peculiarities in international relations, it also has longstanding bilateral ties with Russia. Therefore, Bulgaria has a solid foundation for expanding the activities of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation. Since Moscow has historically regarded Moldova as part of its sphere of influence, Moldova is another priority of the “Russkiy Mir.” Among Western nations, the United States and Germany (to a lesser extent, Spain, Italy, and France) have the highest priority, and this is due to a combination of factors, including the presence of large Russian-speaking diasporas and political considerations in the case of EU nations.

Russia’s foreign policy priorities are reflected in the Fund’s active presence in China and Turkey, which are located outside the Fund’s typical geographic scope. Against a backdrop of increasingly strained relations with the West, Russia has sought to establish ties with these countries over the past decade. The case of Ukraine is explained by the fact that although the Centres and Cabinets were closed in it after 2014 and therefore continued to function only in the temporarily occupied territories of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, the Catalogue of Friendly Organisations of the Foundation still lists 234 organisations promoting “Russian world” on the territory of Ukraine. Only 111 of these organisations operate on government-controlled territory in Ukraine¹³. In terms of the density of organisations per 1 million inhabitants, the Baltic states stand out significantly (up to 93 organisations per 1 million people), which is primarily attributable to the extremely high proportion of Russians or Russian speakers (for example, up to a third of the entire population in Latvia). Meanwhile, the number of “Russkiy Mir” organisations in other countries is relatively low, indicating that the Fund may not have the resources to ensure its pervasive presence.

The second map illustrates how the “Russian World” is attempting to expand its geographic presence by partnering with organisations in the Global South. Significantly, the Foundation’s presence on the African continent is practically non-institutionalised because, despite having friendly organisations in almost every African country (Map 2), this presence is not confirmed by the Russian world’s network of Cabinets and Centres (Map 1). Presumably lacking the resources to establish Cabinets and Centres in every country, it establishes

¹³ The “Russkiy Mir” Foundation ensures its presence on Russian-occupied territory and in unrecognised pseudo-republics supported by Russia. Thus, as of the spring of 2022, six centres and nine offices of “Russkiy Mir” were located in these territories: the temporarily occupied areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in Ukraine, Transnistria in Moldova, and South Ossetia in Georgia. The centre on V. Putin Street in Tskhinvali, the “capital” of self-proclaimed South Ossetia, is exemplary.

ties with a small number of partner organisations in each. This geographical trend may indicate the “Russian World’s” desire to expand its influence in this region. As a result of the Foundation’s limited activities in Western countries, African participation and attention will become increasingly important. Despite the Foundation’s apparent global reach, the number of organisations in each country, except for those with the highest priority, is negligible in relation to the population.

In conclusion, it is necessary to explain certain discrepancies between the actual geography and density of the Foundation’s network presence and its declared work directions in Aleksey Gromyko’s view (see Chapter 1). The assumption is that the original plans were modified as the organisation evolved (Gromyko’s work was published in 2010), both due to the shifting priorities of the Russian government, which is the Fund’s primary client and considering the opportunities available in different countries.

Notably, the strategy of establishing Cabinets and Centres of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation in foreign countries differs from establishing branches of other Russian cultural diplomacy institutions. First, the Foundation’s activities are geared toward individuals interested in learning Russian. While Rossotrudnichestvo almost always opens representative offices in the capitals of other nations, “Russkiy Mir” has “more room for manoeuvre”: “[we] can work in remote regions of the country...> [our centres are] where there is an interest of local citizens, where there is their initiative and desire to study Russian, to teach it to their children¹⁴”. These organisations complement one another in this way.

In fact, 65 out of 104 active Centres and 83 out of 128 active Cabinets (over sixty per cent) are located outside capital cities. This peculiarity of the Foundation’s policy, which aims to be less visible in major metropolitan areas and academic hubs, is also noted by other researchers¹⁵. If the Foundation’s activities are not perceived favourably by host countries, it is believed that a low-profile presence will result in less resistance or public aggression.

All the money from “Russkiy Mir”: distribution of grants by the Foundation

A significant portion of the Foundation’s resources is devoted to supporting projects of non-governmental organisations, professional associations, academic and educational institutions, and the media through the provision

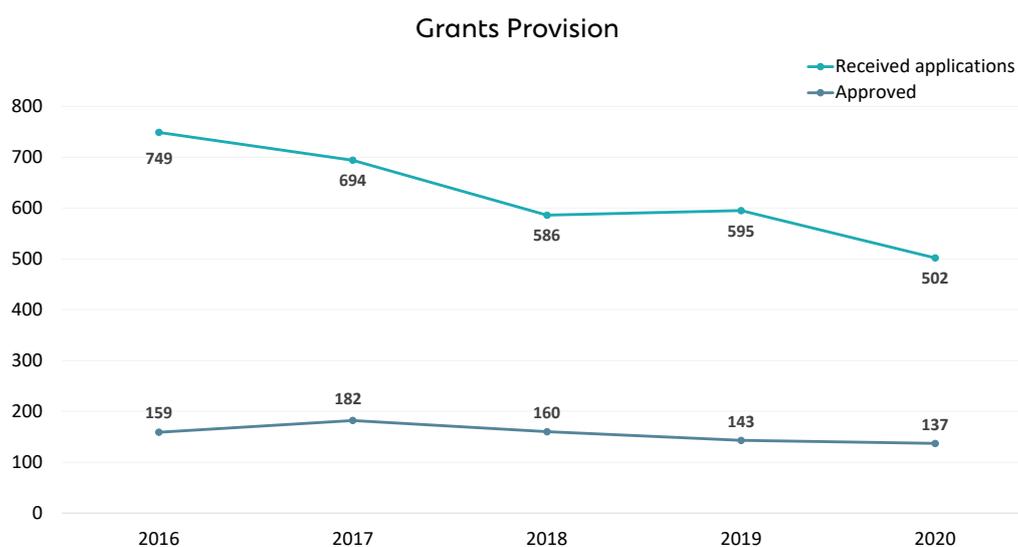
14 If We Are Given Big Budgets, the Russian Flag Will Be Everywhere.” (July 22nd, 2015). Izvestiya (“The News”). <https://iz.ru/news/589034>.

15 Popovic M., Jenne E. K., and Medzihorsky J. (2020). Charm Offensive or Offensive Charm? An Analysis of Russian and Chinese Cultural Institutes Abroad. *Europe-Asia Studies*. 72:9, 1445-1467. DOI: 10.1080/09668136.2020.1785397.

of grants. According to the Foundation, these projects relate to two primary directions:

- **Projects to promote the use and study of Russian** (organisation of Russian language training, support for Russian-language schools abroad, preparation of methodological materials, competitions and contests)
- **Humanitarian and cultural projects** (events dedicated to Russian culture and history, preservation of historical memory, support of Russian-language media, thematic festivals and holidays)

Twice a year, grant applications are accepted. However, there are no official statistics or publicly available information regarding grant funding amounts. The actual amounts of grant funding are unknown, but comments from the Fund's leaders about the need to increase funding and independent evaluations expressing doubts about the effectiveness of using these funds can be found in the media¹⁶. The official reports include information on the number of applications and grants awarded (see chart below), but this data is inaccurate and contradicts other Foundation information.



Source: annual reports of the "Russkiy Mir" foundation, <https://ruskiymir.ru/fund/reports.php>.

According to this graph, approximately 25% of all grant applications are approved annually. However, according to executive director Kochin, only one in ten applications received grants in 2015 due to a lack of funds¹⁷. Counting the number of approved grant applications for the most recent grant cycle (September 2021)¹⁸ yields a nearly identical result: 300 evaluated applications accounted for 38 approvals or approximately 13%.

¹⁶ Dmitrieva O. "Dear"/"Expensive" Compatriots. (May 29th, 2015). Novoe Vremya ("New Times"). <https://newtimes.ru/articles/detail/102183/>

¹⁷ "If We Are Given Big Budgets, the Russian Flag Will Be Everywhere." (July 22nd, 2015). Izvestiya ("The News"). <https://iz.ru/news/589034>.

¹⁸ Projects. Information portal of the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation. <http://ruskiymir.ru/grants/proekt.php>.

In addition, the information in the reports regarding the distribution of grants between organisations from the Russian Federation and other countries does not correspond to the website statistics. In the Foundation's official reports for 2016-2020, grants to Russian organisations account for one-third of all approved applications, ranging from 24 to 38 per cent annually. Analysis of the above-mentioned 300 applications submitted in September 2021 reveals that at least 22 of the 38 approved applications originated from Russian organisations (i.e., 58 per cent). This is considerably more than what official statistics indicate.

In 2016–2020, grants were distributed roughly equally between the “Promotion of the Russian Language” and “Cultural and Humanitarian Themes” categories (see Table 4). Nonetheless, the information regarding the number of projects in both regions over the past two years does not match the total number of projects. Inaccuracies in the statistics are probably not fatal, but they indicate that the Foundation's official information on its activities is not transparent.

Table 4. Distribution of grants provided by the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation by areas of activity

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Всего
Promotion of the Russian language	83	74	71	65	36	329 (45%)
Cultural and humanitarian projects	76	108	89	85	42	400 (55%)
Total	159	182	160	150	78	729 (100%)
Number of grants in the reports for 2016-2020	159	182	160	143	137	781
Difference	0	0	0	-7	59	52

Source: annual reports of the “Russkiy Mir” foundation, <https://russkiymir.ru/fund/reports.php>

Protecting linguistic and geopolitical supremacy: projects supported by the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation

In its annual reports, the “Russkiy Mir” foundation details events, including those organised by other organisations with the Foundation's financial

assistance. This information can be found on the “Russkiy Mir” website, specifically in the catalogue of grant applications and photo reports on the implementation of these grants. The Foundation’s grant funding supports a number of different areas on a thematic level.

1. Projects that promote the study of the Russian language throughout the world are central to the Foundation’s stated objectives. The Russian language competitions in Italy and Spain, the All-Russian Olympiad in Russian as a foreign language, the conference “We Will Preserve You, Russian Language!”, the project “Russian Language in the Republic of Kazakhstan”, the International Week of the Russian language in Sochi, and the Day of the Russian language in Colombo, Sri Lanka, as well as the event “We Speak Russian” in Tuva (a Siberian city in the Russian Federation), are examples of such projects that have taken place in recent years. According to Foundation reports, it is unclear what percentage of participants were foreign nationals, in other words, neither Russian immigrants nor people of Russian descent.



Photo from the conference “We Will Preserve You, Russian Language!”. [Source](#).

2. Support for and promotion of Russian culture abroad (literature, dance, music, theatre, etc.). Examples include the textbook “Russian Literature at the Lesson” (Austria), “Anthology of Short Prose of the Silver Age of Russian Literature” (China), theatrical musical performances (Portugal), New Year’s performances for children (Ankara, Turkey), a tour

of the Slavic studies students choir (Serbia), the festival “Tchaikovsky Is the Soul of Russia” (Mexico), the international festival of Russian romance “European Romansiada” (Hamburg, Germany), the Russian film festival “Russian Resurrection” (Australia), the festival-competition “Balkan Romansiada”.



Picture from the “Russian Resurrection” film festival in Australia. On stage are women dressed in traditional Russian attire and a bear, a stereotypical symbol of Russia. Source.

3. Projects focused on the Russian understanding of the Second World War and the Soviet experience. Professional literature¹⁹ describes in detail the centrality of the victory of the USSR in World War II and the postwar redistribution of areas of influence in the world and Europe to the ideology of the “Russian world.” Since at least a decade ago, the Russian government has used “anti-fascism” language in its propaganda to mobilise the populace. The “Russkiy Mir” Foundation and its grant funding contributed to maintaining such tales in Russia and abroad. Thus, among the submitted and supported projects are a book on the “liberation of Belgrade from the fascists” (as of spring 2022, the application is being reviewed), a congress of scouting forces “Guerrilla Glory”, commemorating the anniversary of victory in the “Great Patriotic War”, or “Restored military monuments in the Republic of Moldova” (the project was supported), as well as a youth camp under the auspices of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation in

¹⁹ See, for instance: Malinova, O. (2017). Political Uses of the Great Patriotic War in Post-Soviet Russia from Yeltsin to Putin. *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, 43–70. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66523-8_2. And also: Mann, Y. (2020). (Re)cycling the Collective Memory of the Great Patriotic War. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 33(4), 508–513. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2020.1845080>.

(2020). By the way, the camp was loaded with Soviet emblems and aspects of Soviet mythology: it was named “Molodaya Gvardiya” (“Young Guard”) in honour of the Soviet underground organisation of the same name that operated in Ukraine during World War II. Participants attended a series of lectures by Russian academics on Russia’s national interests, “the West’s” “distortion” of Russia’s history, and “Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia — the History of Divided Rus.”²⁰



Photo of the camp participants on the shores of lake Donuzlav in the occupied Crimea (2020). Flags raised, from left to right: temporarily occupied Crimea, “Luhansk People’s Republic”, Russia, probably the USSR, the Republic of Belarus, “Donetsk People’s Republic”, and self-proclaimed South Ossetia.
<https://russSource>.

Educational dimension: professors and students of “Russkiy Mir”

As the Russian language and literature are the principal instruments for spreading the “Russian world,” it is only natural that the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation supports investments in education professionals. For this purpose, it organises and finances several programmes aimed at uniting the pedagogical community of Russian teachers and educators and ensuring their presence abroad to develop personal ties and spread the “Russian world” from Albania to Uruguay. Among these programs are:

20 NB: The event’s organisers referred to Belarus by its traditional Russian name, “Belorussia.” The use of the name “Belorussia”, as well as “Moldavia” in relation to Moldova, “Kirghizia” in relation to Kyrgyzstan, “Pribaltika” in relation to the Baltic States (as well as “the Ukraine” instead of just “Ukraine”) refer to the imperial tradition in Russian word usage and is perceived negatively by Russia’s neighbours, especially in the light of its aggressive actions.

- **The annual international pedagogical forum of “Russkiy Mir,”** where, according to the idea of the organisers, experts should discuss current aspects of teaching Russian and literature, ways to transfer Russia’s cultural heritage to future generations, and ways for the pedagogical community to make consolidated decisions in teaching Russian, literature, and culture. At least eight forums have been held to date (the last forum took place online in December 2020). According to the Foundation’s annual report, more than 600 persons participated in this event in 2020, including representatives from thirty foreign countries and thirty regions of the Russian Federation. The platform unites the pedagogical community of Russianists in Russia and the rest of the world.
- Since 2018, the **“Professor of the Russian World” programme** has been in operation. The purpose of the initiative is to coordinate and promote the international travel of Russian educators, primarily to enhance the teaching of Russian in local educational institutions. According to information available to the public, a professor from Smolensk State University visited the Schottengymnasium in Vienna in 2019. Students participated in a series of Russian language classes taught by the professor.



Photo from the Russian language class at the Office of the Russian world at the Vienna Schottengymnasium in 2019. The classroom is decorated with Russian Orthodox icons and a map of the Russian Federation. *Source.*

According to public information, the visit of Olga Sinyova, an associate professor of the linguistics department at Moscow State University, to Albania was extremely fruitful: the professor participated in Pushkin’s readings and delivered at least 250 academic hours of lectures, seminars, and workshops²¹.

²¹ Professor of the Russian world in Albania. (August 07th, 2019). Society of Russian Compatriots in Albania. <http://rusobsina.al/профессор-русского-мира-в-албании/>.

- **The “Student of the Russian World”** programme allows foreign students, notably those studying philology, history, and politics, to complete internships at Russian universities. However, the programme's stated objective is to improve the motivation of overseas students to study Russian. Most of this program's efforts aim to promote studying the Russian language and literature in the Ukraine territories of Donetsk and Luhansk, which are temporarily occupied by Russia²². For instance, in 2019, the municipality of Kolomna (Moscow region) hosted a ten-day school for students from these unrecognised “republics”. According to the “Donetsk People's Republic” Ministry of Education, similar summer schools for children from occupied Donetsk and Luhansk are periodically hosted in Russia²³. According to the school's organisers, one of the purposes of such summer schools is to create bilateral ties with young people from the occupied regions and to mobilise them for the “Russian world”²⁴. However, the programme's geographic scope is not confined to the targeted bounds of Russia's “sphere of influence” – at least in 2014, British interns at St. Petersburg State University participated in the course²⁵.



Photo of history and political science students from the territories of temporarily Russia-occupied regions of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine during a trip to the summer school entitled “Russian World: Identity, Tradition, Culture” in Kolomna, Russia (August 2019). Source.

22 Summer schools for students of the Russian World. (August 01st, 2019). Komsomolskaya pravda (Komsomol Truth). <https://www.kp.ru/daily/27010/4072275/>.

23 Teachers from Donetsk National University discussed the issues of advanced training in the “Russkiy Mir” foundation in Moscow. (October 01st, 2021). “Ministry of Education and Science of the Donetsk People's Republic”. <http://mondnr.ru/vysshee-professionalnoe-obraz/item/15049-prepodavately-donnu-obsudili-voprosy-povysheniya-kvalifikatsii-v-fonde-russkij-mir-v-moskve>.

24 Sergey Panteleev: Overcoming Ukrainian Splits Is in the Worldview of Russian Unity. (September 04th). Information agency “Novorossiya”. <https://novorosinform.org/sergej-panteleevya-preodolenie-ukrainskih-raskolov-yayayayaya-v-mirovozzrenii-russkogo-edinstva-35002.html>

25 Students from the best universities in the UK study Russian at St Petersburg State University. (2014). Information portal of the “Russkiy Mir” foundation. <http://russkiymir.ru/fund/projects/student/155229/>.

Lastly, the Foundation supports the **international competition of pedagogical talents “Kristalnaya chernilnitsa” (“Crystal Inkwell”) and conferences of MAPRYAL – the International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature.** In general, the Foundation’s own or supported activities focus on traditional and repetitive components of Russian culture, such as Pushkin, Dostoevsky, or Tchaikovsky, Russian folk costumes, militaristic themes from World War II, or simple imperial propaganda about “union” or “friendship”. It seeks to consolidate Russia’s dominance in regions it considers part of the “Russian world” or its spheres of influence.

Celebrations of unity: “Russkiy Mir” assemblies

The culmination of the celebration of the unity of the “Russian world” is the yearly grandiose Assemblies of “Russkiy Mir,” which the Foundation itself refers to in its annual reports as the most important event of the year. The reporting materials of the Foundation always start with the outcomes of the most recent Assembly. The Assembly is traditionally held around the start of November, on the eve of the Day of National Unity in Russia, which was established as a national holiday following the reappropriation of Russia’s imperial legacy²⁶. They occurred from 2007 to 2020, and in 2021 it was planned offline, but it was cancelled²⁷ owing to COVID-19 restrictions issued in late October (in 2020, due to the pandemic, the event was held online).

The purpose of the assemblies is to summarise the Foundation’s work. The presence of the Foundation’s ideological sponsors among Russia’s political elites also implies government support. During the concurrent panel discussions, participants would also share their experiences promoting the Russian language and culture internationally. The Assembly is a gathering place for “compatriots” and all those who share the “Russkiy Mir” ideas and values.

As a rule, assemblies begin with a lavish opening ceremony, during which participants listen to an introduction by Vladimir Putin, who is not present in person, and greetings from several high-ranking officials. Typically, representatives of the presidential administration are present, and occasionally, other notable guests, such as Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church, attend. Several panel discussions, led by the Foundation’s administration, and a “cultural programme” are held during the event. For instance, a video tour

²⁶ The celebration of the Day of National Unity in Russia was launched in 2004 in honour of the liberation of Moscow from Polish intervention in 1612; these events had become a precondition for the end of a period of crisis and turmoil, known in Russian historiography as the “Time of Trouble”. The Day of National Unity was intended to replace the celebration of the greatest holiday of the communist period – the day of the anniversary of the October Revolution. The celebration of the Day has become a marker of belonging to the “Russian world”: it is also celebrated in the self-proclaimed South Ossetia, “Donetsk-” and “Luhansk People’s Republics”, and Transnistria.

²⁷ 15th Assembly of “Russkiy Mir” (official site). Retrieved from the Wayback Machine on November 04th, 2021. <https://web.archive.org/web/20211104114801/https://15assamb.russkiymir.ru/>.

of the areas where Fyodor Dostoevsky lived and worked in St. Petersburg was scheduled for 2020. Participating in these debates are members of the Russian government, hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church, and representatives of the “Russian world” from around the world, especially academics from foreign universities²⁸.



Photo from the 10th Assembly of “Russkiy Mir”, which took place in 2016 in the administrative building of the Government of Moscow. According to the organisers, the event gathered about 800 participants from 93 countries. Perhaps that is why the space had to be organised in a way reminiscent of the classic congresses of the communist parties of the socialist bloc. Source.

28 Teachers and students of the Sochi Institute (branch) of the Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia will take part in the 14th Assembly of “Russkiy Mir” on November 3rd, 2020. <https://www.rudn-sochi.ru/центр-тестирования/44-анонсы/1434-ассамблея-русского-мира>.

I CONCLUSIONS

The “Russkiy Mir” Foundation was the first in a series of newly founded or restructured public and cultural diplomacy organisations intended to promote the revanchist goal of overcoming the “greatest catastrophe of the twentieth century,” i.e., the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was tasked with restoring or perhaps creating Russian “soft power” to maintain the attraction and affection for this state and its culture on the global stage. Due to the dramatic rise in energy costs worldwide in the early 2000s, this endeavour was made possible by the availability of the necessary financial resources.

However, the results of the foundation’s activities in its fifteenth year of operation are rather contradictory. On the one hand, global public opinion studies indicate that opinions toward Russia, particularly in the West, have not improved but rather worsened. A 2016 resolution of the European Parliament designated the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation as a propaganda organisation. Therefore, there is no clear relationship between cultural expansionism and improved perception of Russia in the context of Russian cultural diplomacy. Russian cultural initiatives have failed to overshadow the state’s militaristic policies, such as the 2008 war with Georgia, the aggression in Ukraine since 2014, and the active military involvement in Syria and Africa, not to mention election meddling, economic and energy blackmail, and other manifestations of Russia’s aggressive foreign policy.

On the other hand, did the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation truly set out to improve the image of Russia by imitating pro forma activities of global institutions of public and cultural diplomacy, including the creation of representative offices abroad, the provision of grants for cultural projects, the organisation of Russian language studies, and the hosting of cultural events? Based on its two primary characteristics — the subordination of cultural diplomacy to political reasoning and the intrinsic values of the “Russian world” concept — it appears, at the very least, to be a rather secondary goal.

According to our study, the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation is entirely subject to the vertical of the Russian Federation’s presidential administration. Putin personally appoints all heads and members of the Foundation’s governing bodies, and two of the Foundation’s three most influential figures work for the Presidential Administration. Not only “Russkiy Mir,” whose de facto leader, Nikonov, is the deputy head of the State Duma Committee on Foreign Affairs, exemplifies this fusion of political and cultural diplomacy functions, but also the Russian government. It is pervasive in other Russian agencies, where, for instance, Sergey Naryshkin, chief of the Foreign Intelligence Service, presides over the “Russian Historical Society,” which focuses on history education. Minister of

Defense Sergey Shoygu presides over the Russian Geographical Society, which promotes geographical research.

Horizontally, the Foundation is one of the primary nodes of the state-controlled ecosystem of organisations devoted to expanding Russia's influence abroad, which is also a defining feature of the Russian system. These include Rossotrudnichestvo, the Gorchakov Fund, universities and their departments, research centres and think tanks, smaller oligarchic foundations, state-supported NGOs, state-focused media, etc. Their leadership, members, and common propagandists serve on one another's supervisory, trustee, and executive boards, collaborate on numerous joint projects, post on each other's websites, and coordinate activities in general.

This system is capped by the direct inheritance of contemporary Russian elites over Soviet elites¹. In the principal institutions of cultural diplomacy in Russia, descendants of the communist "nomenklatura" occupy crucial responsibilities. Thus, Vyacheslav Nikonov, grandson of the infamous Stalin's sidekick Vyacheslav Molotov, and Alexey Gromyko, grandson of the renowned Soviet foreign minister Andrey Gromyko, have exerted a considerable impact on "Russkiy Mir" since the Foundation's inception. Unsurprisingly, while reverting to components of Russia's imperial history, the present Russian elite remains nostalgic for Soviet greatness: the geopolitical vision and sense of Russia as a power challenging American unipolarity is their life's work or that of their family. It is also not unexpected that the communist worldview of these elites transitioned so readily into conservatism. After the fall of the Soviet Union, this new formulation of the rationale for the legitimacy of the Russian government required an additional element: political and cultural revanche in the former colonies, particularly those increasingly oriented toward the West. Together with the total reliance on state budget financing and the lack of transparency, these tendencies leave no question that Russia's cultural policy is being used for political goals.

Given its role and composition, it is not surprising that since the beginning of the war against Ukraine in 2014, and especially after the beginning of its most aggressive phase in 2022, the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation and its speakers have supported, disseminated, and possibly even created key narratives of Russian propaganda. In addition, a significant portion of their own "news of the Russian world" of the war period on the Foundation's website concerns accelerated Russification in the occupied territories of Ukraine, where Ukrainian textbooks are burned, schools switch to Russian curricula, billboards about Russia's history are installed, and forced deportations are facilitated.

¹ According to Snegovaya and Petrov (2022), a prominent feature of the Russian political regime after the 1990s is the fact that as of 2020, 60 percent of the highest political leadership of Russia consisted of individuals from the old Soviet nomenclature (the other 40 percent are people from law enforcement agencies, the so-called "siloviki"). See Snegovaya M. & Petrov K. (2022) Long Soviet shadows: the nomenklatura ties of Putin elites, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 38:4, 329-348.

However, these features of the Russian regime's cultural diplomacy cannot be explained without an awareness of the contradictory nature of the concept of the "Russian world." Thus, the definition of the "Russian world" is expansive and emphatically expansionist, even global: in the view of its ideologues, it is a kind of civilisation that appears to encompass with concentric circles of varying intensity, all people who are at least in some way related to the Russian language and culture, from birth in the Russian hinterland to accidental interest in some Russian cultural phenomenon in a distant country. Such a comprehension would necessitate the most open and contemporary discourse and cultural interchange, multidisciplinary, and openness to the perspectives and values of the Other. Instead, the "Russian world" is founded on a relatively narrow, essentialist, and archaic interpretation of Russian culture centred on the principles of linguistic and religious unity, an archaic communality, and unwavering submission to power and fate.

In contrast to Western institutions of cultural diplomacy, which attract more and more adherents of their cultures through academic opportunities, language learning, and creating an appealing image, Russian cultural diplomacy is more focused on uniting the base of supporters, relying on the dispersed diaspora of ethnic Russians and "Russian-speakers" (often Russified members of other ethnic groups). Such "cementing" rarely affords the possibility for genuine debate or interaction on an equal footing with representatives of different cultures. Russian cultural diplomacy presents its own cultural and geopolitical paradigms of the "Russian world" in foreign countries. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that inexpensive popular images of bears, kokoshniks, and balalaikas accompany the opening of Russian film festivals or illustrate the release of a very recent phenomenon of small prose from the Russian Silver Age translated into Chinese.

Basing Russian cultural diplomacy on a narrow and anachronistic notion of the "Russian world" is no less a factor in its apparent inefficacy than coercive forms of its imposition or the blatantly authoritarian nature of the Russian regime. In addition, the two are interrelated and interconnected: the expansionist-revanchist program of the Russian regime requires an appropriate ideological foundation. This foundation was built by reinterpreting the different aspects of the "Russian world" concept of the 1990s, which attempted to utilise the potential of Russian diasporas or "compatriots" for Russia's further development. In its place, a concept of cultural-territorial expansion was developed, a tool for reversing what Putin regarded as the greatest catastrophe of the 20th century.

In the former Soviet republics, the attractiveness of Russia's political and cultural model had to be bolstered with bombs and cruise missiles. In the West, the discussion already centres on culture's ever less credible neutrality, its independence from politics, and the (in)admissibility of its "cancellation."

This demonstrates the futility of Russia's current cultural diplomacy in Western and pro-Western countries. In the societies of the Global South still retains attractiveness and development potential. Russia relativises its own aggressive policies using the "fight against imperialism" rhetoric of the Western states, raises hopes for economic investment and military support, builds alliances with other anti-Western states, and enjoys a low level of basic awareness of Russia and Russian culture in these countries, making them susceptible to propaganda clichés. Joseph Nye, the leading theorist of "soft power," wrote in 2013 that this is a short-term trend²: "For a declining power like Russia (or Britain before it), a residual soft power helps to cushion the fall."

² Nye Jr. J. S. (2013) What China and Russia Don't Get About Soft Power. Foreign Policy. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/04/29/what-china-and-russia-dont-get-about-soft-power/>

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This paper is a part of the Ukrainian Institute's research project conducted jointly with the research agency MZ Hub. The project aims to discover the strategies and instruments of Russia's cultural diplomacy operations in the world. Rossotrudnichestvo, "Russkiy Mir" Foundation, and the Gorchakov Fund, the three biggest Russian state or state-affiliated organisations whose aim has been to spread Kremlin's geopolitical and cultural narratives as well as to keep in touch with Russians and Russia's sympathisers abroad, have come into the limelight of this series of papers.

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