

Rossotrudnichestvo: The Unbearable Harshness of Soft Power

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CASE STUDY



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On the cover: A painting by the Russian artist Vasia Lozhkin gifted to Rossotrudnichestvo in December 2021. The bear has the logo of Rossotrudnichestvo in his paws. [Source](#)

▶ ROSSOTRUDNICHESTVO: THE UNBEARABLE HARSHNESS OF SOFT POWER

Rossotrudnichestvo, or the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent State Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation, is a Russian government agency whose mission is to promote a positive image of Russia abroad through diplomacy, international humanitarian cooperation, and maintaining relationships with loosely defined compatriots. Rossotrudnichestvo is a reincarnation of a series of Soviet and later Russian agencies tasked with exercising the soft power of the Soviet Union and Russia abroad. Rossotrudnichestvo inherited from its predecessors an extensive network of Russian Houses serving as its representation offices in nearly one hundred countries and an extensive network of Russian 'compatriots' organisations, its key audience whose primary characteristic is knowledge of the Russian language. Rossotrudnichestvo promotes conservative cultural and historical narratives in order to improve the perception of Russia internationally or to diminish the negative impact of Russia's aggressive policy on its image. Over the past years, Rossotrudnichestvo has been presenting itself as a Russian version of USAID, focusing primarily on providing 'humanitarian' assistance for international development, research, and cultural cooperation. Work with 'compatriots' is a significant aspect of its influence on foreign and domestic policies of other countries, as well as the means of resolving Russia's demographic issues through resettlement programmes. Like other similar Russian organisations, Rossotrudnichestvo has supported the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It provides information support for it and works proactively to integrate the occupied Ukrainian territories into the Russian realm, using 'humanitarian assistance' to the local inhabitants as one of the instruments.

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I INTRODUCTION

For Russian leaders, soft power is not about attraction; it instead refers to non-military instruments for manipulating, undermining, and weakening opponents, a supplement to Moscow's military power.

Stefan Meister, 'Isolation and Propaganda. The Roots and Instruments of Russia's Disinformation Campaign'

The Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent State Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation, hereinafter referred to as Rossotrudnichestvo, is an unusual case of a government agency that embraces multiple functions that in the West are typically distributed among numerous institutions. The analysis of its declared objectives, audiences, projects, and topics points to a comparison with internationally recognised cultural diplomacy institutions, such as the British Council, Goethe-Institut or Institut français, and with international development agencies, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)¹ or the German Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

The first area covered by Rossotrudnichestvo is "shaping in the international community an objective perception of contemporary Russia, its role and place in global history."² It is formally similar to the objectives of most cultural diplomacy institutions worldwide. However, it seeks to influence countries through culture in a way that creates a favourable ground for Russia's expansionist policy. In other words, this is the use of soft power to justify or relativise the use of hard power.

The second area is "strengthening the humanitarian influence of Russia in the world."³ It reveals Russia's aspiration to present itself as a global donor of humanitarian assistance and to expand its influence in certain regions of the world through international development aid, providing economic and financial assistance to developing countries. This is a nationally mandated field of foreign policy work guided by Russia's Policy Concept for international development aid⁴ and supervised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Beyond providing humanitarian aid, Rossotrudnichestvo's activities in this area are also motivated by covert

1 Rossotrudnichestvo's representatives often refer to this parallel. See article *Russia is facing intentional and targeted action against it. But it cannot take offense*, *Kommersant* (07.04.2012). <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1911330>

2 Rossotrudnichestvo Performance Report on Fulfilling Its Tasks in 2020. Rossotrudnichestvo official website. <https://rs.gov.ru/Доклад%20о%20результатах%20деятельности%20Россотрудничества%202020.pdf>.

3 *Agency*. Rossotrudnichestvo official website. <https://rwp.agency/agency/>

4 Decree No259 of the President of the Russian Federation dated 20.04.2014. President of Russia. <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/38334>

political goals to shape Russia's influence and serve as an instrument of information warfare.

"Russia's investment in humanitarian policy should pay off. It should promote our companies in new markets, keep our companies busy and bring them contracts, guarantee that the recipient countries pay their debt, and ensure that the lands surrounding our borders are secure and will never become a base for open or covert aggression."

Yevgeniy Primakov, Head of Rossotrudnichestvo.⁵

The third area that stands out in the title of Rossotrudnichestvo is the loosely defined work with the audience that Russia refers to as "compatriots," primarily in the countries of the former Soviet Union and beyond. This work ranges from meeting their informational and cultural needs, assisting in their resettlement to Russia to reinforcing Russian identity and supporting Russia's political objectives, such as protecting the monuments and cemeteries abroad that are significant to Russia⁶.

Such a combination of work areas is uncommon for soft power institutions in Western countries. But it is also puzzling as Rossotrudnichestvo overlaps with the "Russkiy Mir" ("Russian World") Foundation, another Russian cultural diplomacy institution, in promoting the Russian language, organising cultural events abroad and providing (micro)grants for the projects thematically related to Russia or Russian culture. Both Rossotrudnichestvo and "Russkiy Mir" Foundation take seriously the notion of "compatriots" in their activities.

Close cooperation between the two institutions may not be the only reason for this overlap of ideas and functions. After another change of the Rossotrudnichestvo management in 2020, the idea of reforming Russia's soft power by establishing a single state corporation that would consolidate all resources and operate projects of influence on foreign audiences was voiced⁷. This corporation will likely be based on Rossotrudnichestvo since its operations are more diverse, and its infrastructure is more developed than those of Russia's other cultural and public diplomacy institutions.

5 Yevgeniy Primakov: "Enough balalaikas in humanitarian policy!" (8.04.2019). *Novye Izvestiya*. <https://newizv.ru/article/general/08-04-2019/evgeniy-primakov-hvatit-nam-balalaek-v-gumanitarnoy-politike>.

6 Zakem, V., Saunders, P., Antoun, D., Gorenburg, D., Markowitz, M. (2015). Mobilizing Compatriots: Russia's Strategy, Tactics and Influence in the Former Soviet Union. *Center for Naval Analyses*. https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/dop-2015-u-011689-1rev.pdf. p.39

7 The authorities launch a reform of Russian "soft power". Why an idea of establishing a state corporation aimed at promoting Moscow's interest is discussed. (13.07.2020). *RBK*. <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/13/07/2020/5f05a8079a79477c4c39bfa5>.

In addition to working in the three mentioned areas, Rossotrudnichestvo has a slew of other organisational, functional, operational, and ethical differences from its Western equivalents. Rossotrudnichestvo, along with a number of other Russian cultural and diplomatic organisations, and propagandist media, including the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation, the multilingual Russia Today (RT) TV platform, and the Sputnik multimedia service, were identified as Kremlin-funded instruments of disinformation and propaganda in a resolution passed by the European Parliament on November 23, 2016.⁸ On top of that, Rossotrudnichestvo and its foreign offices have a long legacy of accusations of espionage, provocations and other scandals, including instances in the United States⁹, the Czech Republic¹⁰ and Ukraine.

Russia’s proactive use of soft power and the network of soft power institutions and organisations as hybrid information warfare tools have become a subject of research and analysis published by Ukrainian and foreign experts. Most of these texts mention Rossotrudnichestvo in passing as one of Russia’s soft power institutions. Even research that has a separate section for Rossotrudnichestvo tends to focus on a generalised analysis of some of its aspects, such as its structure and goals¹¹, its funding scope and the trends of its change¹²; or the history of Rossotrudnichestvo, its purpose, and links to Western institutions¹³; or its background, reasons for its establishment and global goals¹⁴. Some of this analysis mentions Rossotrudnichestvo alongside related organisations, such as the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation and Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund (Gorchakov Fund)¹⁵, even though Rossotrudnichestvo has the largest funding

8 European Parliament resolution of 23 November 2016 on EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties (2016/2030(INI)). https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2016-0441_EN.pdf.

9 Head of D.C.-based Russian cultural center being investigated as possible spy (23.10.2013). *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/head-of-dc-based-russian-cultural-center-being-investigated-as-possible-spy/2013/10/23/63a0bb54-3c02-11e3-a94f-b58017bfee6c_story.html.

10 Prague Says Ricin Plot Was a Hoax, and Moves to Expel 2 Russians (05.06.2020). *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/05/world/europe/czech-republic-russia-ricin.html>.

11 Smaglyi, K., Zaslavskiy, I. (2018). Hybrid Analytica: Pro-Kremlin Expert Propaganda in Moscow, Europe and the U.S. A Case Study on Think Tanks and Universities. *The Institute of Modern Russia*. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59f8f41ef14aa13b95239af0/t/5c6d8b38b208fc7087fd2b2a/1550682943143/Smaglyi_Hybrid-Analytica_10-2018_upd.pdf.

12 Lutsevych, O. (2016). Agents of the Russian World: Proxy Groups in the Contested Neighbourhood Research Paper. *Royal Institute of International Affairs*. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2016-04-14-agents-russian-world-lutsevych.pdf>.

Vendil Pallin, C., Oxenstierna, S. (2017). Russian Think Tanks and Soft Power. *Swedish Defence Research Agency*. <https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI-R--4451--SE>.

13 Foxall, A. (2015). The Kremlin’s sleight of hand: Russia’s soft power offensive in the UK. *Russia Studies Centre at The Henry Jackson Society*. <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/HJS-The-Kremlins-Sleight-of-Hand-Report-NEW-web.pdf>.

14 Van Herpen, M.H. (2015). *Putin’s Propaganda Machine: Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy*. Rowman & Littlefield.

15 Meister, S. (2016). Isolation and Propaganda. The Roots and Instruments of Russia’s Disinformation Campaign. *DGAP, Transatlantic Academy Paper Series*. https://dgap.org/system/files/article_pdfs/meister_isolationpropoganda_apr16_web_1.pdf.

Surowiec, P. (2017) Post-truth soft power: Changing facets of propaganda, kompromat, and democracy. *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 18 (3). pp. 21-27;

Horbulin, V. (2017). The World Hybrid War: Ukrainian Forefront. *National Institute for Strategic Studies*. <https://www.worldcat.org/title/world-hybrid-war-ukrainian-forefront/oclc/1000298302>.

and the most ambitious goals of all of Russia's soft power organisations.

The purpose of this study is to develop a comprehensive institutional profile of Rossotrudnichestvo, outlining its areas of operations and target audiences, as well as the scope and nature of its influence in Russia's information war. By looking at the propaganda element of Rossotrudnichestvo's operations, this research focuses specifically on Rossotrudnichestvo's information policy and influence campaigns since the beginning of the full-scale war against Ukraine on February 24, 2022. This research examined the official website of Rossotrudnichestvo and its headquarters' official social media accounts, in addition to the official documents governing Rossotrudnichestvo's operations, such as decrees, resolutions, and other documents. It also uses secondary sources, i. e., relevant policy papers and media reports by Ukrainian and foreign authors. This analysis does not examine the publications produced by the websites and official social media accounts of dozens of the Russian Houses, Rossotrudnichestvo's offices abroad, which partially overlap with what the central organisation publishes yet are partially unique to each country and require individual research.

NOMS DE PLUME: PREDECESSORS OF ROSSOTRUDNICHESTVO

Rossotrudnichestvo was officially founded on September 6, 2008, by Decree No. 1315 of the President of the Russian Federation, Dmitriy Medvedev. In contrast to other agencies established within the same period to promote Russia's cultural influence abroad, Rossotrudnichestvo did not begin from scratch. Its predecessor agencies are nearly a century old. Each of the previous iterations of Rossotrudnichestvo was established and restructured amidst historical transformations and challenges posed to the international image of the Soviet Union and later Russia. Although they had different legal statuses – some were founded as civic organisations or associations – they were all government-controlled and promoted pro-Soviet and pro-Russian propaganda.¹

The first predecessor of Rossotrudnichestvo was the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS), established in 1925. **The primary objective of VOKS was to whitewash the image of the Soviet Union and the Bolshevik government** following the Civil War and its early years in power. This essentially state-run agency was in charge of organising cultural events with representatives of the Soviet Union abroad and bringing regime sympathisers to the Soviet Union.

It was rebranded for the first time in 1958 as part of the effort to combat the detrimental effect that Stalin's regime had on the international image of the Soviet Union. **While VOKS primarily targeted Western countries, the Soviet Union sought to expand its global influence since the beginning of the Cold War.** Consequently, VOKS became the Union of Soviet Societies of Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (SRTD). It began establishing contacts with the countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America that were friendly to the Soviet Union. Until 1991, the SRTD oversaw 98 societies and associations of friendship with the peoples of foreign countries², as well as 600,000 students enrolled in Russian language courses abroad.³

After the Soviet Union collapsed and the Cold War ended, Russia inherited a vast network of cultural and research centres in 41 countries. To manage them, the SRTD was transformed into the Russian Agency for

1 Svystovych S. (2011). The All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and foreign contacts of the Ukrainian community in 1924-1928. *Gileya: Academic Bulletin. Special issue*, pp. 116-124. <http://gileya.org/index.php?ng=library&cont=long&id=62>.

Ditkovska S. (2014). Requirements for the establishment and launching the Ukrainian Society of Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. *Grani*, No. 5. Pp. 102-108. http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/Grani_2014_5_21.

2 The Union of Soviet Societies of Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (SSOD). 1958–1992. A guide to the Russian archive. <https://guides.rusarchives.ru/node/25092>.

3 About Rossotrudnichestvo. The Russian House. <https://ruskidom.rs/россотрудничество-ру/о-россотрудничестве/>.

International Cooperation and Development in 1992. In 1994, its name was changed to the Russian Centre for International Science and Culture Cooperation (RosZarubezhCentr). It is likely that these changes were not reflected in the SRTD's work for a long time: the first female astronaut, Valentina Tereshkova, led the organisation from 1987 until 2004. RosZarubezhCentr expanded its operations in 2002 when it was resubordinated from the Government of Russia to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Eleonora Mitrofanova, a former Russian envoy to UNESCO, chaired it in 2004. Under Mitrofanova, **RosZarubezhCentr shifted to prioritising work in the Baltic States and CIS countries**, particularly with civic organisations, organisations of "compatriots" and local organisations; and to analysis and collection of data about the Russian diaspora in the post-Soviet space.⁴

Notably, the predecessors of Rossotrudnichestvo, starting from VOKS, served to mask the intelligence work with a facade of cultural propaganda and the establishment of international cultural contacts.⁵ **The intelligence function was an integral part of all successors of VOKS**, and many of their employees were KGB or FSB agents or Soviet and Russian foreign intelligence. According to the Dossier Centre, at least 17 out of RosZarubezhCentr 546 employees between 1994 and 2008 were agents of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service.⁶

4 Mitrofanova highlights the priorities of RosZarubezhCentr. (18.01.2005). *RIA Novosti*. <https://ria.ru/20050118/1741088.html>

5 See, for example, Nevezhyn V.A. Soviet politics and cultural relations with Germany (1939-1941) // National History 1993. Is. 1. – p. 32; What is Rossotrudnichestvo and its purpose? (24.02.2021). *Dossier Center*. https://dossier.center/rossotr/VOKS_maintained_ties_with_the_intelligence_community_down_to_the_personnel_level. (See the story of Grigoriy Heifetz, Soviet intelligence agent and deputy head of VOKS in Laamanen, V. (2016). VOKS, Cultural Diplomacy and the Shadow of the Lubyanka: Olavi Paavolainen's 1939 Visit to the Soviet Union. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 52(4), 1022–1041 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009416669422>).

6 Ibid.

Table 1. Predecessors of Rossotrudnichestvo

Title	Years	Status	Declared goals
<p>All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS)</p> 	<p>1925 – 1958 (established in the early years of the Soviet Union's existence)</p>	<p>Held the status of a civic organisation.</p>	<p>Establishing and fostering academic and cultural ties between institutions, civic organisations and individuals engaged in culture and arts from the Soviet Union and foreign countries.</p>
<p>Union of Soviet Societies of Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (SRTD)</p> 	<p>1958 – 1992 (Cold War period)</p>	<p>Officially an international all-union association⁷ – association of civic organisations, including societies, associations, friendship committees, and republican associations for cultural relations with foreign countries, their industry sections). Funded by the state.</p>	<p>Assisting the autonomous republics, oblasts, krais and cities of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to establish commercial and cultural ties with foreign countries, thereby facilitating the receipt of humanitarian aid from abroad.</p>
<p>Russian Agency for International Cooperation and Development</p>	<p>1992 – 1994 (first years after the USSR disintegration)</p>	<p>It was a federal state agency subordinated to the Government of RF (i.e., belonging to its executive branch).⁸ As the SRTD's successor, the Russian Agency for International Cooperation and Development received the SRTD's facilities and other assets.</p>	<p>Implementing state policy in international financial and investment cooperation and coordinating advisory, technical, humanitarian and cultural cooperation with foreign governmental and non-governmental organisations⁹.</p>

7 Letter No34/50 of the Union of Soviet Societies of Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries to RSFSR President B. M. Yeltsin dated 25.10.1991. <https://yeltsin.ru/archive/paperwork/49393/>.

8 Decree No889 by RF President B. M. Yeltsin dated 14.08.1992. <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/1830>.

9 Resolution No995 On Approving the Statute of the Russian Agency for International Cooperation and Development dated 12.12.1992. <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docview&page=1&print=1&nd=102020278&rdk=1&&empire=>.

<p>Russian Centre for International Science and Culture Cooperation under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (RosZarubezhCentr)</p> 	<p>1994 – 2008</p>	<p>The successor of the Russian Agency for International Cooperation and Development. Received the premises and other property of the SRTD.</p> <p>In 1994-2002, RosZarubezhCentr was a state agency subordinated to the Government of the Russian Federation.¹⁰ It has been under Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 2002.</p>	<p>Humanitarian, cultural, research and technical, and information relations of Russia with foreign countries through the established network of Russian research and cultural centres abroad. Assistance to Russian and foreign NGOs in fostering these relations.</p>
<p>Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent State Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rosstrudnichestvo)</p> 	<p>2008 – ... (revision of Russia's foreign policy doctrine, incorporation of soft power into its foreign policy strategy)</p>	<p>The successor of RosZarubezhCentr. A central federal state agency of the government's executive branch. Reports to the President of Russia and operates under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia.¹¹</p>	<p>Providing state services and managing public property management in the field of development of Russia's international relations with CIS and other countries. Providing international humanitarian cooperation and international development aid.</p>

10 Resolution No311 by the Government of the Russian Federation dated 08.04.1994 "On Establishing the Russian Centre for International Science and Culture Cooperation." <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&prevDoc=102077370&backlink=1&&nd=102029410>.

11 Decree No1315 of the President of the Russian Federation on Some Aspects of Governance in International Cooperation dated 06.09.2008. <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/28020>.

RosZarubezhCentr was reformed into Rossotrudnichestvo in 2008 because of Russia's realisation that it needed to reconsider its approach to the use of soft power and reevaluate its weight in light of the colour revolutions in Eastern Europe and the deterioration of attitudes toward Russia in the aftermath of its attack on Georgia. By the mid-2010s, Russia had a considerably lower soft power ranking than the United States, Canada, EU countries, Japan, China, and India. This period, however, witnessed the strengthening of Russia's economy, political modernisation and other transformations that may have contributed to making Russia more attractive internationally and restoring its influence in the post-Soviet space.¹²

A former head of Rossotrudnichestvo, Konstantin Kosachev, stated that as a result of the war with Georgia, Russia **"became somewhat isolated and was portrayed as an aggressor in international media, that is, in the eyes of the international community. Essentially, we learned the most important lesson about the effects of information and image manipulation."**¹³ This led to the conclusion that Russia had to focus more on soft power to promote its positive image abroad. The Russian President signed a decree establishing Rossotrudnichestvo on September 6, 2008, less than a month after Russia's troops invaded the territory of Georgia. The decree's objective was to "increase the effectiveness of governance in the field of international cooperation."¹⁴ Apart from the failure to accomplish massive geopolitical objectives, **organisational inefficiency and internal corruption at RosZarubezhCentr**¹⁵ could have been a less apparent reason for that rebranding.

Complaints of inefficiency have generally accompanied Rossotrudnichestvo throughout its history and have been the primary impetus for numerous reform initiatives. They focus primarily on its shortage of funding compared to its foreign competitors and other Russian public agencies engaged in "international development aid." In 2013, Rossotrudnichestvo expanded its role as a soft power agent with plans to increase its budget significantly and transform into the Russian USAID.¹⁶ Rossotrudnichestvo reform discussions resumed in 2018 when Eleonora Mitrofanova returned to her position as head of the organisation,

12 Iliuk T. (2016). Transformation of Russia's public and cultural diplomacy at the present stage: The activities of Rossotrudnichestvo. *Countries of the post-Soviet space: Challenges of modernisation. A collection of research papers*, State Institution "Institute of World History of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine". https://elibrary.ivinas.gov.ua/310/1/postrad2016_-20-33.pdf. p. 19-32.

13 Kosachev K. Rossotrudnichestvo: Background, reality and prospects. (15.11.2013). *Russian International Affairs Council*. <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytiks-and-comments/comments/rossotrudnichestvo-istoki-realii-perspektivy/>

14 Decree No1315 of the President of the Russian Federation dated 06.09.2008. President of Russia. <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/28020/page/1>.

15 In one fragment of her unpublished book, Tatiana Poloskova, a former member of the expert council at Rossotrudnichestvo, described the idleness of RosZarubezhCentr employees in the departments of the Baltic States and CIS countries, their total ignorance of the local context in the countries where they worked, the pursuit of business trips to distant countries, corruption, and receipt of residence certificates for NATO member-states. See *Russian diplomacy and its representation abroad: How staff decided everything*. (24.02.2014). Livejournal, user marss2. <https://marss2.livejournal.com/899015.html>.

16 Soft power is provided with means. (05.06.2013). *Kommersant*. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2204815>.

followed by Yevgeniy Primakov in 2020. The current plan is to establish a state soft power corporation based on Rossotrudnichestvo. And another title change for the international audience is imminent, as its leaders have spent a decade complaining that the current title is too complicated for foreigners.¹⁷

¹⁷ Konstantin Kosachev: There is no split of Russkiy Mir as a result of the developments in Ukraine. (19.08.2014). Rossiyskaya Gazeta. <https://rg.ru/2014/08/20/kosachev.html>.

STAFF, BUDGETS, NETWORKS: INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

Rossotrudnichestvo, which reports to the President of Russia and operates under the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has the best funding and geographic coverage out of all Russia's soft power institutions. How precisely it is integrated into the existing institutional infrastructure of Russia's soft power could be clarified by describing where its leaders are recruited, whom it collaborates with, where its funding comes from, how it spends the funds, and what its geographic priorities are.

Chained by "United Russia": Rossotrudnichestvo's leadership and partners

The President of Russia has the right to appoint and dismiss the head and deputy heads of Rossotrudnichestvo.¹ Throughout its existence of thirteen years, Rossotrudnichestvo had six heads. This reflects political turbulence surrounding Rossotrudnichestvo and stands in stark contrast to the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation and the Gorchakov Fund, whose current heads have been in place since the establishment of both organisations. Except for Eleonora Mitrofanova, all heads of Rossotrudnichestvo were MPs in the State Duma or Federation Council, the two chambers of the Russian Federal Assembly, before or after they led Rossotrudnichestvo. They were also unlikely to be career diplomats, cultural managers, or international cooperation experts. Yevgeniy Primakov, the current head, is a case in point. Before being appointed to Rossotrudnichestvo, he hosted the International Digest (Международное обозрение) show on Rossiya 24, a state television channel. He continued to host the show for some time after taking office.



Yevgeniy Primakov Jr. is the grandson of Yevgeniy Primakov Sr., former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia. **Primakov Jr. has chaired Rossotrudnichestvo** since June 25, 2020. He is a former member of parliament, advisor on foreign policy and humanitarian projects to Vyacheslav Volodin, the seventh speaker of the State Duma; member of the praesidium of the Council for Foreign and Defence Policy; co-founder and board chair of the Russian Humanitarian Mission (RHM), a key partner for Rossotrudnichestvo.

¹ Decree No1315 on the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent State Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation approved by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on 06.09.2008. <https://rs.gov.ru/upload/iblock/29c/29cbf441764f36ebab10fbfb8f1e9396.pdf>.



Dmitriy Polikanov, formerly a high-ranking official at the United Russia party, the first deputy executive director at the Russian Geographical Society, and the former head of other state agencies.



Illia Balanin, former deputy governor of Yaroslavl Oblast.



Mikhail Briukhanov, standing 1st class state councillor of the Russian Federation (a bureaucratic rank within Russia's public service system).



Aleksei Polkovnikov, standing 3rd class state councillor of the Russian Federation, formerly director general at the Russian Humanitarian Mission.



Pavel Shevtsov, former deputy director of the Department for Economic Cooperation with CIS Countries and Development of Eurasian Integration in the Russian Ministry of Economic Development.

Well-known former deputy heads



Natalia Poklonskaya, Rossotrudnichestvo's deputy head from February 2 to June 13, 2022. Born in Luhansk Oblast, Ukraine, she served as a prosecutor of the Russian occupation administration in the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Poklonskaya has been sanctioned by Ukraine (charged with high treason, among other things), the EU, the US, Canada and Japan.

Most of Rossotrudnichestvo's deputy heads previously held important offices in Russian state agencies, often in institutions closely linked to the President's administration. Some of them possess multiple state decorations. Natalia Poklonskaya (dismissed on June 13, 2022) and Dmitriy Polikanov have recently been the most visible and media-present deputy heads. Polikanov typically represents Rossotrudnichestvo at its events or those organised by Rossotrudnichestvo's partners. After her appointment, Poklonskaya intended to defend the rights of "Russian-speaking compatriots" in Ukraine.² In recent months, she has primarily appeared in Rossotrudnichestvo's activities focused on what it presents as humanitarian development aid.

Since late 2020, Rossotrudnichestvo has had a Public Council, supposed to represent the public's interests in overseeing the organisation's operations. However, the members of the Public Council point to a close connection between Rossotrudnichestvo and key state educational institutions. For instance, Viktor Sadovnichiy, Rector of Moscow State University, is both an Honorary Director of this Public Council and a member of the Academic Board of the Russian Security Council. The Public Council has ties to Russia's other public and cultural diplomacy organisations, such as the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation and Valdai Club, and its membership includes representatives from the most prominent state corporations, including Gazprom Neft and Rostech. Virtually all Public Council members hold multiple state decorations and are engaged in other Russian state agencies. Some have experience working in Russian-occupied territories, including in Moldova. In other words, integration into the Russian Federation's state structure is more important than public oversight.³

In addition, Rossotrudnichestvo systematically collaborates **with other Russian organisations that operate in similar areas**, including the Presidential Grants Foundation, Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, Russian Geographical Society, Russian International Affairs Council, and others. Rossotrudnichestvo collaborates, supports, and participates in the following **partner projects by other Russian organisations**:

- **InteRussia**⁴ research and academic internships for foreign specialists. Implemented by the Gorchakov Fund and the Moscow State Institute of International Relations;

2 In a comment on her appointment to KrymInform, an outlet controlled by the Russian occupation authorities, Poklonskaya said that "protecting the rights of compatriots abroad, including in Ukraine, will be her priority" in the new office. To support this statement, she claimed to have relevant expertise related to "human rights protection, peace, and security" and said that her "...Russian-Ukrainian experience will serve her well." See Poklonskaya plans to "protect the rights of Russians in Ukraine" in her new office (03.2022). *Ukrayinska Pravda*. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/02/3/7322690/>.

It was Poklonskaya who initiated the prohibition of the Mejlis, the representative body of the Crimean Tatar people, in 2016 while serving as prosecutor in the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

3 Members of the Public Council at Rossotrudnichestvo. Rossotrudnichestvo official website. <https://rs.gov.ru/Автобиографии%20членов%20Совета.docx.pdf>.

4 Internship programme InteRussia: call for applications is open <https://english.mgimo.ru/announce/interussia-03-22>.

- **SPUTNIKPRO**⁵ workshops for international journalists, media managers and press service personnel, an international project of Russia Today, the Russian state propaganda media company. Since 2015, more than 250 people from eighty countries have participated in the Rossotrudnichestvo's New Generation program workshops;
- **School of Real Journalism**⁶ by the Russian Reporters organisation with support from the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation and Rossotrudnichestvo. RIA Novosti, the Russian Union of Journalists, the Presidential Grants Foundation and Yandex technology company are also involved in this project;
- **Leaders of Russia**⁷, an open competition for education grants of 1 million roubles (around \$16,000) for Russian and non-Russian executives. It was declared the flagship project of the presidential platform *Russia – Land of Opportunity*. The competition's International Track's⁸ supervisory board is chaired by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and includes Rossotrudnichestvo head, Yevgeniy Primakov. Dmitriy Polikanov, the deputy head of Rossotrudnichestvo, has expressed interest in and plans to collaborate with the winners of this track. In a broader sense, this competition appears to be a means for the Russian regime to select qualified and loyal executives for regional and federal positions. In the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, it is interesting to note that the 2022 Leaders of Russia winners include ministerial appointees in the self-proclaimed "Donetsk People's Republic" and "Luhansk People's Republic" (Russia-occupied territories). Examples include Ivan Kusov, vice-president of the Sevastopol State University, who was invited to become minister of education in the self-proclaimed "LPR" while Oleg Trofimov received the same position in the self-proclaimed "DPR." Vladimir Putin endorsed both appointments in a personal meeting with Kusov and Trofimov.
- **International development aid** with the Association of Volunteer Centres, Russian Humanitarian Mission (see Section III below for more details about international development aid partners).

As such, Rossotrudnichestvo is deeply integrated into the state apparatus of the Russian Federation, as evidenced by its management, Public Council, and list of partners. Due to the fact that its leaders are members of the ruling "United Russia" party, political expediency and favouritism are prioritised over efficiency. Cultural diplomacy and international development specialists are favoured less than performers who will propagate the same narratives as

5 A New Generation of foreign journalists attend Sputnikpro workshop. <https://rwp.agency/news/637/>.

6 The School of Real Journalism in Belarus. <https://www.rwp.agency/news/1035/>.

7 Leaders of Russia national management competition. <https://www.лидерыроссии.рф/>.

8 Leaders of Russia. International Track. <https://www.лидерыроссии.рф/international2021>.

other government agencies in Russia. The case of Liubov Glebova, the head of Rossotrudnichestvo in 2015-2017, is an illustrative case in point: she never held any international relations-related positions. She was a senator from two different regions of the Russian Federation in the Federation Council before and after her tenure at Rossotrudnichestvo. This approach differs significantly from the selection of managers for comparable organisations in the West, such as the British Council or Goethe-Institut, where leaders typically come from academia, non-governmental organisations, or charitable organisations. Thus, Rossotrudnichestvo entirely depends on the foreign policy course the Russian regime is pursuing at any given time and serves as the premier platform for Kremlin narratives.

Catching up with USAID: Funding challenges

According to the Rossotrudnichestvo's Statute, it is funded from Russia's state budget and from the revenues from the activities that it is allowed to conduct.⁹ This is a typical method of funding the West's public and cultural diplomacy institutions. In contrast to the latter, however, Rossotrudnichestvo's funding is not transparent. Its standard financial statement only provides details by budget category codes for its revenues and expenditures. This provides little insight into how Rossotrudnichestvo is funded. It has an annual statements section on its website, which, similar to such organisations in other countries, should provide more details on its activities in a way that is not strictly bureaucratic. But almost all links to annual statements lead to empty pages. Currently, only the 2020 annual statement is available, which, despite providing no insight into the funding's dynamics, permits comparisons with soft power institutions from other countries.

Rossotrudnichestvo earned 455 million roubles in revenue in 2020, equivalent to € 5.5 million at the average annual exchange rate.¹⁰ Nearly 83% of this revenue came from using the Russian property abroad and providing paid services, most likely Russian language classes. Its expenditures were tenfold higher, at 4.538 billion roubles, or € 54.8 million. The Russian budget made up the difference. This demonstrates that 90% of Rossotrudnichestvo's expenditures are subsidised. The unknown is the spending section of its budget structure. However, interviews with the organisation's leaders reveal that approximately 70 per cent of its budget is spent on staff salaries and property maintenance.¹¹

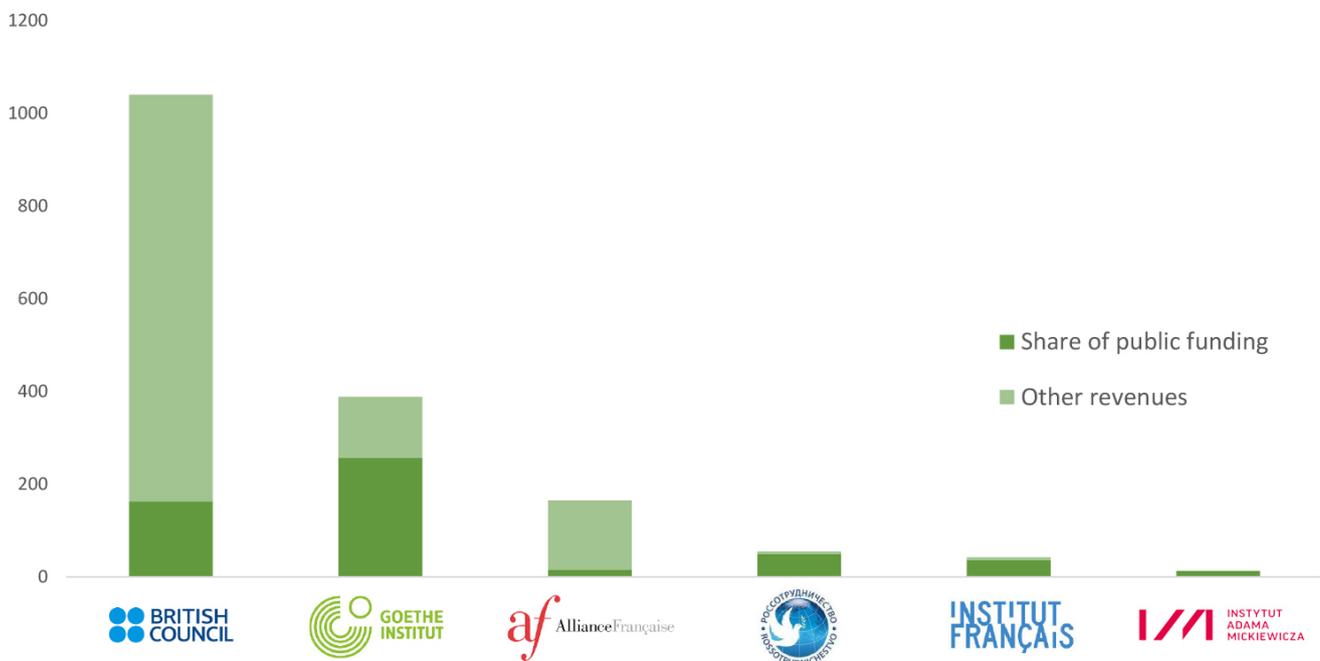
9 Statute of the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent State Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation, approved by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation №1315 dated 06.09.2008. <https://rs.gov.ru/upload/iblock/29c/29cbf441764f36ebab10fbfb8f1e9396.pdf>.

10 Report on budget fulfilment by the main administrator, administrator and recipient of budget funding. Rossotrudnichestvo. <https://www.rwp.agency/upload/iblock/aa4/aa44ee5e818e310d59cf316fa3d3870d.pdf>.

11 Head of Rossotrudnichestvo to RBC: "We will not write in Latin." (12.09.2018). RBC. <https://www.rbc.ru/interview/politics/12/09/2018/5b90ee6f9a7947682967bd0a>.

This funding is significantly less than that of comparable soft power institutions in Germany and the United Kingdom. The Goethe-Institut generated € 388 million in revenue in 2020 and spent € 393 million.¹² The British Council generated £925mn in revenue and spent £1,008 million in 2020-2021 over the financial year from April 1, 2020, to March 31, 2021.¹³ In addition, Rossotrudnichestvo differs in terms of its revenue structure as most of its income comes from the state, not from its activities. Rossotrudnichestvo's expenditures are moderately comparable to those of Institut français, which generated € 42.1 million in revenue in 2020, 72% of which was subsidised by the French government, and spent € 35 million.

Chart 1. Publicly funded cultural diplomacy institutions in Western countries and Russia



Note. Data is derived from the 2020 annual reports of these entities. The amount was converted to EUR for the British Council and Rossotrudnichestvo using the average annual exchange rate of the pound and rouble in 2020.

The current funding for Rossotrudnichestvo is significantly less than what was discussed at the beginning of the 2010s. A presidential decree from 2013 mandated an increase in the 2020 budget from 0.03% to 0.1% of the Russian GDP.¹⁴ Initially, things were moving in this direction. As the 2014 Concept of the State

¹² 2020–21 Annual Report and Accounts. British Council. https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/annualreport_2020-21.pdf, p. 68-71.

¹³ Rapport d'activité 2020. Institut français. https://www.institutfrancais.com/sites/default/files/medias/documents/if_ra_2020.pdf, p. 61.

¹⁴ Tafuro, E. (2014) Fatal Attraction? Russia's Soft Power in Its Neighbourhood. FRIDE policy brief No. 181. P. 4. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/180660/Fatal%20attraction_%20Russia%E2%80%99s%20soft%20power%20in%20its%20neighbourhood.pdf.

Policy of Russia in International Development Aid granted Rossotrudnichestvo the leading role in developing Russia's soft power, it was expected to administer a great deal more money in the context of providing international aid. In 2014, compared to 2013, its budget increased by a third, from 2 billion roubles to nearly 2.74 billion roubles, or € 61 million, at the beginning of the year's exchange rate. From then on, all international development aid would be administered by Rossotrudnichestvo rather than the Ministry of Finance.¹⁵

But the initial drive was sapped quickly. Now, Rossotrudnichestvo receives 25 times less than the 0.1% planned for it in 2013, ending up with 0.004% of the Russian GDP in 2020.¹⁶ Rossotrudnichestvo never received large budgets to provide international aid, despite retaining these functions. Its most recent public statement on this topic dates to 2015.¹⁷ In 2016, Leonid Slutskiy, chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs, criticised Rossotrudnichestvo's inadequate funding. He compared it to a "good brand automobile that knows how and where to go but has an empty tank."¹⁸ According to Slutskiy, Rossotrudnichestvo's foreign offices were forced to relocate from symbolic buildings to the suburbs of capitals because of a lack of funding.

Rossotrudnichestvo's opaque statements make it difficult to understand why an institution that, given its objectives, should have seen its funding increase as Russia's policy becomes more aggressive has not received the previously promised funding. The following factors may be at play:

- **Russia's foreign policy priorities are shifting, as is its preference for hard power.** Russia's neighbouring states were expected to become the primary focus areas in 2013-2015, and Rossotrudnichestvo planned to open 9 out of its 11 new offices in those countries. Ukraine was likely a top priority: In March 2014, Konstantin Kosachev, then Head of Rossotrudnichestvo, complained that USAID's budget in Ukraine doubled Rossotrudnichestvo's total for all countries. He insisted that Russian universities significantly increase the quota for Ukrainian students.¹⁹ However, the subsequent annexation of Crimea and the military invasion of the Donbas demonstrated that Russia prioritised hard power over soft power in Ukraine.
- **Foreign policy challenges and Russia's stagnant economy.** Early in the

15 Lutsevych, O. (2016). Agents of the Russian World: Proxy Groups in the Contested Neighbourhood Research Paper. *Royal Institute of International Affairs*. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2016-04-14-agents-russian-world-lutsevych.pdf>.

16 Russia's GDP was RUR 106.6tn in 2020. *Kommersant*. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4671959>.

17 Burlinova N., Vasilenko P., Ivanchenko V., Shakirov O. (2020). 10 steps towards efficient public diplomacy of Russia. Expert overview of Russian public diplomacy in 2018-2019. *Russian International Affairs Council*. <https://russiancouncil.ru/papers/RussianPublicDiplomacy-Report52-Rus.pdf>.

18 State Duma concerned about funding cuts for Rossotrudnichestvo programs. (07.10.2016). *RIA Novosti*. <https://ria.ru/20161007/1478733956.html>.

19 Rossotrudnichestvo Head Konstantin Kosachev: "Severalfold increase in attendance of ballet courses during the crisis." (13.05.2014). *Vedomosti*. <https://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/articles/2014/03/13/v-krizis-v-razy-povysilas-poseschaemost-kursov-baleta>.

2010s, Russia's economic growth began to decelerate, and its GDP fell by 2 per cent in 2015.²⁰ This left Russia with fewer resources for foreign policy. In 2015, this was reflected in the shrinking budgets of RT and MIA Rossiya Segodnya, the principal Russian propaganda outlets.²¹ Rossotrudnichestvo was not exempt from budget cuts.

- Finally, **Rossotrudnichestvo's inefficiency** could be a more trivial cause. In 2015, Russia's Accounts Chamber reported that Rossotrudnichestvo was not spending efficiently, and the desired pace of opening new offices abroad did not match the available resources: it opened only three out of the eleven planned for 2013-2015.²² Numerous violations were found in other categories of spending. This may have necessitated a reevaluation of the initial plans to increase funding for Rossotrudnichestvo.

World League of Russian Houses: Rossotrudnichestvo's foreign representations

As of 2021, the infrastructure of offices inherited by Rossotrudnichestvo from its predecessors has evolved into a network of Russian Centres of Science and Culture and Russian Houses. Additionally, it inherited established relationships and contacts with foreign and Russian organisations across the world. As a result, **Rossotrudnichestvo is now an organisational behemoth with a maximum** of 278 full-time employees at its central office and 600 employees abroad at the offices and representatives in other countries. These include 185 employees sent abroad by Rossotrudnichestvo and 415 hired in host countries.²³

According to the Rossotrudnichestvo's Statute, its apparatus abroad comprises the so-called Russian centres of science and culture, Russian information and culture centres, Russian houses of science and culture abroad, Russian cultural centres abroad. Still, the term used in the organisation's annual reports and public communication is Russian Centre of Science and Culture/RCSC. In places where Rossotrudnichestvo does not have full-fledged offices, there are individual representatives at Russia's diplomatic missions who are not part of the diplomatic personnel. Rossotrudnichestvo offices operate in 80 countries.²⁴

²⁰ GDP growth (annual %) - Russian Federation. World Bank Data. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=RU>.

²¹ The RT budget is cut 10%. (16.01.2015). *RT in Russian*. <https://russian.rt.com/article/69298>.

²² Rossotrudnichestvo used budget funding inefficiently – Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation. (09.06.2016). *Regnum*. <https://regnum.ru/news/2142931.html>.

²³ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation "On Some Aspects of Governance In International Cooperation." <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102124100&rdk=7>.

²⁴ Programs. Official website of Rossotrudnichestvo. Accessed via Wayback Machine on 18.02.2022. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220218091030/https://rwp.agency/programmy/>.

Rossotrudnichestvo offices and representatives are subordinated to the Russian state and are managed centrally from Moscow. Russia's president decides on any alterations to the structure and functions of these offices.²⁵ According to the Statute of Rossotrudnichestvo offices,²⁶ their work is regulated by the laws of the Russian Federation, as well as by the decrees, resolutions, and orders of the president, government, ministries and Rossotrudnichestvo central apparatus, Russia's international agreements and the laws of the host countries. The central apparatus is responsible for the offices' property management, while the ambassador of Russia to the host country exercises general management and oversight. The analysis of administration at Rossotrudnichestvo abroad representations²⁷ demonstrates how its central office's strategy is implemented and how the top management controls the work of these representations and centrally defines and influences their work.

With the appointment of Yevgeniy Primakov as head of Rossotrudnichestvo, the organisation began a rebranding effort to modernise and unify its image. As the word "Rossotrudnichestvo" is allegedly difficult for foreign audiences to pronounce, a suggestion was put forward in late 2020 to change its name to something more colloquial. In March 2021, Russian science and culture centres were renamed Russian Houses, and Rossotrudnichestvo ended up with the Russian House as its second unofficial name. Its new logo, based on the new name, was publicly introduced in September 2021.²⁸

It appears that the rebranding was done in preparation for implementing the strategy to create a network of non-state Russian Houses, which was announced in September 2021²⁹. The declared goals of these changes include expanding the geographic presence of Rossotrudnichestvo, primarily going beyond the capitals of the host countries where its offices are currently concentrated and engaging a larger foreign audience. Under the new guidelines, a Russian House abroad can be opened by foreign and Russian partner organisations, private Russian schools and local higher education institutions, non-profit organisations, "compatriots" abroad, and graduates of Russian universities. According to Nadana Fridrikhson, press-secretary for Rossotrudnichestvo, the Russian House is transforming into a "franchise" of

25 Statute of the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent State Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation approved by Decree No1315 of the President of the Russian Federation dated 06.09.2008. <https://rs.gov.ru/upload/iblock/29c/29cbf441764f36ebab10fbfb8f1e9396.pdf>.

26 Statute of the Offices of the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent State Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation beyond the Russian Federation, and on Representatives of the Agency at Diplomatic Missions of the Russian Federation. <https://rwp.agency/agency/open-a/index-detail/normativnye-dokumenty-reglamentiruyushchie-deyatelnost-rossotrudnichestva/>.

27 About the new logo of Russian Houses. https://rwp.agency/press-sluzhba/zayavleniya/?ELEMENT_ID=295.

28 Rossotrudnichestvo presents a new brand style for Russian Houses abroad. <https://rwp.agency/news/282/>.

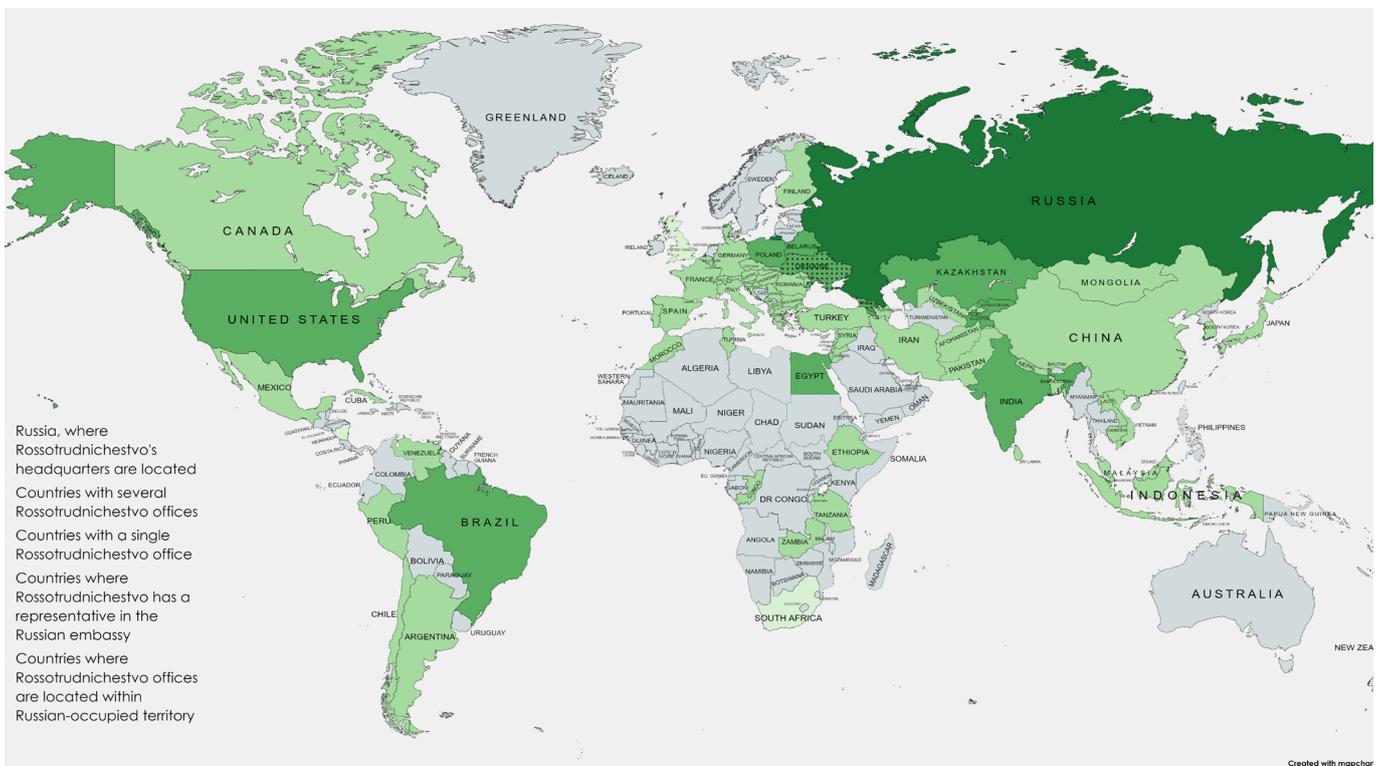
29 Russkiy Mir Foundation set up its offices similarly, at least until 2015. See more at Masiyenko Yu., Zahryvenko K., Koval N., Tereshchenko D. (2022) The Russian Flag Will Be Flown Wherever Russian Is Spoken: "Russkiy Mir" Foundation. https://ui.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/fond_russkiy-myr_analitychna-zapyska_-2-chastyna.pdf. pp. 33–36.

sorts.³⁰

The initiative of establishing Rossotrudnichestvo agencies with a non-government status has the potential to significantly accelerate and simplify the emergence of new offices and increase their number, thereby promoting the Kremlin's agenda faster and more effectively. The office that opened in Sudan in early 2022 provides one example in support of this assumption: its director was already spreading the Kremlin's false narratives about the causes and context of Russia's war against Ukraine in the first month after it began (see subsection *Doves of peace, hawks of war: Rossotrudnichestvo after the full-scale Invasion below for more details*).

Rosotrudnichestvo is present in 80 countries through 97 offices, including 73 Russian centres of science and culture in 62 countries and 24 representatives with embassies in 21 countries, according to the Programmes section of its official website.³¹ Despite the announced rebranding, Rosotrudnichestvo continues to refer to its offices as the Russian Centre of Science and Culture or the Russian House. For example, the office in Moldova uses different titles for its website³² and Facebook page.

Map 1. Rosotrudnichestvo's offices abroad



30 Briefing by Rosotrudnichestvo press-secretary Nadana Fridrikhson: Agency accomplishments in 2021 and plans for 2022. Russkiy Dom Youtube channel. <https://youtu.be/s89EA9KtcUY>.

31 Programs. Official website of Rosotrudnichestvo. Accessed via Wayback Machine on 18.02.2022. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220218091030/https://rwp.agency/programmy/>.

32 Rosotrudnichestvo in Moldova. <http://www.rcnk.md/kontaktynaya-informaciya/>.

Chart 2. Host countries for foreign offices of Rossotrudnichestvo³³

Region	Number	Countries*
CIS, occupied parts of Georgia: Abkhazia and South Ossetia	16	Azerbaijan, Armenia (2)**, Belarus (3), Kazakhstan (2), Kyrgyzstan (2), Moldova, Tajikistan (2), Uzbekistan, occupied territory of Georgia: Abkhazia and South Ossetia
The Middle East and North Africa	9	Egypt (2), Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia
Asia	22	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, India (5), Indonesia, Iran, Cambodia, China, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, South Korea, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Japan
Europe	29	Austria, Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Hungary, Germany, Greece, Denmark, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland (2), Portugal, Romania, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, Finland, France, Croatia, Montenegro, Czechia, Switzerland UK (<i>representative at the Russian Embassy, not a proper office</i>)
America	12	Argentina, Brasil (2), Venezuela, Canada, Cuba, Mexico, Peru, USA (2), Chile Nicaragua (<i>representative at the Russian Embassy, not a proper office</i>)
Africa	5	Zambia, Congo, Tanzania, Ethiopia South Africa (<i>representative at the Russian Embassy, not a proper office</i>)
Total	93	

* Rossotrudnichestvo uses the vocabulary and categorising for countries and territories that are typical for the Russian regime. For example, the occupied territories of Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, recognised as independent unilaterally by Russia, are placed in the same cohort as independent countries. Also, it uses such vocabulary for the countries that used to be part of the Soviet Union. For example, it uses Belorussiya, Kyrgyzia, and Moldavia instead of their current official names: Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova. This is just one illustration of the way Rossotrudnichestvo approaches naming other countries. Other documents and communications by Rossotrudnichestvo persistently use old Soviet or Russian imperial names for the countries that used to be part of the Soviet Union, not their official names. Examples include Pribaltica for the Baltic States or na Ukraine instead of v Ukraine for the phrase "in Ukraine." This practice points to the preservation of Russia's imperialist perspective of the countries in the post-Soviet space and attempts to legitimise quasi-entities established with Russia's support and unrecognised by most countries across the world. See Russian Houses. Official website of Rossotrudnichestvo. Accessed via Wayback Machine on 18.02.2022. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220218091030/https://rwp.agency/programmy/>.

** The number in the brackets hereinafter marks the number of offices in the country. If there is no number in brackets next to a country's name, this means that it hosts just one office of Rossotrudnichestvo.

³³ It is important to note that the total number of offices and representatives listed in the Russian Houses section on the website and in the chart below, respectively, is smaller than the number specified in the Programmes section and seems to be incomplete. For example, the Russian House in Donetsk is mentioned in other sections of the website but is not on the list in the Russian Houses section.

In public documents and on the official website, **CIS countries, a traditional focus of Russia's cultural diplomacy, are identified as geographic coverage priorities.**³⁴ In a briefing on Rossotrudnichestvo's performance in 2021 and its plans for 2022,³⁵ press-secretary Nadana Fridrikhson also highlighted the organisation's projects in CIS countries. She cited the Agency's activities in Ukraine,³⁶ which were implemented despite sanctions imposed against the organisation by the Ukrainian National Security and Defence Council in 2021.³⁷ This indicates that Rossotrudnichestvo continues to prioritise Ukraine despite the Ukrainian government's ban on its operations. Even more illustrative of this point is the fact that the Russian House in Kyiv maintains its Facebook account and continues to post content until this day.

In numerous public documents, the countries covered by Rossotrudnichestvo are typically categorised into the "CIS countries" that include a number of post-Soviet states, as well as the Baltic States and Georgia, and the "far abroad," which refers to the remainder of the world. This outlines two major operational areas. One is the territory of the former Soviet Union, which may confirm Russia's strategic aspiration to maintain control over all post-Soviet countries in one way or another. The other is the rest of the world, which, according to Rossotrudnichestvo's publicly available documents, including the annual statement,³⁸ plan of activities,³⁹ public declaration of goals and objectives⁴⁰ and others, appears rather vaguely defined as these documents offer no nuanced strategies for various regions of the world, (or at least they are not publicly articulated).

A focus on gathering "compatriots": Offices in Ukraine⁴¹

As soon as Rossotrudnichestvo was reformed in 2008 to prioritise former Soviet Union countries, Ukraine became a priority. In 2008, the Russian Centre of Science and Culture opened in Kyiv, and the one in Simferopol opened in

34 Agency. Official website of Rossotrudnichestvo. Accessed via Wayback Machine on 18.02.2022). <https://web.archive.org/web/20220218091030/https://rwp.agency/programmy/>.

35 Briefing by Rossotrudnichestvo press-secretary Nadana Fridrikhson: Agency accomplishments in 2021 and plans for 2022. Russkiy Dom Youtube channel. <https://youtu.be/s89EA9KtcUY>.

36 Ibid.

37 Decree No140/2021 of the President of Ukraine "On the Decision of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine" dated April 2, 2021, "On Imposing Personal Special Economic and Other Restrictive Measures (Sanctions)." Official website of the President of Ukraine. <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/1402021-38381>.

38 Report on the performance of its functions by Rossotrudnichestvo in 2020. Rossotrudnichestvo official website. <https://rwp.agency/agency/open-a/index-detail/doklady-o-rezultatakh-deyatelnosti-rossotrudnichestva/?special=Y>.

39 2022 Action Plan for the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent State Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation. Rossotrudnichestvo official website. <https://rwp.agency/agency/open-a/index-detail/plany/?special=Y> (link to the Open Agency section – the link to the document was unavailable as of 28.07.2022)

40 Public declaration of Rossotrudnichestvo goals and objectives for 2022. Rossotrudnichestvo official website. <https://rwp.agency/agency/open-a/index-detail/plany/?special=Y> (link to the Open Agency section – the link to the document was unavailable as of 28.07.2022)

41 We express gratitude to the Centre of Defence Strategies for the materials provided for this section.

2012 and closed in 2014. Another representative office was at the General Consulate of Russia in Odesa. Ukraine was viewed as a battleground of an uncompromising fight against American or, more generally, Western soft power, and thus a significant number of resources were invested there.

“Our competitors and adversaries have been expanding their influence on the minds of Ukrainians all these years using soft power tools. Here is a serious difference in our approaches: while we traditionally assumed that the factors of cultural, linguistic, and historical proximity, economic ties, and a large Russian diaspora would act on their own without constant external impetus from our side, the competitors have invested massively in the local NGOs and, through them, they have consistently peddled onto the population the “European” idea as their goal for Ukrainian civil society, not only in the West but also in the East of Ukraine.”

Konstantin Kosachev, Head of Rossotrudnichestvo in 2012-2014.⁴²

These offices operated activities that are rather customary for Rossotrudnichestvo, although the substance of their work in Ukraine has caused increasing concern, especially after 2014.⁴³ Despite Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine, the Kyiv office of Rossotrudnichestvo kept operating after 2014. According to some data, it held nearly 700 cultural events across the country in 2017 alone, despite the Russian occupation of a part of Ukraine’s territory. Most of the criticism of Rossotrudnichestvo was aimed at its attempts to reconstruct common identity in the post-Soviet space through organising events that promoted (outdated) Russian historical narratives, fostering contacts and support for militarised youth groups, persistently promoting the learning of Russian language, culture, and literature among children and youth in some regions, proactively encouraging local students to study in Russian universities, and implementing other projects to engage educational, cultural, and academic professionals. Furthermore, its offices were suspected of spying on and incorporating agents of influence among central and local authorities.

For example, the work of Rossotrudnichestvo’s “local partners” in Ukraine, such as the International Pedagogical Club in Kharkiv, the Kyiv Society of Russian Compatriots Homeland, the Kharkiv Society of East Slavs, the International Association of Slavic Unity, was frequently unambiguously pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian. Rossotrudnichestvo’s activities in Ukraine often sparked scandals. For example, its office in Ukraine brought 70 Ukrainian school students to Moscow

⁴² Rossotrudnichestvo Head Konstantin Kosachev: “Severalfold increase in attendance of ballet courses during the crisis.” (13.05.2014). *Vedomosti*.

<https://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/articles/2014/03/13/v-krizis-v-razy-povysilas-poseschaemost-kursov-baleta>.

⁴³ How the Kremlin exploits soft power for hybrid influence: The case of Rossotrudnichestvo in Ukraine. Ukrainian Crisis Media Center. <https://uacrisis.org/uk/how-kremlin-uses-soft-power-for-malign-influence-case-of-rossotrudnichestvo-in-ukraine/>.

and Saint Petersburg as part of the Hello, Russia! Programme;⁴⁴ activists from Ukrainian nationalist organisations broke into its office in Kyiv,⁴⁵ its operations were blocked,⁴⁶ and Security Service of Ukraine, the SBU⁴⁷ and parliamentarians⁴⁸ made multiple attempts to ban Rossotrudnichestvo in Ukraine to protect Ukraine's national interests.

In 2018, SBU counterintelligence uncovered and terminated Rossotrudnichestvo employees' anti-Ukrainian activities at the Russian Consulate General in Odesa.⁴⁹ Multiple instances of Rossotrudnichestvo representatives acting against Ukraine's national interests were uncovered. Among other things, the SBU discovered that these representatives engaged Ukrainian citizens who were members of pro-Russian civic associations and movements in anti-Ukrainian activities under the guise of so-called Humanitarian and Social Programmes of the Russian Federation. One Consulate employee was suspected of working for Russian security services. His illegal activities on the territory of Ukraine were proven, and he was declared persona non-grata.

The road towards a legislative ban of Rossotrudnichestvo operations in Ukraine was arduous⁵⁰, partly because the Agreement Between the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the Government of the Russian Federation on the Establishment and Operations of Information and Culture Centres⁵¹ had to be repealed. Finally, with decree No140/2021 in April 2021, the President of Ukraine enacted the decision of Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council "On Personal Special Economic and Other Restrictive Measures (Sanctions)." Among other things, this decision applied various unilateral restrictions on Rossotrudnichestvo for three years, disabling and de facto terminating its operations in Ukraine.⁵² The request to the National Security and Defence Council that resulted in sanctions against Rossotrudnichestvo was made after

44 Russians boast about sending a big group of Ukrainian school students to Russia. *Ukrayinska Pravda*. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2017/08/16/7152369/>.

45 Nationalists break into the office of Rossotrudnichestvo in Kyiv. *Ukrayinska Pravda*. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2018/02/17/7171957/>.

46 The activists who "wall up" Russian banks block the Total Dictation in Kyiv. *Ukrayinska Pravda*. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2017/04/8/7140655/>.

47 SBU tells how it targeted the Russian center that brings children to Russia. *Ukrayinska Pravda*. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2017/09/19/7155628/>.

48 Verkhovna Rada considers a law to ban Russian cultural centre. *Ukrayinska Pravda*. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2017/09/19/7155664/>.

49 SBU counterintelligence discovers anti-Ukrainian operations of Rossotrudnichestvo and a Russian diplomat in Odesa. *CENSOR.NET*. <https://censor.net/ua/n3069021>.

50 Podoliak: Russian cultural centre in Kyiv is a brainwashing spot. *Hromadske Radio*. <https://hromadske.radio/podcasts/kyiv-donbas/rosiyskyy-kulturnyy-centr-u-kyievi-ce-misce-promyvannya-mizkiv-podolyak>.

51 Agreement Between the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the Government of the Russian Federation "On the Establishment and Conditions for Information and Culture Centres." Official website of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/643_090#Text.

52 Limits and scope of Russian international development assistance. (03.08.2021). *Russian International Affairs Council*. <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/granitsy-i-masshtaby-rossiyskogo-sodeystviya-mezhdunarodnomu-razvitiyu/>.

the Russian Centre of Science and Culture held an event in Kyiv on March 9, 2021, titled *Summarizing the International Creative Competition of Modern Poets On the Commemoration Day for the Russian-Ukrainian Poet Taras Shevchenko*. This attempt at cultural appropriation of Shevchenko was met with resentment and condemnation from Ukraine's MFA and civil society.⁵³ On November 30, 2021, a Russian House was opened in Donetsk that Russia temporarily occupies.⁵⁴

Importantly, Rossotrudnichestvo leaders have long served as mouthpieces for Russian propaganda on Ukraine, echoing identical talking points to Russia's state media and MFA top officials in the media and their social network accounts. In March 2014, Konstantin Kosachev, then head of Rossotrudnichestvo, spoke about "the US and EU investing giant resources in ideology in Ukraine, which resulted in EuroMaidan."⁵⁵ Eleonora Mitrofanova echoed this point in 2018 when she spoke about \$ 1.5 billion that the US allegedly spent on NGOs in Ukraine to "undermine the regime."⁵⁶ In March 2022, Yevgeniy Primakov threatened to shell Kyiv downtown and critical infrastructure if Ukraine attempted to deoccupy the Donbas.⁵⁷

53 MFA: We object to any Russian narratives on Taras Shevchenko. (29.03.2021). **Radio Svoboda**. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-mzs-shevchenko-ros-tsentr/31174651.html>.

54 A Russian House opens in Donetsk. (30.11.2021). Rossotrudnichestvo official website. <https://rwp.agency/news/770/>.

55 Kosachev: EU and US have invested giant resources in ideology in Ukraine. **Vzgliad**. <https://vz.ru/news/2014/3/13/676829.html> (accessed on 11.07.2022)

56 Head of Rossotrudnichestvo explains the failure of soft power in Ukraine. (26.05.2018). **RBC**. <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/26/05/2018/5b0931c49a7947552a58086d>.

57 Bankova, airfields, power stations, defence facilities: Head of Rossotrudnichestvo threatens shelling Kyiv downtown and key infrastructure. (11.07.2022), **Espresso**. https://espresso.tv/news/2021/03/10/glava_quotrossotrudnychestvaquot_pogrozhuye_udarom_po_centru_kyyeva_ta_klyuchovym_obyektam_infrastruktury.

A THREE-HEADED DRAGON: KEY AREAS OF WORK

Rossotrudnichestvo operates in three broad areas: supporting and expanding Russian cultural and humanitarian presence abroad by promoting Russian culture and accomplishments of Russian science, promoting Russian education abroad and strengthening the presence of the Russian language in the world; **supporting “compatriots”** and **assisting international development**.¹ It focuses on a range of clearly defined target audiences.²

Russian and foreign youth is one such audience. Systematic exchange programmes, such as *Hello, Russia!* and *New Generation*, focus on engagement with students and young professionals. Numerous cooperation projects with foreign educational institutions to promote Russian education and science are another priority. These include educational programmes for international students at Russian higher education facilities and further cooperation with their graduates.

The second important audience includes those whose profession is related to **learning the Russian language** to promote it abroad. This audience includes teachers of Russian as a foreign language, including those employed by Russian Houses, and a wide range of people interested in learning and practising Russian and obtaining a degree in Russian.

Another audience is the **expert community** (e. g. historians, art critics) and foreign journalists engaged in various events and cooperation projects to expand Russia’s cultural and humanitarian presence abroad. Finally, **Russian artists or researchers from various regions** contribute to developing international contracts in education, science and technology, culture, and the economy.

The Russians abroad, or “compatriots” engaged in projects and events in other areas, are the meta-audience of Rossotrudnichestvo. A direct policy of encouragement of their ties to the Russian motherland is targeted at them. This policy also claims to protect Russian interests in the target country and contribute to their voluntary resettlement to Russia.

1 Rossotrudnichestvo Performance Report on Fulfilling Its Tasks in 2020. Rossotrudnichestvo official website. <https://rwp.agency/agency/open-a/index-detail/doklady-o-rezultatakh-deyatelnosti-rossotrudnichestva/?special=Y>.

2 Rossotrudnichestvo official website. Accessed via Wayback Machine on 18.02.2022. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220218091030/https://rwp.agency/>.

Culture, language, youth: expansion of Russian presence in the world

Russia's expanding cultural and humanitarian presence abroad can be roughly categorised into the following subgroups: cultural diplomacy projects, projects to engage the youth, and projects to promote the Russian language abroad.

A) Cultural diplomacy projects

Russian culture and the achievements of Russian science are promoted with the conventional means of exhibitions; cinema screenings and film days; thematic festivals; tours of Russian music, theatre groups; lectures, roundtables and thematic workshops, and through cooperation with educational facilities abroad.³ Since 2010, Rossotrudnichestvo has been supporting and maintaining burial sites of "historical and memorial significance for Russia." Before 2019, the financial sources for this had been drawn from the money earned by the Rossotrudnichestvo offices. In 2020-2022, state budget funding was also utilised for this purpose.⁴ In 2022, Rossotrudnichestvo planned to launch a system of microgrants from \$ 300 to \$ 1,000 to implement the projects that are thematically related to Russia in science, environment protection, and preservation of historical memory.⁵

In this category, Rossotrudnichestvo promotes Russian narratives proactively. For example, Russian Houses abroad extensively and comprehensively cover the topics of wars of the past and Russian feats in general. For instance, in 2020, a series of documentaries was subtitled in eight foreign languages for the 100th anniversary of the imperial Black Sea fleet departing from Crimea;⁶ the Russian House in Belgrade prepared an exhibition project on the Serbian-Ottoman Wars; a conference on the war in Yugoslavia and NATO bombing was organised.⁷

Still, in other countries, much effort is invested in spreading Russian myths and interpretations of World War II, or the "Great Patriotic War," in contemporary Russian parlance. The Russian President's Decree No. 211, dated May 9, 2018, "On Preparations and Celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the Victory in the 1941-1945 Great Patriotic War," outlined the activities to celebrate

3 Briefing by Rossotrudnichestvo press-secretary Nadana Fridrikhson: Agency accomplishments in 2021 and plans for 2022. *Russkiy Dom Youtube channel*. <https://youtu.be/s89EA9KtcUY>.

4 Rossotrudnichestvo will receive funds for important burials abroad. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. <https://rg.ru/2019/06/14/rossotrudnichestvo-poluchit-sredstva-na-znachimye-zahoroneniia-za-rubezhom.html>

5 Rossotrudnichestvo will allocate microgrants for cultural events. https://www.bfro.be/ru/rossotrudnichestvo-budet-vydavat-mikrogranty-na-kul-turnye-meroprijatija.html?cmp_id=80&news_id=33463.

6 Rossotrudnichestvo Performance Report on Fulfilling Its Tasks in 2020. Rossotrudnichestvo official website. <https://rwp.agency/agency/open-a/index-detail/doklady-o-rezultatakh-deyatelnosti-rossotrudnichestva/?special=Y>, p. 6

7 For the 22nd anniversary of NATO aggression against SFR Yugoslavia. *Russkiy Dom*. <https://ruskidom.rs/2021/03/23/k-22-j-godovshhine-nachala-agressii-nato-na-srju/>.

the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II across the world in 2020. The content for some events was distributed from headquarters to all offices worldwide and subsequently translated into seven languages. Monitoring of titles and topics of events proves that Rossotrudnichestvo focused on strengthening the narrative of the “great victory of the Soviet people” and its role in the global context. The events included the St. George Ribbon initiative;⁸ eight documentary chronicle films with subtitles screened via 26 online platforms of Rossotrudnichestvo offices; ten feature films of the 20th century; and the premiere of the Immortal Regiment: A Global Movement⁹ in seventy offices of Rossotrudnichestvo. Rossotrudnichestvo does not need anniversary dates to substantiate its intense exploitation of the topic of World War II. Forty-five out of 105 publications on the website of its Ukrainian office between May 1 and July 16, 2020, were at least somehow related to World War II.¹⁰

Another important aspect of the Russian Houses’ work in the CIS countries is **nostalgia and attempts to preserve and fuel positive interpretations of the Soviet experience.** For example, when the Russian House opened a centre for the Russian language at a school in Ulaanbaatar, the school was renamed for Semen Budennyi. The Facebook post about the event described him as “*Marshal of the Soviet Union, holder of three Hero of the Soviet Union titles... first head of the Society of Soviet-Mongolian Friendship, founded in 1958.*”

At the same time, **Rossotrudnichestvo does not shun providing open ideological support for the Kremlin’s aggressive policy in the international arena.** In 2022, it held a series of events for the eighth anniversary of the

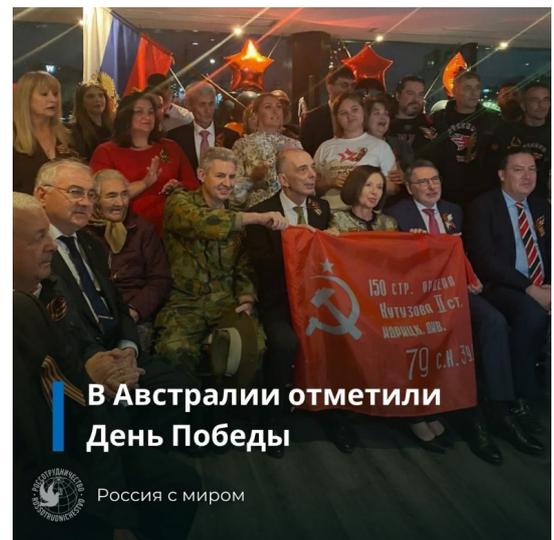


Photo from [Rossotrudnichestvo’s Facebook page](#).

The inscription on the photo goes, “Victory Day was marked in Australia. Russia with peace/world”. May 8, 2022. There is also a Soviet and a Russian flag, Soviet (red) stars, and some people wear St. George ribbons.

8 A two-colour ribbon with three black and two orange stripes, used in Russian state decorations and awards. It is mostly known as a symbol of the Soviet Union’s fight and victory over Nazism through the medal “For Victory Over Germany in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945.” The ribbon is known to have been used since the 18th century, when the Russian empress Catherine the Great founded the Order of Saint George, a military award of the Russian Empire (hence its name). Among other things, Russian propaganda is exploiting it today as a symbol of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine since 2014. The use of these symbols has been banned in Ukraine since 2017. A number of other countries, including Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Moldova, have restricted its use as well.

9 The Immortal Regiment started in 2017 as a civic initiative to commemorate those who were killed in WWII, or the Great Patriotic War, as it is called in Russia. In recent years, Russian federal authorities have supported this march with photographs of family members who fought in the war. Along with the St. George ribbon, now a symbol of “Russkiy Mir” supporters, the function of the Immortal Regiment march is to glorify the military experience of the Soviet Union and to shape a militarist, imperialist and anti-West Russian-Soviet identity.

10 How the Kremlin uses soft power for hybrid influence: Rossotrudnichestvo in Ukraine. (09.09.2020). *Ukrainian Crisis Media Center*. <https://uacrisis.org/uk/how-kremlin-uses-soft-power-for-malign-influence-case-of-rossotrudnichestvo-in-ukraine>.

“reunification of Crimea with Russia” that **pushed false messages in direct violation of international law and well-aligned with Russian propaganda narratives**. Examples include a photo exhibition about Crimea at the Russian House in New Delhi, or the screening of the “Militant Girl” («Ополченочка») film at the Russian House in Chisinau focused on presenting Russian narratives on Russia’s military aggression in the Donbas.

In terms of the topics it covers, Rossotrudnichestvo **primarily targets events from the past** and offers far less coverage of modern culture and art. For instance, its many art events, especially the ones marking memorable dates, traditionally represent classic Russian culture, including literature, poetry, music, art, ballet, and cinema, and the best-known representatives from each category, such as Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, Dmitri Shostakovich, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Ivan Aivazovsky, Sergei Diaghilev. In another example of its conservative framework, Rossotrudnichestvo consistently refers to **religious motifs**. Plans to open an Orthodox church in collaboration with the office of Rossotrudnichestvo (the 2020 report mentions this initiative in Singapore) is a recent example.¹¹ Rossotrudnichestvo’s Statute lists cooperation with religious organisations as one of its functions.¹²

This backward perspective stems from the Russian propaganda concerning the country’s past accomplishments and from Russia’s utter failure to offer anything modern and appealing. Therefore Konstantin Kosachev, former head of Rossotrudnichestvo, emphasised the importance of using the Russian language and the country’s artistic heritage after discussing the failure to promote “Russian brands” in the world¹³:



Photo from Rossotrudnichestvo’s Facebook page.

The inscription in the photo says, “Pushkins walk around Kazakhstan. Russia with peace/world”. June 7, 2022. The text in the post states that the flash mob was dedicated to Alexander Pushkin’s birthday. Unidentified persons were wearing masks with Russia’s most famous poet’s face.

11 Rossotrudnichestvo Performance Report on Fulfilling Its Tasks in 2020. Rossotrudnichestvo official website. <https://rwp.agency/agency/open-a/index-detail/doklady-o-rezultatakh-deyatelnosti-rossotrudnichestva/?special=Y>. Pp.12-13.

12 Statute of the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent State Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation approved by Decree No1315 of the President of the Russian Federation dated 06.09.2008. <https://rs.gov.ru/upload/iblock/29c/29cbf441764f36ebab10fbfb8f1e9396.pdf>.

13 Konstantin Kosachev: There is no split in the Russian World as a result of developments in Ukraine. (19.08.2014). *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. <https://rg.ru/2014/08/20/kosachev.html>.

“All this is without exaggeration the world’s treasury, and all this is our unique heritage. **We do not need to invent new brands artificially.** We just need to preserve what we have, love it as much as we can, and know how to make it serve our national interests.”

B) Youth-oriented projects

Former Rossotrudnichestvo head Eleonora Mitrofanova identified a focus on working with the youth as the top priority for reorganising the organisation’s work in 2018.¹⁴ As part of this effort, **Rossotrudnichestvo proactively engages students and young professionals from foreign countries in cooperation.** This includes primarily events and programmes engaging this audience in **studies, internships, or work in Russia.** This is intended to immerse them into the country’s culture and, most importantly, facilitates the formation and maintenance of an extensive network of personal connections between foreigners and their peers in Russia.

Given the organisation’s extensive network of partner institutions in host countries, the Concept for promoting Russian education abroad via Rossotrudnichestvo representations¹⁵ was approved in 2014. Rossotrudnichestvo appeals to dozens of thousands of foreigners and engages them in visiting Russia and studying there. According to its 2020 report, it held “awareness raising events” in sixteen countries to present and promote education in Russia. Over 16,500 people in total attended those events. Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Education and Science participated in 2020/2021 campaign to recruit students for Russian universities together with Rossotrudnichestvo. The quota for international students from 171 countries was 15,000.¹⁶

Rossotrudnichestvo places particular emphasis on **IT and international relations**, among other areas. Its 2020 performance report highlighted the engagement of “talented foreign students” to study computer technologies and participate in the **DIGITAL PEOPLE** competition as part of the effort to develop international cooperation with Russia regarding the digital economy.¹⁷ **InteRussia**¹⁸ programme of research internships mentioned above offers

14 Head of Rossotrudnichestvo to RBC: “We will not write in Latin.” (12.09.2018). **RBC.** <https://www.rbc.ru/interview/politics/12/09/2018/5b90ee6f9a7947682967bd0a>.

15 The Concept of Promoting Russian Education Through Rossotrudnichestvo Offices Abroad. (approved by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia on 27.03.2014). Codified in the Russian Federation: Current legislation of the Russian Federation. <https://rulaws.ru/acts/Kontseptsiya-prodvizheniya-rossiyskogo-obrazovaniya-na-baze-predstavitelstv-Rossotrudnichestva-zarubezhom/>.

16 Rossotrudnichestvo Performance Report on Fulfilling Its Tasks in 2020. Rossotrudnichestvo official website. <https://rwp.agency/agency/open-a/index-detail/doklady-o-rezultatakh-devatelnosti-rossotrudnichestva/?special=Y>. p.8

17 Ibid. p. 7.

18 Internship programme InteRussia: call for applications is open. <https://english.mgimo.ru/announce/interussia-03-22>.

another example of a programme that seeks to establish international contacts, establish close cooperation throughout the programme and develop regular professional relations among its alumni beyond the programme. Implemented jointly with the Moscow State Institute of International Affairs and Gorchakov Fund since 2021, it targets young foreign professionals aged 25-35 who specialise in international relations and political studies. It offers visits to Russian government institutions, universities, think tanks, and non-governmental organisations, as well as collaboration with Russian experts. These are efforts to indoctrinate foreigners with Russian (geo)political and cultural narratives.

The New Generation long-term programme has been in place since 2011. It suggests that young professionals between the ages of 25 and 35 from the political, social, academic, and business communities travel to Russia on a short-term basis to establish professional contacts and long-term partnerships with Russian state and non-state entities, as well as youth and social organisations. Annually, over 1,000 people visit Russia through this programme. For example, 38 attendees came to the Eurasia Global International Youth Forum from 17 countries in the CIS, Europe, Asia and Africa in 2021. Organised by the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs (RosMolodezh), it declares the goal of building dialogue and cooperation between the youth of Russia and other countries. Three hundred sixty-nine foreigners from 54 countries visited Russia in 2021 via this programme. In 2020, a trip for foreigners to the occupied Crimea was organised as well.¹⁹

Generally, Rossotrudnichestvo pays much attention and invests generously in working with young people in an effort to increase the number of people who have a favourable perception of Russia, share its worldview, and develop a certain degree of loyalty to it as they become adult professionals. In addition to this long-term objective, Rossotrudnichestvo pursues more attainable and immediate goals. Among other things, it collaborates with the state corporation Rosatom on humanitarian projects in countries where nuclear power plant

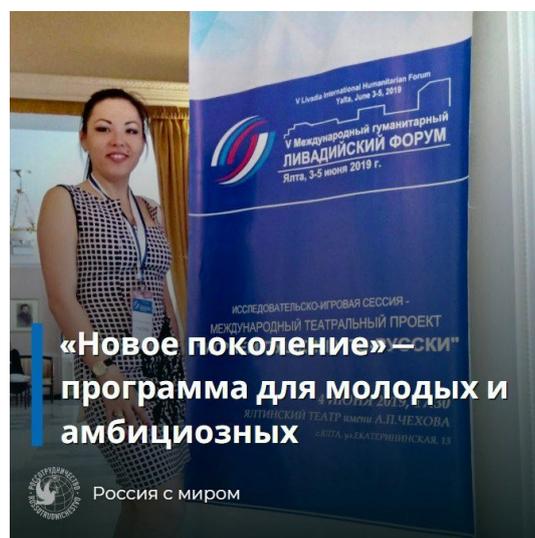


Photo from [Rossotrudnichestvo's Facebook page](#).

The inscription on the photo goes, "New generation' is a programme for the young and ambitious. Russia with peace/world". July 15, 2022. A representative of one of the self-proclaimed "Transnistrian Moldovan Republic's" political parties is profiled in the post's text. Through the New Generation programme, the woman participated in a forum held in Yalta, which is in the Ukraine's Autonomous Republic of Crimea, which is currently occupied by Russia.

¹⁹ Rossotrudnichestvo Performance Report on Fulfilling Its Tasks in 2020. Rossotrudnichestvo official website. <https://rwp.agency/agency/open-a/index-detail/doklady-o-rezultatakh-deyatelnosti-rossotrudnichestva/?special=Y>. P. 16

construction is planned. Quotas for students from these countries to study in Russian universities and eventually obtain employment at Rosatom are the key instrument here.²⁰

C) Projects to promote the Russian language abroad

Promoting the Russian language abroad is an integral part of Rossotrudnichestvo's operations. It encompasses a vast array of events, such as Russian language courses at Russian Houses; assistance with the opening of affiliate organisations, preparatory sections and departments of Russian educational facilities in foreign universities; professional development courses for teachers at Russian schools and of Russian as a foreign language; and summer camps for children and youth.

In 2020, 66 offices of Rossotrudnichestvo offered Russian language courses to nearly 18,000 students in 58 countries. Overall, nearly 3,000 events were held to promote the Russian language worldwide in 2020. In total, approximately 900,000 people attended them. Notably, the courses in the US suspended operations "for political reasons".²¹

This operation field is supported by content platforms of the *System of Support for Russian Schools*, an electronic resource for educational institutions abroad; and *My Russian*, an e-library for a wide range of users that already has had over 150,000 "book borrowings" over 2020.²² Rossotrudnichestvo even utilised the 2018 FIFA World Cup, which was hosted by Russia, to promote the Russian language. In the lead-up to the championship, it opened "fan houses" in 35 countries and held Russian language classes in 11.²³

In this context, the work to promote the Russian language and Russian-language literature in certain post-Soviet countries and Russian-occupied territories is of particular importance. The 2020 report mentions "spreading the model of expanding the presence of the Russian language in preschool education using Russian preschool education techniques in teaching Russian in Abkhazia, Moldova, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and South Ossetia"; providing Rossotrudnichestvo employees with all types of textbooks and methodology guidance for teaching Russian; fiction and non-fiction literature in Russian that is to be "subsequently gifted to Russian schools/classes." Notably, over 100,000 copies of books were provided to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the occupied

20 Rosatom joined the II Youth Forum Russia-Africa: Nuclear Education for Sustainable Development at the People's Friendship University of Russia. (25.11.2021). https://www.rosatom.ru/journalist/news/pri-uchastii-rosatoma-v-rudn-proshel-ii-molodezhnyy-forum-rossiya-afrika-yadernoe-obrazovanie-dlya-u/?sphrase_id=3031826.

21 Rossotrudnichestvo Performance Report on Fulfilling Its Tasks in 2020. Rossotrudnichestvo official website. <https://rwp.agency/agency/open-a/index-detail/doklady-o-rezultatakh-deyatelnosti-rossotrudnichestva/?special=Y>. Pp.9-10.

22 Ibid. 17.

23 Rossotrudnichestvo opens 35 "fan houses" to promote 2018 World Cup. (22.05.2018). **RBC**. <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreeweb/5b03dfdf9a79475aad4e002d>.

territories of Georgia, in 2020, and slightly over 60,000²⁴ to the “far-abroad” countries. A similar trend persisted in 2021: Rossotrudnichestvo provided over 169,000 copies of books to foreign countries. More than 94,000 of these were handed over to the CIS countries and the occupied territories of Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This points to the priority of preserving and strengthening the status of the Russian language in the region.

In addition to promoting and supporting the Russian language, Rossotrudnichestvo is visibly engaged in the related media campaign. The News section²⁵ on its website features numerous articles about Russian officials’ statements on what they refer to as “discrimination” against the Russian language in other countries. These statements are not directly related to the work of Rossotrudnichestvo. One example is Sergei Lavrov’s statement on the discrimination against Russian in Ukraine. According to him, Ukraine has “declared an open war on the Russian language and Russian-language education”, which is “a violation of its Constitution.” He spoke about “guarantees for the Russian, Russian-speaking and national minorities.” Other similar news, based on statements made at the informal Arria formula meeting of the UN Security Council and posted on the website in late December 2021, peddle the narrative about linguistic oppression. The titles speak for themselves: “The problems of national minorities and heroising Nazism in the Baltic States and the Black Sea region were discussed at the UN Security Council online meeting”; “An appeal of the 13-year-old Faina Savenkova from Luhansk to the UN Security Council.”

Despite Rossotrudnichestvo’s efforts to promote the Russian language, the number of Russian language learners in the world has been steadily declining since the collapse of the Soviet Union. From 2004 to 2018, it **shrank from 13 to 8.3 million.**²⁶ Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Rossotrudnichestvo and the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation work so hard to promote the Russian language. Interest in learning Russian is decreasing in most regions of the world. The only exceptions are Sub-Saharan Africa and North America, where the number of learners has increased from 19,000 to 30,000 over the past fifteen years. While Russia’s aggressive policy toward its neighbours explains the steep decline of the Russian language in post-Soviet countries, the fact that the number of Russian language learners in Asia has fallen from 570,000 to 185,000 raises questions about the effectiveness of Russian soft power institutions in this region.

²⁴ Ibid. P. 8

²⁵ News. Rossotrudnichestvo official website. https://rs.gov.ru/news/novosti_list/.

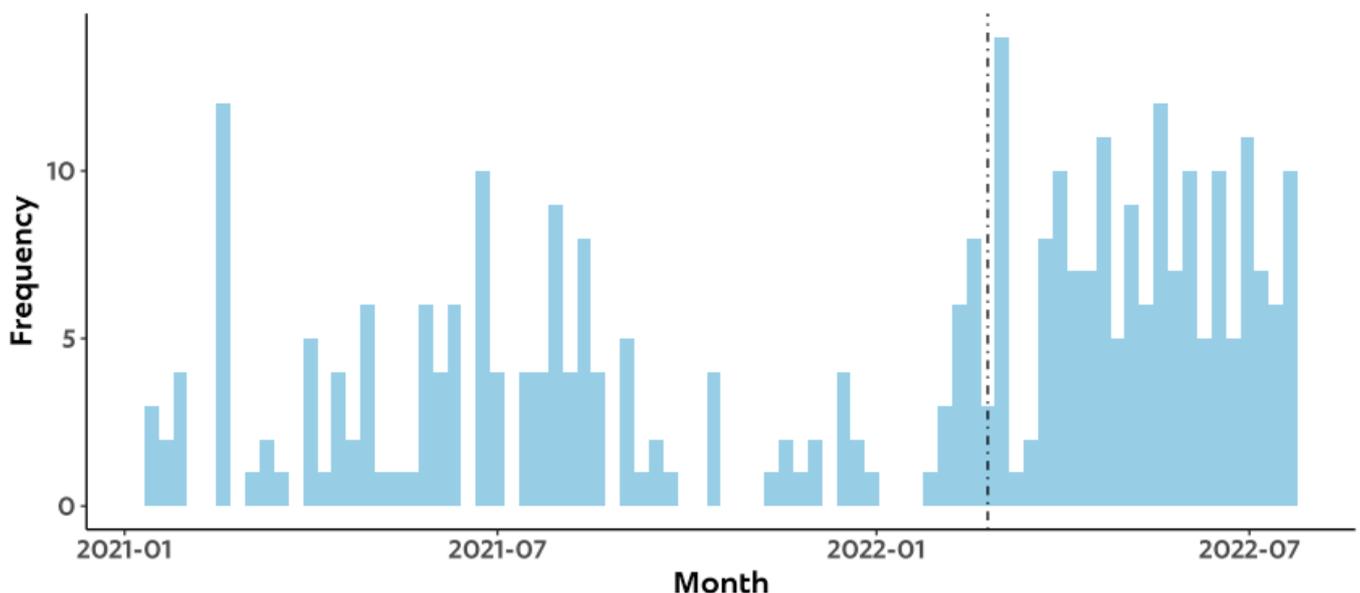
²⁶ The number of Russian learners in the world halves since the collapse of the Soviet Union. (28.09.2019). RBC. <https://www.rbc.ru/society/28/11/2019/5ddd18099a79473d0d9b0ab1>.

Gathering them all: Support for “compatriots”

Working with “compatriots” focuses on two primary objectives: encouraging Russian-speaking citizens of other countries and Russians abroad to move to Russia, on the one hand, and spreading its influence on other countries via organisations of “compatriots” Rossotrudnichestvo cooperates with, on the other. After Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, these organisations have been exploited extensively (see section *Doves of Peace, Hawks of War: Rossotrudnichestvo after the Full-Scale Invasion for more details*).

When it comes to its target audience, the term “compatriots” appears frequently in Rossotrudnichestvo’s external communication as well as the description of its projects and long-term programmes. It has been used much more frequently since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, for instance, 157 times between January and June 2022, and as many as five times on some days. In its social media posts, Rossotrudnichestvo refers to participants in various events in support of Russia abroad as “compatriots.”

Chart 2. The word “compatriot” mentioned in a week, 2021-2022



Source: Calculated from posts on Russkiy Dom Telegram channel

At the same time, the term “compatriot” is not well defined, which benefits Russian propaganda and foreign policy because it can be filled with whatever suits any given situation. The term encompasses a wide range of people, including those whose ties with contemporary Russia are questionable. According to articles 1 and 3 of Federal Law No99-Φ3 “On the State Policy of the Russian

Federation on Compatriots Abroad,” the term “compatriots” is much broader and goes far beyond individuals with Russian citizenship.

In addition to the audience that meets this criterion, Russia considers compatriots people and their descendants who permanently reside outside the Russian Federation and are part of the peoples that “... historically reside on the territory of the Russian Federation...” as well as “... people who have freely chosen spiritual, cultural, and legal ties with the Russian Federation, whose direct ascending line family members resided on the territory of the Russian Federation in the past...”. These include those who reside in the countries that were formerly a part of the Soviet Union and hold their citizenship or have no citizenship, as well as those who emigrated from these countries and obtained citizenship from other countries or have become persons without citizenship.²⁷

On March 28, 2022, Konstantin Zatulin, a member of the State Duma and director of the Institute of CIS Countries who works on citizenship, migration policy, and “compatriots,” filed a bill to amend the law on Russia’s state policy regarding “compatriots.” Among other things, he proposed to include knowledge of the Russian language as a criterion for the term “compatriot” and to more clearly outline the concept of “peoples that historically reside on the territory of the Russian Federation” by adding a list of these peoples. This list would include Belarusians and Ukrainians, among others, because he thinks they are connected to the Russians, who are considered to be state-founding people, “through the commonality of historical fate and culture”.²⁸

Essentially, he proposed to codify Russia’s political and cultural expansion over the populations of Ukraine and Belarus. While Zatulin is an ardent supporter of the concept of “compatriots” and their repatriation to Russia, he appears to have been unsuccessful in gaining the Kremlin’s support for his effort to maintain consistency between the concept of the “Russian World” and the term “compatriot.” His bill was still pending review in early August 2022 and ended up with negative feedback from the Russian government after two and a half months of waiting.²⁹ This decision was probably delayed but is likely to resurface amidst possible attempts to assimilate forced Ukrainian deportees from Russian-occupied territory.

Rossotrudnichestvo top officials were voicing similar ideas even before this legislative proposal:

²⁷ No 95462-8 Draft Law: Support System for Legislative Activity. <https://sozd.duma.gov.ru/bill/95462-8>.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Masiyenko Yu., Zahryvenko K., Koval N., Tereshchenko D. (2022) The Russian Flag Will Be Flown Wherever Russian Is Spoken: Russkiy Mir. https://ui.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Fond_russkiy-myr_analitychna-zapyska_-2-chastyina.pdf.

“There are descendants of white émigrés; dissidents of the Soviet era; economic immigrants of the late 1980s and early 1990s; global Russians of the modern time who live where they are most comfortable and travel the globe. However, there are millions upon millions of people who did not choose to become compatriots because new borders were imposed upon them when one country fell apart, and they found themselves in the new republics outside of Russia. When it comes to how their lives are, they vary greatly, but assimilation is an issue everywhere.”

Yevgeniy Primakov, Head of Rossotrudnichestvo, on the definition of “compatriots.” December 2021

This Russian policy of preventing the assimilation of the groups that meet the Russian definition of “compatriots” in other countries appears to seek their assimilation into the Russian cultural space in the future, whether it is to influence the policy of any given target country or to encourage “compatriots” to resettle to Russia.

Other statements by Rossotrudnichestvo top officials suggest that speaking Russian is the primary criterion for identifying a person as a “compatriot,” as opposed to having relatives who had lived in the territory of the Russian Federation in the past (even several generations ago) or belonging to an ethnic group that makes up the population of modern Russia. The language is also a crucial component of the “Russian world” identification in the work of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation.³⁰

“...there are four million compatriots in Ukraine, for example, according to this data. And we are well aware that there are significantly more Russian speakers there. Five million in Kazakhstan. And the number in Belarus is ridiculous, slightly over 700,000 people! But we understand that in Belarus, roughly speaking, all are compatriots.”

Yevgeniy Primakov, Head of Rossotrudnichestvo, about the number of “compatriots” in the post-Soviet territory. October 2021

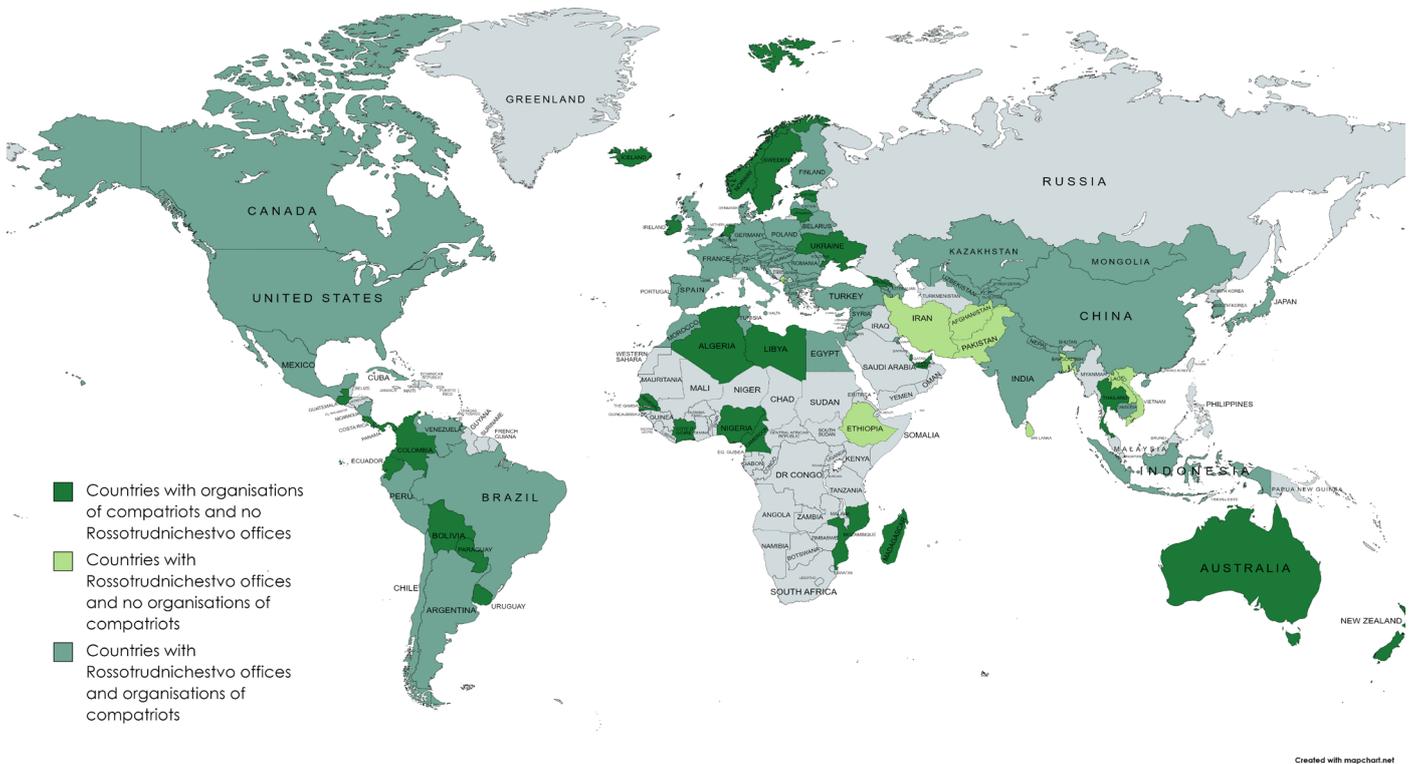
This variety of definitions and the “Russian language” factor provide ample room for foreign policy manoeuvres in the context of work with “compatriots,” including repatriation programmes, pressure on the countries with the Russian diaspora for alleged violations against the Russian-speaking population, and

30 Relevant aspects of applying international aid opportunities and mechanisms in state national policy of the Russian Federation. Program of the meeting of the Council for International Relations and Interaction with Religious Societies at the Federation council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation on the topic. <http://council.gov.ru/media/files/VTdeqAludImWuOjMEbj1oxSxsTUzQyZk.pdf>.

armed aggression under that very same pretext.

Rossotrudnichestvo's focus on "compatriots" is also unsurprising given the global network of their associations. The President of Russia issued a decree back in 2011 to establish a Fund to Support and Protect the Rights of Compatriots Residing Abroad in over 30 countries. It currently has 49 "human rights entities" in over 30 countries, such as legal support centres and consultation desks.³¹ In addition, the World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad (WCCRC) was established in Russia, bringing together national coordination councils in 99 countries. They provide a convenient platform for Rossotrudnichestvo's events abroad. Only eight of all the countries that host a Rossotrudnichestvo office do not have a "compatriots" organisation.

Map 2. Countries with organisations of Russian compatriots and Rossotrudnichestvo offices



Source: Rossotrudnichestvo and World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad websites

There are several ways that Rossotrudnichestvo collaborates with "compatriots":

- **Financial support for organisations of compatriots in other countries.** In 2020, Rossotrudnichestvo supported over 300 initiatives of "compatriot"

³¹ Coordination councils. World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad. <https://vksrs.com/koordinatsionnye-sovety/map/?TYPE=REGION>. (accessed on 13.07.2022).

non-governmental organisations in 60 countries.³²

- **Hello, Russia!** Since 2014, this programme has offered cultural and educational trips to Russia for 14- to 19-year-old Russians living abroad. The objective is to acquaint them with contemporary life and culture in Russia, assist them in improving their Russian through practice, and encourage them to establish new contacts. Participants include the winners of creative contests and contests on Russian history, culture, and language held at Russian Houses abroad. Each year, over 700 people visit Russia through this programme.³³
- **Resettlement of compatriots.** Running since 2006, this programme focuses on voluntary resettlement to Russia of people who ended up outside of Russia following the collapse of the Soviet Union and who wish to return to their “historical homeland” for permanent residency in a territory of strategic importance to Russia.³⁴ It is co-implemented with the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation. The Russian government lists the Republic of Buryatia, the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Zabaykalsky Krai, Kamchatsky Krai, Primorsky Krai, Khabarovsk Krai, Amur Oblast, Magadan Oblast, Sakhalin Oblast, Jewish Autonomous Republic, and Chukotka Autonomous Okrug as “the territories of strategic importance to Russia” that are also “the territories for priority settlement.” All these are the remote regions of the Russian Far East, which are significantly less populated than the oblasts of Central Russia.³⁵ Virtually all priority regions are non-Russian ethnically, and virtually all are experiencing a demographic crisis. Therefore, the resettlement policy for “compatriots” may have also an economic and security rationale.
- According to the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, 826,000 people moved to Russia under this programme between 2006 and 2018. The majority came from former Soviet Union countries, including Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Tajikistan, Armenia, and Moldova.³⁶

Given the flexible definition of the term “compatriots” and their actual number, this concept applies to many former Soviet Union populations. This threatens their national interests, given the nature of Russia’s migration policy. Russia’s approach to applying elements of the “compatriot” resettlement policy

32 Rossotrudnichestvo Performance Report on Fulfilling Its Tasks in 2020. Rossotrudnichestvo official website. <https://rwp.agency/agency/open-a/index-detail/doklady-o-rezultatakh-devatelnosti-rossotrudnichestva/?special=Y>. P. 18.

33 Hello, Russia! Programmes. Official website of Rossotrudnichestvo. Accessed via Wayback Machine on 18.02.2022. https://web.archive.org/web/20220129035439/https://rwp.agency/programmy/news.php?ELEMENT_ID=53.

34 “Resettlement of compatriots”. Programmes. Official website of Rossotrudnichestvo. Retrieved via Wayback Machine as of 18.02.2022. https://web.archive.org/web/20220128203332/https://rwp.agency/programmy/news.php?ELEMENT_ID=607.

35 State program for resettlement. Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Consulate. http://www.consular.rfembassy.ru/lm/konsulskie_voprosy/sootechestvenniki/.

36 The number of compatriots who returned to Russia under the resettlement program reported. <https://iz.ru/861860/2019-03-29/nazvano-chislo-vernuvshikh-sia-v-rossiiu-po-programme-pereseleniia-sootechestvennikov>.

to the occupied Ukrainian territory's population before and after its full-scale invasion should serve as an additional warning to other countries. Similar to its predecessors, the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire, Russia seeks to resolve its demographic, economic and security issues through the use of force and a policy of relocating large populations across its territory.

“Russia with peace/world?” International development aid

“We need to reject the old interpretation of “humanitarian” in the political and social sphere – in foreign and domestic (!) policy... for us, the international terms of “humanitarian policy” and “humanitarian cooperation” are broader, more comprehensive, more interesting and more promising. In practice, this will mean a greater emphasis on international development, human rights, and a major focus on charity – but by no means at the expense of “promoting” the Russian language and art.”³⁷

Yevgeniy Primakov, Head of Rossotrudnichestvo

This area was added to Rossotrudnichestvo's portfolio in 2014 when Russia adopted the Concept of State Policy for International Development Aid. The rationale for the Concept was that, in the past, Russia provided assistance through multilateral projects led by international organisations. As a result, according to Rossotrudnichestvo top officials, the recipients were unaware of the aid's origins and did not associate it with Russia. The Russian leadership decided to copy the approach of the US and provide bilateral assistance through an international development aid agency comparable to USAID. This role was bestowed on Rossotrudnichestvo. All of Russia's international assistance would now be channelled through it, and not through the Ministry of Finance as it had been prior to 2014.

In the briefing on Rossotrudnichestvo's performance in 2021 and plans for 2022, this area was still mentioned as a priority for 2022: “an important mechanism for promoting Russian humanitarian policy in the world.”³⁸ The speakers highlighted that these projects would contribute to the socio-economic development of the countries in which they are implemented in science, education, and healthcare. The stated objectives are to **improve the quality of life for the population, shape a favourable image of modern Russia, and reduce “Russophobic” sentiments in certain countries.**

³⁷ Yevgeniy Primakov: “Enough with balalaikas in humanitarian policy!”. (08.04.2019). Novye Izvestia. <https://newizv.ru/article/general/08-04-2019/evgeniy-primakov-hvatit-nam-balalaek-v-gumanitarnoy-politike>.

³⁸ Briefing by Rossotrudnichestvo press-secretary Nadana Fridrikhson: Agency accomplishments in 2021 and plans for 2022. Russkiy Dom Youtube channel. <https://youtu.be/s89EA9KtcUY>.

The partners that co-implement these projects with Rossotrudnichestvo, as listed on its website, include **the Russian Humanitarian Mission, the Association of Volunteer Centres and Humanitarian Map.**

- The **Russian Humanitarian Mission (RHM)**³⁹ is portrayed as a non-governmental commercial organisation that focuses on international humanitarian activities in Russia and abroad, including Palestine, Uzbekistan, Lebanon, Syria, Nagorno-Karabakh, Kyrgyzstan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Tajikistan, and Georgia. Its stated mission is to “help people and communities in crisis as a result of conflicts, natural disasters, catastrophes, and poverty.” In essence, RHM is not a partner for Rossotrudnichestvo, but its humanitarian assistance tool. Yevgeniy Primakov, one of RHM founders, is the current Head of Rossotrudnichestvo.⁴⁰ Rossotrudnichestvo’s social media accounts frequently share RHM content, and RHM employees frequently appear at events that are exclusively about the activities of Rossotrudnichestvo, such as the opening of the Russian House in Donetsk.⁴¹ In 2017, RHM and Rossotrudnichestvo signed an agreement on state subsidies from Rossotrudnichestvo. In 2018, these subsidies accounted for 50.5% of the RHM’s budget, or 74.7 million roubles (around \$1.2 million).⁴²
- The **Association of Volunteer Centres**⁴³ is declared one of Russia’s largest non-profit organisations. It encompasses a vast network of volunteer organisations throughout Russia. Its “federal programmes” include Dobro. Universitet, an education programme; #MblBMECTE (We Are Together), an award presented by the President of Russia; ДОБРО.РФ (Kindness.RF) platform and more. It interacts closely with several federal entities and initiatives. Among its numerous listed partners are the Russian government and a number of ministries, the Presidential Grant Foundation, ROSATOM, RIA Novosti, and others.
- The **Humanitarian Map**⁴⁴ is a digital portal developed as part of the Humanitarian Monitor project. Its mission is to “increase the awareness of Russian and foreign audiences about various aspects of international humanitarian cooperation and Russia’s contribution to international

39 Russian Humanitarian Mission. <https://rhm.agency/>.

40 Yevgeniy Primakov. History of the establishment of ANO RHM; humanitarian projects abroad and in Russia; demand for support of Russian non-profit organisations in the regions in crisis; state of affairs within the Russian non-profit sector. Parts 1 to 3. (02.03.2020.) Russian Humanitarian Mission. <https://rhm.agency/radio/e-primakov-istoriya-sozdaniya-ano-rgm-gumanitarnye-proekty-za-rubezhom-i-v-rossii-vostrebovannost-podderzhki-rossijskih-nko-v-krisisnyh-regionah-polozhenie-del-v-rossijskoj-nekommercheskoj-sfere/>.

41 A Russian House opens in Donetsk. (30.11.2021). IA REGNUM. <https://regnum.ru/news/3437052.html>.

42 Burlinova N., Vasilenko P., Ivanchenko V., Shakirov O. (2020). 10 steps towards efficient public diplomacy of Russia. Expert overview of Russian public diplomacy in 2018-2019. Russian International Affairs Council. <https://russiancouncil.ru/papers/RussianPublicDiplomacy-Report52-Rus.pdf>.

43 Association of Volunteer Centres. <https://www.avu.pf/>.

44 Humanitarian Map. <https://russianassistance.ru/about/>.

development aid.” The project’s website aims to demonstrate “how Russia helps foreign partners in emergencies and peaceful times, for instance, by supporting their socio-economic development.”

- **Missiya Dobro (Mission Kindness)** is a cultural diplomacy-related project implemented by Rossotrudnichestvo in the international development aid area. Rossotrudnichestvo defines it as its flagship project. Launched in 2021, it is run jointly by Rossotrudnichestvo, the Association of Volunteer Centres and the Russian Humanitarian Mission. Its objective is to promote international volunteering in Russia and humanitarian cooperation with other countries in environmental protection, education, and culture. Currently, it is available to Russians who are interested in international volunteering. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were partner countries in 2021. A mirror project for foreigners in Russia is planned.⁴⁵

This shortlist of international development aid partners reflects the status of this component in Rossotrudnichestvo’s portfolio in general. Despite its designation as a provider of international assistance, Rossotrudnichestvo can hardly be put in a row with similar institutions from other countries due to the extremely limited resources allocated to this portfolio component. As mentioned in section II, Rossotrudnichestvo assumed responsibility for international development in 2014 and aimed to expand it significantly by 2020. However, funding was reduced in 2015 for a variety of reasons, and the most recent report on its international development aid work is from that year. While Rossotrudnichestvo’s leaders have spoken about the need to expand international humanitarian cooperation, the organisation’s efforts towards this end are primarily motivated by inertia. At least in terms of public communications, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine mainly reduced its role to a single purpose. It is to provide stories for Russian propaganda about what it calls “humanitarian assistance” to people in the “territories of Ukraine liberated by the Russian Federation,” who are, in fact, victims of the Russian invasion and temporary occupation of Ukrainian territories.

⁴⁵ Mission Kindness. Programs. Rossotrudnichestvo official website. Accessed via Wayback Machine on 04.09.2021. https://web.archive.org/web/20210904024453/https://rwp.agency/programmy/news.php?ELEMENT_ID=60.

DOVES OF PEACE, HAWKS OF WAR: ROSSOTRUDNICHESTVO AFTER THE FULL-SCALE INVASION

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Rosotrudnichestvo participated directly in state propaganda and provided support for the war effort through events at its headquarters and offices abroad, as well as through website and social media content. In practice, this entails two major components: assisting humanitarian assistance and conducting and bolstering information campaigns, including efforts to demonstrate support for Russia and its war in other countries. Local organisations of compatriots in other countries and the Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad frequently organise such events.¹

Since the early days of the full-scale invasion in late February, the official Facebook account of Rosotrudnichestvo, with 41 thousand followers, its Telegram channel with 12 thousand subscribers (both titled Russkiy Dom), and the Facebook accounts of its offices have been the primary platforms for Rosotrudnichestvo to share the official position of Russia.² Increased activity of its social media accounts since February 2022 highlights the importance of the social media assault by Rosotrudnichestvo: the number of its posts increased from 25-35 per week in February-March 2021 to 50-70 in the same period of 2022.

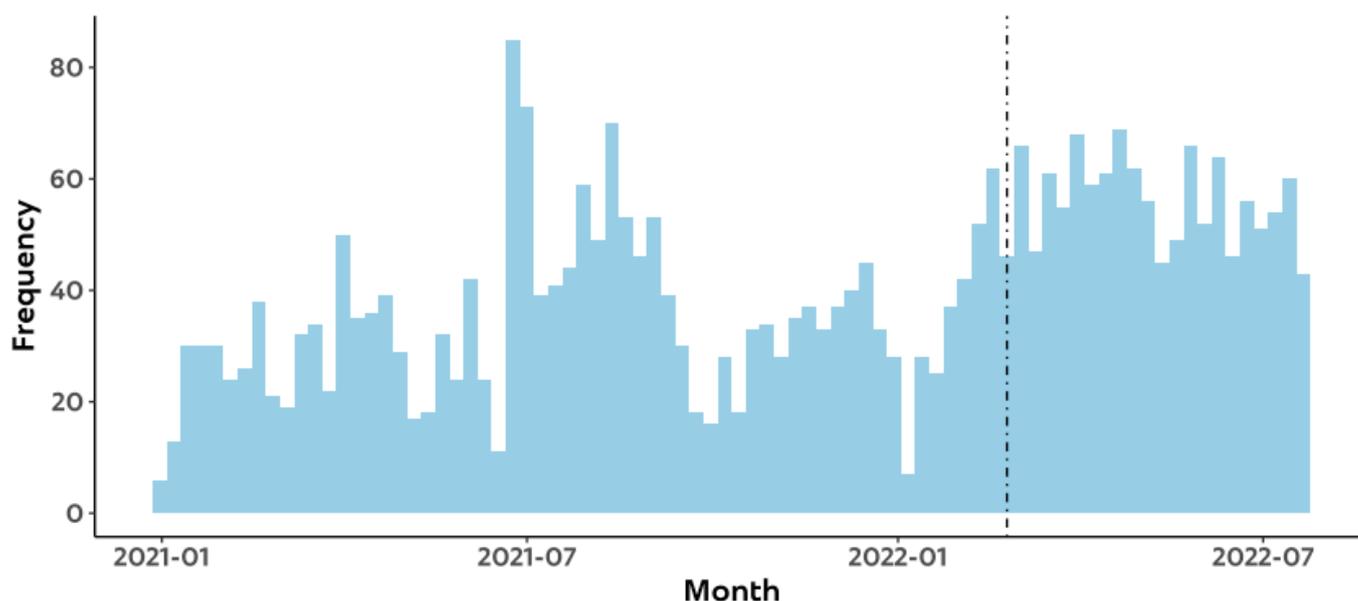
The posts on both channels have identical content. Some posts are duplicated in English, but most of the content is written in Russian, so it is primarily aimed at Russians and Russian-speaking “compatriots”. Examples include appeals to end “Russophobia” or “cancelling” Russia and general posts about great Russian artists and geographical attractions.

The analysis of Rosotrudnichestvo’s central office’s social media content between February 24, 2022, and June 20, 2022, reveals that all posts from this time can be classified into several clusters. Similar trends emerge in the accounts of its foreign offices, with minor variations.

¹ One example is the car rally in Cyprus in support for Russia. Source: Rosotrudnichestvo official Facebook account. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=556996232279652>). Another example is the XV conference of organisations of Russian compatriots in Buenos Aires. Source: Rosotrudnichestvo official Facebook account. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1006802196604276>).

² Rosotrudnichestvo social media performance was as follows, according to its 2020 performance report: 700,000 total account subscribers; total post reach – 51 million accounts.

Chart 3. Frequency of publications per week, 2021-2022



Source: Calculated based on posts in Russkiy Dom Telegram channel

- **Publications on programmed activities of Rossotrudnichestvo:** announcement, fact or result of events with hashtags #Россотрудничество (Rossotrudnichestvo) and #Русский Дом (Russian House)) comprise between one-third and one-half of all weekly posts. In some posts, the topic of Ukraine and/or the Russia-Ukraine war is interwoven with pro-Russian messages. For example, "The Russian House in Ulaanbaatar hosted the exhibition A Tragedy of the Donbas."
- **General information posts include memorable dates, brief stories** about the geographical diversity or peoples of Russia, notable figures, announcements of partner organisations' events and more. These constitute roughly a third of all posts. Before May 9, posts about the "Great Patriotic War" stood out as a meta-theme central to Rossotrudnichestvo and the Russian historical narrative.
- **Posts that are direct media support for the war against Ukraine.** Likewise, these constituted nearly a third of all content:
 - **Posts on international development aid** (#СМП for "содействие международному развитию" in Russian), "humanitarian assistance" to some areas in Ukraine or "refugees", often forcibly deported individuals from the Donbas to the territory of Russia.
 - **Propaganda posts on the Russia-Ukraine war**, news on Ros-

sotrudnichestov's events or third-party events in support of Russia, or the dissemination of Kremlin narratives.

- **#Русофобия (Russophobia)/ #StopHatingRussians/ #StopCancellingRussia:** posts countering attempts to "cancel" Russia or combating so-called "Russophobia".
- **News about Russian "heroes" and awards for participation in what Russia calls "special operation."**

Wolf in sheep's clothing: Imitating humanitarian assistance

On February 22, 2022, the day after Russia recognised the "independence" of the quasi-entities in parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, the so-called "LPR" and "DPR," Rossotrudnichestvo published a statement on its official website "On the recognition of DPR and LPR". It states that Rossotrudnichestvo intends to "continue supporting humanitarian projects in the Donbas" in order to "improve the lives of people." In the following days, the first articles appeared in the News section ([24.02.2022](#) and [01.03.2022](#)) regarding humanitarian support and Russia's assistance to the refugees from the Donbas in Rostov Oblast. Between the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine and June 20, 2022, Rossotrudnichestvo almost daily posted on its Facebook account about humanitarian aid provided by itself, its partners, and other Russian organisations as part of what it refers to as international development aid. This assistance is provided to people in the parts of the Donbas, Kherson Oblast and Kharkiv Oblast that are temporarily occupied by Russia as a result of the war or are under a Russian military blockade. Occasionally, these regions were mentioned without any reference to Ukraine, and some posts referred to them as "demilitarised" or "liberated." These posts manipulate the topics pertaining to war victims, such as children of the Donbas/Mariupol residents. They construct a narrative in which these groups allegedly suffer from the military aggression of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and face a humanitarian crisis, injuries, loss of residence, and PTSD. At the same time, Russia allegedly provides humanitarian assistance, and the Russian military allegedly evacuates civilians from the frontline territory to protect them from shelling by the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

Publications on the work of the Russian Humanitarian Mission in the destroyed cities of the Donbas, including Mariupol, are a standalone thread. Presenting it as a neutral humanitarian organisation, this communication is incredibly cynical. On the one hand, it is the Russian army that attacks and destroys Ukrainian cities, as well as kills Ukrainians. On the other hand, the pro-Kremlin Russian Humanitarian Mission claims that Russia at least partially provides the so-called "humanitarian aid" to the surviving residents of Ukrainian

cities. In public communications, this is portrayed as the charitable work of a neutral-appearing humanitarian organisation of the Russian Federation.

These posts highlight that ordinary Russians across Russia, including its most remote regions, allegedly assist the Ukrainian populace. Some posts mention aid provided by Bashkortostan (4 posts), Dagestan (3 posts), Tatarstan, Omsk Oblast, Khakassia, and Karelia, among others. Russian national minorities dominate these regions, and their living standards are significantly lower than those of the majority-Russian central regions.



The images for the collage were obtained from public sources

Empire's mouthpieces: Spreading military propaganda

Another area of Rossotrudnichestvo's work covers **local audience-oriented events held by Russian Houses abroad and focuses on the so-called "special operation" in Ukraine, as well as the unfolding communication on Rossotrudnichestvo's social media.** In fact, this demonstrates that Rossotrudnichestvo disseminates propaganda and engages in targeted efforts to rally public support for Russia's war against Ukraine.

The official accounts of Rossotrudnichestvo on social media share announcements of rallies in Israel, Armenia, Tunisia, Serbia, Turkey, and Cyprus,

with **direct or disguised appeals to support Russia in the war it launched against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and/or echo the Kremlin’s narratives about the causes of this war.** These rallies are presented as initiatives of some organisations or individuals without the involvement of Rossotrudnichestvo. But the similarities in their conduct and their key messages hint at the centralised organisation.

Publications on events that promote propaganda narratives regarding alleged Ukrainian war crimes stand out. For example, Rossotrudnichestvo’s social media accounts live-streamed the press conference titled “War crimes of the Kyiv regime: Testimony of eye-witnesses” on May 25, 2022, with Rossotrudnichestvo’s Head Yevgeniy Primakov, representatives of the Russian government and other state organisations, propagandists Armen Gasparian and Kirill Vyshinsky. A special website was designed for the event, and disinformation leaflets were prepared and translated into thirteen languages. These contained Kremlin propaganda clichés about Ukraine and its army, presenting them as “irrefutable facts of manifestation and encouragement of the Nazi regime in Ukraine on the state level.” The presentation’s key points were then published on Rossotrudnichestvo’s social media platforms.



The photo was taken from Rossotrudnichestvo’s [Facebook page](#).

The inscription on the photograph reads, “War crimes of the Kyiv regime: eyewitness accounts.” The date of the post is May 25, 2022.



Photo from the [Facebook page of Yerevan’s “Russian House.”](#)

“Basic knowledge about the civil war in Donbas and the special military operation: the Head of the Rossotrudnichestvo Yevgeniy Primakov presented a new project of the Agency together with the Research Fund, which is brochures about the allegedly committed war crimes by the “Kyiv regime”, during the press conference “War crimes of the Kyiv regime: eyewitness accounts.”

Rossotrudnichestvo exploited the theme of World War II to promote the narrative of “the crimes of the Ukrainian Nazi regime.” It posted its own content and shared content from the Russian Ministry of Defence’s page, drawing parallels between World War II and the current Russia-Ukraine war and **portraying Ukrainians as those who continue the cause of Nazism, a message typical of Russian propaganda.** On April 22, Rossotrudnichestvo’s Telegram account shared the Russian Ministry of Defence’s post about the project “Mariupol. Liberation,” with a reference to the 1943 Donbas operation with a phrase about the “bloody legacy between Nazis of that time and Ukrainian radicals today.” It follows this approach in other publications on similar topics.

Lastly, some posts have nothing to do with cultural diplomacy or humanitarian assistance, yet they **express direct support for the Russian aggression and, once again, spread propaganda and war symbols.** The car rally in Limassol with the slogan “Let us stop neonazism together with Russia. No to NATO in Ukraine and Cyprus. Russia speaks the truth!” is an illustration. This announcement’s teaser was created by the SMM team of Rossotrudnichestvo and features the letter Z, a symbol that propagates Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. Another example comes from Lebanon, where people formed the phrases *Za Rossiju* and *Za Pobedu* (“For Russia” and “For Victory”) using candles. During the rally on April 17 in Nicosia the message that the Bucha Massacre was fake news was pushed.

Shared from the account of RT, the video appeal of athlete Jeff Monson with a number of hostile and misleading Kremlin narratives on Ukraine, justifying the war on Ukraine, offers another example of imitating support for Russian policies from foreign audiences. A similar example of content with blatant propaganda appears in “Besogon,” an author’s programme by pro-regime filmmaker Nikita Mikhalkov where he creates an alternative scenario for the EuroMaidan based on the memories of so-called “eyewitnesses” that Western media outlets allegedly do not discuss. This episode of Mikhalkov’s show is available in Ukrainian, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, Italian, Hindi, German, French, and English. It is distributed through the online resources of Russian Houses across the world.

Finally, media coverage of events abroad in support of Russia is sometimes accompanied by the condemnation of the collective West’s sanctions against Russia due to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Russia’s sanctions, not its military aggression, are portrayed as the cause of the global food price increase. The news about the Peruvian rally illustrates this case.

Russian cultural diplomacy's collateral damage: Fighting "Russophobia"

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Rossotrudnichestvo's communication strategy has incorporated criticism of the allegedly pervasive "Russophobia" in Europe and the wider West and the fight against calls to "cancel" Russian culture. This refers to the war-induced refusal to collaborate with Russian cultural actors and institutions and attempts to reflect on the imperialistic or colonial Russian artistic objects critically. In the meantime, Rossotrudnichestvo employees seek to appeal to the discourse of human rights, the need for dialogue and understanding, and the apolitical nature of culture – which some Western audiences find relatable and frequently acceptable.

On February 28, 2022, on the fifth day of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, Rossotrudnichestvo published a confusing and abstract statement by then-deputy head Natalia Poklonskaya³ on its website. She spoke of new cases of what she termed "violation of the rights of compatriots and discrimination for citizenship and national affiliation abroad" "as a result of the current situation" and announced the launch of a hotline in Telegram "to protect compatriots" where they could seek assistance and called for peace. One of Rossotrudnichestvo's posts on its Facebook account is more specific about the hotline, stating that it focuses on providing psychological support. It appears that the statement's tone and content correspond to the narratives about the inadmissibility of "Russophobia" and its negative impact on "ordinary" Russian civilians. Since the Russia-Ukraine war began and Russia's military aggression against Ukraine was condemned by various countries, the Russian state media and some opinion leaders have promoted these narratives. The official Facebook account bolsters the argument against "Russophobia". Examples include the announcement of the Motorcade against "Russophobia" and racism with slogans like "For Peace! For Russia! For Greece!" in Athens; a post about a rally against russophobia held in Brussels; a petition of Italian cultural actors to protect Russian culture; a rally supporting Russian culture in the centre of Rome; and more. The photographs of these events reveal few attendees.

Individual appeals of people from various countries calling to stop "Russophobia" without identifying themselves or their names have become the typical content on Rossotrudnichestvo's accounts in the context of combating "Russophobia". This content is typically accompanied by manipulative titles, such as "country x joins the #StopHatingRussians flash mob."

3 Natalia Poklonskaya's statement on the launch of a Telegram hotline for the protection of compatriots abroad. Rossotrudnichestvo official website. https://rs.gov.ru/press-sluzhba/zayavleniya/?ELEMENT_ID=1150.



Freeze frame from a video from Rossotrudnichestvo's [Telegram channel](#).

Text under the video: "More and more people in the whole world call to stop Russophobia. Nicaragua joins the #StopHatingRussians flash mob".



Freeze frame from a video from [Rossotrudnichestvo's Telegram channel](#).

Text under the video: "Ratish Nair from India joined the flash mob #StopHatingRussians. In his video address he urged to stop Russophobia and to ignore unverified information".

This campaign is intended to give the impression that ordinary people worldwide support Russia, especially in the absence of celebrity endorsements. For the same reason, the rallies "against Russophobia" posts use impersonal language and do not identify the actors responsible for particular actions. This suggests that the activities they describe on the ground are supported by the local populace. For instance, the post on the fight against "Russophobia" in Mexico has the title "Posters against Russophobia appear on the streets of Mexico City", and the text refers to unspecified "activists." The post on the rally in Rome prior the Cosmonautics Day mentions the representatives of the local communist youth organisations who put up posters depicting Yuri Gagarin in Rome. However, it provides no information regarding the public's reaction to this.

The few public art events that Rossotrudnichestvo manages to organise in Western countries also come with messages on preventing the "cancellation" of Russia. For example, an exhibition's opening by the Russian artist Andrey Esionov in Rome was reported with a message from a local art critic stating that "if an artist is Russian, we should not judge him based on his nationality."

The "cancelling" context, too, has incorporated the meta-narrative of the victory in World War II. Rossotrudnichestvo's social media accounts published

sporadic articles about “vandalism” against Soviet-era Russian institutions or artefacts in March and April. The Russian embassy in Germany urged “citizens who care” to report vandalism “to prevent xenophobia and racism” after someone painted over the Treptower Park memorial to Soviet soldiers. The news that someone painted the monument to Soviet soldiers in Otepää, Estonia, in the colours of the Ukrainian flag was also accompanied by the hashtag #Russophobia. Notably, that mass grave turned out to be fake⁴ when the city tried to transfer it to the cemetery. It was discovered to contain no real remains of soldiers.

On May 23, Rossotrudnichestvo’s social media accounts launched a media campaign with similar videos for several countries. In these videos, the statement about the significant assistance of the Soviet Union before or after World War II, for which the country in question should allegedly be grateful, is followed by accusations of “Russophobia” or sanctions against Russia with the hashtag #МЫПОМНИМ (We Remember). In total, twelve such videos have been produced.

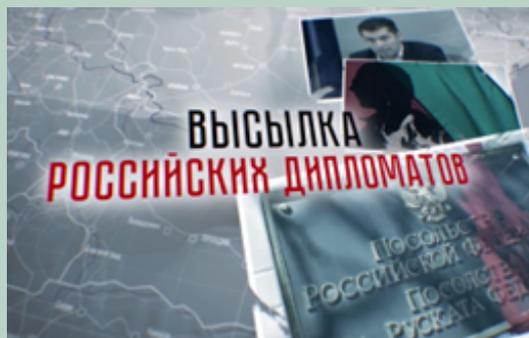
All of these and other communication cases, such as statements by Rossotrudnichestvo leaders, news, social media posts to allegedly cover humanitarian and other areas of its work, and the work of its partner organisations, are designed to spread and bolster propaganda narratives among Russian and foreign audiences. Several of these narratives are hostile toward Ukraine. The narrative of the “people of the Donbas suffering from Ukraine’s aggressive actions and seeking refuge and assistance in Russia” and the narrative of “nationalism and Nazism in Ukraine” are examples. Once again, this demonstrates the political bias of Rossotrudnichestvo and its role as a mouthpiece for Russian propaganda through its extensive network of offices abroad and media platforms.



Photo from Rossotrudnichestvo’s [Facebook page](#).

In the picture is one of the exhibits by a Turkish artist Metin Birecikligil. The exhibition named “The West’s Police Station,” held in the city of Izmir, was dedicated, as the publication says, “to the sanctions applied to the classical Russian culture”. May 17, 2022.

⁴ Mass grave in an Estonian city turns out to be a soviet fake (photo). *Focus*. <https://focus.ua/uk/world/519379-bratskaya-mogila-v-estonskom-gorode-okazalas-sovetskim-feykom-foto>.



Freeze screen from a video from Rosotrudnichestvo's [Telegram channel](#).

The text under the video: "Video dedicated to Bulgaria with hashtags #МыПомним #StopHatingRussians #Болгария"

The inscription in the freeze screen: "Expulsion of Russian diplomats"



Freeze screen from a video from Rosotrudnichestvo's [Telegram channel](#).

The text under the video: "Video dedicated to Romania with hashtags #МыПомним #StopHatingRussians #Румыния"

The inscription in the freeze screen: "Anti-Russian sanctions"

I CONCLUSIONS

Reinvented by the Russian government in the 2000s out of the Soviet-era organisations of “friendship and cooperation” with other countries, Rossotrudnichestvo was designed to dramatically strengthen the soft power and attractiveness of the Russian Federation in the world, especially among its neighbour countries that were becoming increasingly interested in Western development models. Rossotrudnichestvo preserved and reworked the approaches and traditions of its predecessors, such as solid integration into the state structure and administration close to the top tiers of the Russian government; centralised governance and political bias; non-transparent funding and concealed motives and tools of work, up to spying and subversions. Having established Rossotrudnichestvo at the same time as waging its war on Georgia in 2008, Russia began to back up its hard power from day one. The objective was to relativise or justify armed or hybrid aggression against other states in the international arena.

In the network of Russia’s cultural and public diplomacy institutions, Rossotrudnichestvo appears to be the most powerful, thanks to the resources at its disposal. These include generous state funding, the extensive network of offices it inherited from the past, which is likely to grow exponentially after the recent innovation in authorising “non-state” foreign offices and friendly organisations in the world; an extensive partner network with federal institutions; media outlets banned in the EU; programs and projects, including those supported by the president. All this converts into hundreds of thousands of personal contacts and millions of media users’ exposure. Still, these resources are partially offset by the excessively ambitious goals and the weakness of Russia’s economy, which has been investing much more into militarisation, i.e., hard power, leaving soft power tools on the side-lines.

However, Rossotrudnichestvo does have massive objectives and ambitions. It deals with cultural diplomacy, as well as international development aid and support of “compatriots” abroad. Notable is the emphasis on promoting the glorious past of Russian culture over modern, future-oriented art, as well as intense ideological exploitation of history and identity myths for political purposes. Self-presentation as an international donor of humanitarian aid intended to strengthen Russia’s role as a global powerhouse. In fact, this has become a tool of media support for the military aggression that covers up the massive destruction caused by the “humanitarian” rallies. Finally, support for the loosely defined “compatriots” helps Russia solve its political challenges in the target countries through its work with the Russian-speaking minorities and the demographic challenges of Russia through the passportisation policy and resettlement in Russia’s remote regions.

Russia's war against Ukraine has revealed all the potential of Rossotrudnichestvo's threatening impact. It openly acts as a mouthpiece for propaganda and a tool of war through institutional ties, networks of representatives and media platforms. Given Rossotrudnichestvo's active support of Russo-Ukrainian war, the Agency will not only have to undergo a rebranding (which it must be accustomed to), but also a reevaluation of its values, in order to again pose itself as a neutral organisation specialising in cultural and humanitarian cooperation and "soft power" agent. As of now, its history and the history of related organisations, as well as the characteristics of Russia's political regime do not support such optimistic forecasts.

The Ukrainian Institute is a public institution affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. Our mission is to strengthen Ukraine's international standing through the means of cultural diplomacy. We facilitate international connections between people and institutions and create opportunities for Ukraine to interact and cooperate with the world.

This paper is a part of the Ukrainian Institute's Information & Analytics Department 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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