

HANNA VASILEVICH

“RUSSIAN WORLD” AND COMPATRIOTS’
POLICIES: A VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDE

Abstract: This text will analyse the framework and limitations of the Russian policies towards compatriots (as defined in the Russian legislation) and the perception of these policies in the countries of the former Soviet Union, whose entire populations might potentially be treated as “compatriots.” The focus will be made on the political speeches and media discourse analysis, as they appear both in Russia and the selected post-Soviet countries (Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine).

Introduction

The annexation of Ukraine’s Crimean peninsula in 2014 by Russia once again raised the question of correlation between the territorial integrity and frontiers’ inviolability on the one hand, and the right of self-determination on the other.¹ To justify its actions against this part of Ukraine’s territory, Russia emphasized its alleged “responsibility to protect ethnic Russians and compatriots” and linked it with the right to self-determination.² Moreover, in his so-called “Crimean speech” on March 18, 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin referred to the case of Kosovo and the Written Statement of the United States of America submitted to the International Court of Justice on April 17, 2009, which stipulated that “[d]eclarations of independence may, and often do, violate domestic legislation” which “does not make them violations of international law.”³ In 2008, during the Russo–Georgian war, the Kremlin already made a reference to the responsibility to protect

1 This and further formulations pertinent to the Crimean conflict neither imply denial of an illegal and illegitimate character of the Russian authorities’ activities towards a part of Ukraine’s territory nor advocate these illegal and illegitimate activities.

2 Rilka Dragneva-Lewers and Kataryna Wolczuk, *Ukraine Between the EU and Russia: The Integration Challenge* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 103.

3 “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” Russian President Website, March 8, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>, accessed May 10, 2017.

compatriots and explained that it as an “oblig[ation] under the Russian Constitution to protect the life and dignity of Russian citizens, especially when they find themselves threatened by armed conflict.”⁴

With regard to the security domain of international law, these examples might be rather viewed as a challenge of the primacy of the principles of territorial integrity and the inviolability of frontiers or at least as an attempt to use different formal criteria to measure available margins of appreciation. At the same time, these two examples might also be perceived as state-sponsored and institutionalized manifestations of transnationalism, as they involve “multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states.”⁵ In the case of transnational communities, the references to certain historical experiences often form an important part of the kin-state policies. This vision is anchored with the concept of homeland perceived as “a repository of historic memories and associations, [and] the place where our sages, saints and heroes lived, worked, prayed and fought.”⁶ Moreover, it obviously goes beyond the actual borders of the states and targets compatriots on the other side of the border, who might tend to think of themselves as members of the society of their kin-states but not of their home-states. In this regard, it could imply rather unconscious detachment of these communities from the societies of their home-states and often involuntary integration into the kin-states’ societies. It results in the virtual emergence of these cross-border homelands without alteration of the actual borders. The international arrangements available in Europe can neither impede these societal processes nor access their margins nor offer effective legal and political mechanisms to prevent kin-states from these policies.

Although the aforementioned examples of Russia’s policies are rather extreme manifestations of the kin-state approach, they eloquently demonstrate the margin of an extra-territorial application of the available international arrangements combined with domestic legislation, historical narratives, political agendas and mass media. This article addresses the framework and limitations of the Russian policies towards compatriots (as defined in the Russian legislation) and the perception of these policies in the countries of the former Soviet Union, whose entire populations might potentially be treated as “compatriots,” namely the linkage between Russian domestic legislation towards its ethnic-kin abroad; the interpretation of who Russia sees as ethnic-kin; its linkage with actual policies and their

4 Natalie Sabanadze. “States, Minorities and Regional Hegemons in the South Caucasus: Whose Responsibility to Protect?”, in *National Minorities in Inter-State Relations*, ed. Francesco Palermo and Natalie Sabanadze (Leiden: Matrinus Nijhoff, 2011), 167–84.

5 Steven Vertovec. *Transnationalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

6 Anthony D. Smith. *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 9.

contribution to the production of historical narratives; references to these narratives made by Russian public and church authorities; and the dissemination power of state-sponsored mass media in this process. Overall, there is a focus on the political speeches and media discourse analysis, as they appear both in Russia and the selected post-Soviet countries (Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine).

Legal foundations and concepts of compatriots

There are two dimensions that should be addressed within the context of the Russian Constitution. The first dimension deals with the concept of people in the light of the country's previous statehoods. The Russian Constitution in its preamble refers to the country's multinational people (Russian: *mnogonatsionalnyi narod*).⁷ This multiethnic nature of the country's political organization is further emphasized in Art. 3.1, which defines Russia's multinational people as a sole bearer of sovereignty and a source of power. The preamble also underlines the common fate of the land as a uniting factor of the Russia's multinational people as well as the preservation of the historically established state unity based on the principles of equality and self-determination. Moreover, the preamble sees the phase of the country's development at the moment of its adoption as the reviving of Russia's sovereign statehood. This approach provides two major implications. Firstly, Russia cannot be viewed as a kin-state of exclusively ethnic Russians. Secondly, through the reference to reviving the sovereign statehood, Russia's current statehood *de facto* claims its lineage to the pre-Soviet formations, which *inter alia* include the Russian Empire. The latter addresses the issue of citizenship and its correlation with the duties pertinent to the citizens' rights with which the state bound itself. Accordingly, the Russian Constitution does not exclude foreign citizenship, and its possession does not impair rights and freedoms of such citizens guaranteed by law (Art. 62). Moreover, the state ensures protection and patronage to its citizens abroad (Art. 61). This protection is therefore applicable to the persons and groups who permanently reside beyond the country's international borders.

7 All quotations of the Russian Constitution are provided according to their translation available on the Garant database website <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm>, accessed May 27, 2017.

These two dimensions are interlinked in the 1999 Federal Law On Russian Federation's State Policy Toward Compatriots Living Abroad (as amended).⁸ In its preamble, the federal law defines today's Russia as a legal continuation of the Russian state, the Russian republic, the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic, and the Soviet Union (USSR). Moreover, the institute of citizenship complies with the principle of the continuity of Russia's statehood. Hence, this approach is twofold. On the one hand, the first of these entities emerged in 1917;⁹ hence, the law does not imply legal continuity between today's Russia and the Russian Empire or earlier state formations. On the other hand, the reference to the USSR makes the country a successor of an entity with a larger territory than that of today's Russia.

The federal law also introduces a definition of compatriots (Russian: *sootchestvenniki*) as "persons born in one state, who reside or have lived in it and possess characteristics of common language, history, cultural heritage, traditions and customs, as well as the direct descendants of these persons" (Art. 1.1). Russian citizens permanently residing beyond Russia's borders are also considered to be compatriots (Art. 1.2). Furthermore, the notion of compatriots is extended to

- the persons and their descendants who reside abroad and usually belong to the peoples who historically reside on the Russia's territory;
- the persons who expressed their free choice in favor of spiritual, cultural and legal relationship with Russia; and
- the persons whose ancestors previously lived on the territory of the Russian Federation (Art. 1.3).

According to the same article of the federal law, this approach includes former Soviet citizens residing in the post-Soviet countries regardless of their actual citizenship, as well as citizens of the state entities mentioned in the preamble who either became foreign citizens or stateless persons. It is noteworthy that the previous version of the federal law explicitly excluded descendants of the persons belonging to the titular nations of the foreign states

8 Federal Law No. 99-FZ On Russian Federation's State Policy towards Compatriots Living Abroad, adopted on May 24, 1999, as amended (in Russian), <http://www.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?Req=doc&base=law&n=150465&rnd=261745.100704841&from=89945-37#0>, accessed May 27, 2017. (Original quote: Федеральный закон О государственной политике Российской Федерации в отношении соотечественников за рубежом.)

9 Robert P. Browder and Aleksandr F. Kerensky, eds., *The Russian Provisional Government, 1917: Documents*, vol. 1 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 1657–9.

from the category of foreign compatriots (Art. 1.2).¹⁰ Additionally, the criterion of the person's free will for maintaining a relationship with Russia as a determinant of the notion of compatriots was introduced by the 2010 amendments.

These two shifts are explained both in qualitative and quantitative terms. On the one hand, by the reference to persons' free will to maintain relations with Russia, it introduced active membership as a qualitative characteristic of compatriots; on the other hand, it extended the application scope of the federal law to all citizens of the former USSR regardless of their ethnic affiliation.¹¹ Furthermore, it provided Moscow with the broadest categorization of "compatriots" possible—Russian ethnic, Russian citizen, Russian speaking, and all former USSR citizens.

The protection of rights and interests of foreign compatriots, as well as their consolidation in order to realise their rights, are also listed among country's priorities in the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation.

Institutionalization

The main body responsible for the distribution and management of cultural aid and exchange within the compatriot's policy is the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Russian: *Федеральное агентство по делам Содружества Независимых Государств, соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом, и по международному гуманитарному сотрудничеству*), which is also commonly known as Rossotrudnichestvo (Russian: *Россотрудничество*). This body, established by the Presidential Decree of the Russian Federation No. 1315 on September 6, 2008, is officially an autonomous Russian federal government agency under the jurisdiction of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose aim is the realisation of the state policy International Humanitarian Cooperation and assistance in the spread of an objective view of modern Russia abroad,¹² meaning the maintenance of

10 Federal Law No. 99-FZ on Russian Federation's State Policy toward Compatriots Living Abroad, adopted on May 24, 1999, as formulated before the adoption of Federal Law No. 179-FZ on Amendments to the Federal Law on Russian Federation's State Policy toward Compatriots Living Abroad, adopted on July 23, 2010 (in Russian), <http://www.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc&base=LAW&n=89945&rnd=261745.26681193&dst=100017&fld=134#0>, accessed May 27, 2017. (Original quote: *Федеральный закон О государственной политике Российской Федерации в отношении соотечественников за рубежом*.)

11 Agnia Grigas. *Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 90.

12 "About Rossotrudnichestvo," Rossotrudnichestvo, <http://rs.gov.ru/%20/about>, accessed January 31, 2020.

Russian influence in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) via cultural support of so-called compatriots and other various means of soft power.

Rossotrudnichestvo operates mostly in the CIS (but also in Latin America). It has its representation as a part of Russian science and culture centers and agencies as a part of embassies in over 80 states. Among other activities, Rossotrudnichestvo promotes Russian language and culture and closely works with the youth and compatriots.

The Government Commission for Compatriots Abroad (Russian: *Правительственная комиссия по делам соотечественников за рубежом*) is “a coordinating (monitoring) body that ensures coordinated actions by interested executive bodies in implementing the state policy of the Russian Federation with respect to compatriots living abroad.”¹³ The governmental commission was established in 1994, by the Presidential Decree of the Russian Federation No. 1681 “On the main directions of the state policy of the Russian Federation with respect to compatriots living abroad,” and by Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of August 31, 1994, No. 1064 “On measures to support compatriots abroad.” The Regulation on the Government Commission was approved by Government Decree of December 11, 1994, No. 1369.¹⁴

The commission includes representatives of the legislative and executive state bodies of the Russian Federation and its constituent entities (e.g., Government of the Russian Federation, Administration of the President of the Russian Federation, Council of Federation, State Duma, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Ministry of Finance of Russia, Government of Moscow, Government of St. Petersburg, Administration of the Republic of Tatarstan).

13 “Governmental Commission on the Issues of Compatriots’ living Abroad,” the Governance of Russia, <http://government.ru/department/156/about/>, accessed January 31, 2020. (Original quote in Russian: *Правительственная комиссия по делам соотечественников за рубежом*.)

14 “On Governmental Commission on issues of Compatriots’ living Abroad,” the Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs, https://www.mid.ru/obsie-svedenia/-/asset_publisher/Bmqp3BnvTYus/content/id/269882, accessed January 31, 2020. (Original quote in Russian: *О Правительственной комиссии по делам соотечественников за рубежом*.)

Instruments of the promotion of Russian world and Russia's influence

The main instruments/pillars of the promotion of the Russian world and Russia's influence abroad are the Russian language, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), the so-called spiritual ties and history. The version of history has the strong focus on the Soviet past and glory of the victory in the Second World War.

Considering that Rossotrudnichestvo acts as the main executive body for the promotion of compatriots' policy and the Russian world's ideas, it is worth having a closer look at some instruments that are used for such promotion.

Russian language

After the fall of the Soviet Union and collapse of communism, the number of those learning and speaking Russian dropped. The former satellite states opted for other foreign languages, such as English and German, instead of Russian, claiming that Russian was imposed on them during the Cold War. Similar statements became popular among Baltic states, where the number of Russian schools and Russian classes were gradually limited. Russian language, though still a *lingua franca* (language of intercultural communication) among most of the post-Soviet states, has lost its leading positions in many states, being replaced fully or partially by the national languages. Thus, a concept of state support and promotion of the Russian language abroad was adopted on November 3, 2015. The concept was developed within the realisation of the main directions of the Russian Federation in the sphere of international cooperation, approved by the Russian president on December 18, 2010.

According to this concept, language spread and usage abroad determines a state's authority and influence in the world. Therefore, Russian language is to be seen as one of the main instruments of the promotion and realisation of Russia's strategic and foreign policy interests.¹⁵ The spread and promotion of Russian language abroad is seen as a tool that contributes to the formation of a positive attitude towards the Russian Federation as well as to

15 "Concept of the state support and promotion of the Russian language abroad," Rossotrudnichestvo, http://rs.gov.ru/uploads/document/file/22/koncepciya_gosudarstvennoy_podderzhki_i_prodvizheniya_russkogo_yazyka.pdf, accessed February 5, 2020. (Original quote in Russian: *Концепция государственной поддержки и продвижения русского языка за рубежом.*)

strengthening and widening of Russian presence and influence in the international arena. The concept underlines the need to use international norms and mechanisms in the promotion and support of the Russian language abroad as well as for protection of the essential rights of the Russian-speaking population abroad for the preservation of their culture and language. In order to reach the above-stated aims, among others the following tasks are set:

- the support and strengthening of the position of the Russian language as a *lingua franca* as well as the preservation of Russian as a *lingua franca* in the CIS;
- the preservation of the Russian language in the countries historically connected/linked to Russia;
- ensuring the usage of the Russian language in integration processes in the CIS;
- the formation of a single Russian informational space abroad.

Thus, the concept presents the Russian language as a corner stone for the preservation of Russian geopolitical and socio-economic influence and presence, if not dominance, in the countries that used to have Russian as their *lingua franca* or are historically linked to Russia. The Russian-speaking population is automatically identified as a Russian one with the need to protect their culture and identity (which is automatically perceived as a Russian one). Moreover, language is claimed to be the tool for the creation of a positive image of Russia (apparently referring to the pre-occupation times [e.g., pre-Soviet, pre-Crimea] to the greatness of Pushkin, Tolstoy, Lermontov), replacing politically negative images with a great culture and literature.

The Russkiy Mir Foundation, established in accordance with Presidential Decree No. 796 of June 21, 2007, supplements the activities of federal executive bodies to support and promote the Russian language abroad within the framework of their authority and competence and acts in concert with them.

Support for the Russian compatriots abroad is the other main activity of Rossotrudnichestvo. Russian compatriots are seen as carriers of Russian culture, values, and language and peculiar conductors of humanitarian ties and relations between Russia and foreign countries.¹⁶ Rossotrudnichestvo actively interacts with organizations of compatriots, organizing various joint events for people who continue to feel their involvement in Russia and are doing everything to develop friendly ties between their country and Russia. The

¹⁶ "Support of Compatriots' Living Abroad", Rossotrudnichestvo, <http://rs.gov.ru/ru/activities/5>, accessed February 5, 2020. (Original quote in Russian: *Поддержка соотечественников за рубежом*.)

competence of Rossotrudnichestvo includes the implementation of the program of work with compatriots living abroad in the field of supporting public associations of compatriots; meeting the cultural, linguistic, and spiritual needs of Russian compatriots abroad; and supporting youth of the Russian diaspora.

Thus, the Russian language as an important instrument of the promotion of the Russian world, and compatriots' policies are closely interconnected through the activities of the above-mentioned institutions.

History and spiritual ties

The formulation of the Russian constitution on "reviving the sovereign statehood of Russia" raises the question of the linkage of epochs in the Russian contemporary official discourse. In this regard, it is also important to mention Putin's 2016 statement that Russia "do[es] not have and cannot have any other unifying idea other than patriotism."¹⁷ This was not Putin's first reference to patriotism. He had previously emphasized that patriotism is a moral beacon for Russia's younger generation as well as one of the basic values and a sacred duty of the Russian society.¹⁸

Paraphrasing the rhetoric of the Kremlin, one can say that patriotism plays the role of the main "spiritual tie" of Russian society. The idea of patriotism understood as unconditional love to one's home country does not imply anything wrong *per se*. However, the questions address what the Russian authorities mean when they apply patriotism and what domestic and external effect it has.

17 "Putin says patriotism is Russia's 'national idea'", *TASS*, February 3, 2016, <http://tass.ru/en/politics/854250>, accessed March 15, 2020.

18 See: "Путин: патриотизм должен быть нравственным ориентиром для подростков" ("Putin: Patriotism should be a Moral Guide for Teenagers"), *RIA Novosti*, October 18, 2015, <http://ria.ru/society/20151008/1298806962.html>, accessed March 15, 2020; "Путин: патриотизм, доброта, милосердие всегда были нашими базовыми ценностями" ("Putin: Patriotism, Kind, and Mercy always were our Basic Values"), *Pravoslavie.ru*, January, 15, 2015; <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/76536.html>, accessed March 15, 2020; "Путин назвал верность ценностям патриотизма «священным долгом» россиян" ("Putin Called Loyalty to the Values of Patriotism the 'sacred Duty' of Russians"), *RBC.ru*, June 22, 2015, <http://www.rbc.ru/politics/22/06/2015/5587e95f9a79478cbf0f6885>, accessed March 15, 2020.

While searching for the spiritual ties back in 2012, Putin suggested to tie together the historical epochs and return to the understanding of the simple truth that Russia did not emerge in 1917 or even in 1991, that it has a single, indissoluble millennial history upon which we find inner strength and sense of national development.¹⁹

In other words, the notion of patriotism in the understanding of the Kremlin authorities in any case is linked with Russian history. Moreover, the vision of Russia's history proposed by Putin does not contradict the goal of "reviving the sovereign statehood of Russia" declared in the country's constitution. At the same time, Putin's references to 1917 and 1991 can comply with his vision of the USSR collapse as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century," which he has been repeatedly emphasizing since at least 2006.²⁰ Moreover, Putin's thesis on Russia as the biggest divided nation in the world as a result of the USSR collapse²¹ echoes in his perception of the Russian world concept, as a trans-national and multiethnic community united by Russian as "the language of the historic brotherhood of nations" and "international communication," which preserves "the living space for the multimillion Russian world, which of course is much broader than Russia itself."²²

The main binding ties that unite all Russians and compatriots are linked to Soviet history and an interpretation of the actions of Soviet authorities towards Soviet republics. According to political analyst Igor Zevelev, the Soviet Union meant much more for Russians than for other citizens of the USSR. It claimed unity, erased borders between "us" and "them" in Russian consciousness, and created "a subjective mental map held by most Russians," who however "share no congruence."²³ Thus, historical events and narratives that are expected to be interpreted similarly by all of the post-Soviet republics have in reality different values, if any at all, and create major misunderstanding among the post-Soviet states and Russia.

The major cornerstones of such debates are with an interpretation of the willingness of the Soviet republics to join the USSR (voluntarily vs. occupation), an interpretation of the

19 "Путин: в России дефицит духовных скреп," ("Putin: there is a deficiency of spiritual ties in Russia"), *Dni.ru*, December 12, 2012, <http://www.dni.ru/culture/2012/12/12/245110.html>, accessed March 19, 2019.

20 "Putin calls collapse of Soviet Union 'catastrophe'," *The Washington Times*, April, 26, 2006, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2005/apr/26/20050426-120658-5687t/?page=all>, accessed March 17, 2018.

21 "Address by President of the Russian Federation," Russian President Website, March 18, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>, accessed May 10 2017.

22 "Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation," Russian President Website, 26 April, 2007, http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2007/04/26/1156_type63372type63374type82634_125339.shtml, accessed March 15, 2018.

23 Igor Zevelev. *Russian National Identity and Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: CSIS Report, 2016), https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/161208_Zevelev_RussianNationalIdentity_Web.pdf, 7, accessed March 15, 2020.

WWII victory (victory vs. another occupation) and the celebration of Victory Day (May 9th), and partisan/nationalist movements during and after WWII (traitors vs. fighters for freedom/against communism). Such variations in interpretations are very typical for all of the Baltic states and Ukraine (mostly western regions) and to a much lesser extent for Moldova and Belarus. All of the "deviations" from the historical interpretation are seen by Russia as acts revisionism and "Russophobia."

At the Sixth World Congress of Russian Compatriots, which took place in Moscow in October 2018, Putin underlined that the Russian world "was never built exclusively and only on the ethnic, national, or religious grounds. The Russian world united all who are spiritually connected to Russian, who feel spiritual connected with our Motherland, who claim to be a Russian native speaker, [and a carrier of] Russian culture and Russian history."²⁴ In his speech, he specifically mentioned the Baltic states and Ukraine as countries where "Russophobia" as a form of aggressive nationalism, in which history was rewritten, historical monuments were demolished, and Russian language persecuted, was widely spread. Thus, he promised to fight for the compatriots' rights using all available bilateral and multilateral mechanisms and would proceed with supporting the Foundation of Compatriots Support and Protection.²⁵ In line with his speech on the protection of compatriots who were persecuted and terrorized, Putin signed a new concept of migration policy.²⁶

In addition to supporting the projects and activities aimed at the compatriots abroad, the Russian authorities launched the State Program of Voluntary Resettlement to the Russian Federation of Compatriots Living Abroad in 2007. The expectations were that Russia would be seen as more attractive economically and culturally compared to the countries of resident. The inflow of compatriots from the Baltic and Western CIS states was expected, while most of the compatriots who resettled came from Central Asian states (e.g., Tajikistan, Kazakstan). By the end of the first year, however, just 143 ethnic Russian families (around 650 people) had moved to Russia, while the expected number was as high

24 "Всемирный конгресс соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом, Владимир Путин выступил на VI Всемирном конгрессе соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом" ("World Congress of Compatriots living abroad. Putin held a speech at the VI World Congress of Compatriots living abroad"), Russian President Website, October, 31, 2018, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59003>, accessed March 25, 2020.

25 "Путин: Россия защитит русский язык и русскость своих соотечественников" (Putin: Russia will protect Russian Language and Russianness of its Compatriots), *Sputnik*, October, 31, 2018, https://ee.sputniknews.ru/world_news/20181031/13477490/Russia-Putin-Vsemirnyj-kongress-sootchestvenniki.html, accessed March 31, 2020.

26 "Путин подписал новую концепцию миграционной политики" ("Putin signed a new concept of migration policy"), *RIA Novosti*, October 31, 2018, <https://ria.ru/20181031/1531851750.html>, accessed January 31, 2020.

as 25,000.²⁷ As of September 2019, 12 years after the introduction of the program, only 878,000 compatriots had returned to Russia out of an estimated 5–6 million. Before the conflict with Ukraine, within six years, only 148,200 people had returned. Already in 2012 Putin signed the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of September 14, 2012, No. 1289 “On the implementation of the State Program to facilitate the voluntary resettlement of compatriots living abroad in the Russian Federation” to increase effectiveness of repatriation program, which again was not a very successful one. Only the outbreak in Ukraine caused a significant increase of the inflow. Thus, in the year 2014, 106,300 individuals returned and in 2015, 181,100.²⁸ Then, the flow decreased to 107,700 in 2018.²⁹ The program is a failure as 10 times more compatriots return on a common basis.³⁰ The program aims to improve the demographic situation in Russia, and thus it focuses on compatriots raised with Russian culture and speaking Russian, as those are who would easily adapt into Russian society.³¹ Program non-effectiveness is determined by the terms established by the Russian government to compatriots’ citizenship and by the reluctance of the local authorities to accept repatriates, as the authorities search exclusively for highly educated people with 10 years of experience. Thus, the program itself has turned from one of repatriation into a compatriot labor search program.

A category called Russian native speakers³² has also offered a simplified procedure for receiving Russian citizenship. As of March 18, 2020, Vladimir Putin has signed a law on the abolition of the exam for citizens of Belarus and Ukraine to obtain the status of Russian native speakers.³³

27 Jean-Christophe Peuch, “Russia: Repatriation Plan Appeals To Few Ethnic Russians,” *Radio Free Europe*, January 17, 2008, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1079364.html>, accessed January 31, 2020.

28 However, it is questionable if those people could be considered as repatriates or rather refugees or forced displaced people.

29 Алена Лаптева, “Россия: программа репатриации соотечественников пробуксовывает” (Alyona Lapteva, “Russia: compatriots’ repatriation program stalls”), *Eurasianet*, September, 10, 2019, <https://russian.eurasianet.org/россия-программа-репатриации-соотечественников-пробуксовывает>, accessed March 31, 2020.

30 *Ibid.*

31 “State Program to Facilitate the Voluntary Resettlement of Compatriots Living Abroad to the Russian Federation,” Embassy of Russian Federation to Belarus Website, https://belarus.mid.ru/ru/consular-services/consular%20functions/programma_pereseleniya_sootechestvennikov/, accessed March 31, 2020. (Original quote in Russian: *Государственная программа по оказанию содействия добровольному переселению в Российскую Федерацию соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом.*)

32 Russian native speakers are recognized as those who speak the Russian language and use it daily in the family, household and cultural spheres if these persons or their relatives live in a direct ascending line or have previously lived permanently in the territory of the Russian Federation or in a territory related to the Russian Empire or USSR, within the State Border of the Russian Federation. Main Department on Migration of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs Website, <https://увм.50.мвд.рф/для-граждан/гражданство-рф/признание-носителем-русского-языка>, accessed March 31, 2020.

33 “Путин подписал закон о приеме украинцев в гражданство без экзамена” (“Putin has signed a law on accepting Ukrainians into citizenship without examination”), *RIA Novosti*, March, 18, 2020, <https://ria.ru/20200318/1568802080.html>, accessed March 31, 2020.

Adopted measures clearly aim to attract as many compatriots as possible to be resettled into Russia, as they are those who by default share Russian culture, values, and traditions. Language is seen as a check-point for cultural and ethnic affiliation.

Role of the Russian Orthodox Church

The approach of the the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) largely resembles that of the Kremlin regarding Russia's relationship with its post-Soviet nations—Armenia, Belarus, Moldova, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. As its Patriarch Kirill, Vladimir Gundiaev in 2009 emphasized that "the Russian Orthodox Church conducts its pastoral mission among the people who embrace Russian spiritual and cultural tradition as the core of their national identity, or, at least, its substantial part."³⁴ Gundiaev further repeated Putin's vision while speaking of "the entire East Slavic civilization, which we conventionally call the Russian world."³⁵ According to him, "this is the world that has been created through baptism in the Dnieper river; it is the world of Prince Vladimir, a system of values, which penetrated the culture."³⁶

One of the central uniting ties, according to him, is the Russian language, which is regarded as "a natural means of maintaining the relationship between the people belonging to the same cultural and spiritual community."³⁷

Moreover, while projecting his thoughts to the events in Ukraine during the last two years, Gundiaev underlined that "perhaps, the most terrible threat to the entire Russian world is the extreme nationalism and rejection of a representative of a different nationality, a different culture."³⁸

These and other speeches of the head of the ROC show two trends. First, Gundi-aev refers to the same historical personalities (Prince Vladimir) and geographical objects

34 "Выступление Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла на торжественном открытии III Ассамблеи Русского мира" (Address at a solemn opening of the 3rd Assembly of the Russian world), Russian Orthodox Church, Official Website of the Moscow Patriarchate, November, 3, 2009, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/928446.html>, accessed March 31, 2020.

35 "Слово Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла на V Всемирном конгрессе соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом" (The word of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the V World Congress of Compatriots Living Abroad), Russian Orthodox Church, Official website of the Moscow Patriarchate, November, 05, 2015, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4265245.html>, accessed March 31, 2020.

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Ibid.*

(the Dnieper river in Kyiv) that form the ideological core of the Russian official historical canon. Second, in terms of the authority Russia asserts, an “East Slavic civilization” underlines the alleged common origins of Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Russians as well as other ethnic groups who adopted Russian “traditions,” and it also emphasizes the central role of the Orthodox Church in maintaining, developing, and preserving these allegedly common origins.

The formal break out of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) from the ROC of Moscow Patriarchate took place at the very beginning of 2019, when the spiritual leader of Eastern Orthodox Christians, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, recognized UOC independence (Autocephalous).³⁹ Such a split was condemned by the ROC and was not recognized as valid. Ukraine as such and Kyiv in particular are seen as a cradle of Russian Christianity, as Russia associates Ruthenia (Rus’) with Russia and sees Kyivan/Kyivan Rus’ as a formation that became a birthplace for the three Slavic peoples: Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians. The ROC sees the UOC as an intrusion into ROC canonical territory. The split between the churches was aggravated by the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014.⁴⁰ The Russian Patriarch Kirill Gundiaev claimed, [the ROC has] never abandoned the notion that we are one country [with Ukraine-auth.] and one people. It is impossible for us to separate Kyiv from our country, as this is where our history began. The Russian Orthodox Church preserves the national consciousness of both Russians and Ukrainians.⁴¹

Putin sees the UOC as a political project supported by the USA, with the aim of separating Russia and Ukraine, “to sow national and religious divisions.”⁴² Moreover, the split between the churches was seen by the Russian side as a threat of a new civil war in Ukraine.

Thus, the vision of the Russian world is largely monopolized by the Kremlin and the ROC. The activities of these two political heavyweights are complementary, as they act in parallel in secular and religious directions. In addition, their interpretation of history, key

39 Carlotta Gall, “Ukrainian Orthodox Christians Formally Break From Russia”, *The New York Times*, January 6, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/06/world/europe/orthodox-church-ukraine-russia.html>, accessed March 31, 2020.

40 “Греческая церковь признала право Константинополя дать автокефалию Украине” (“Greek Church recognized the right of Constantinople to give autocephaly to Ukraine”), *BBC Russian Service*, October 12, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-50020363>, accessed March 31, 2020.

41 EXCLUSIVE: The dialogue between the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Moscow during their meeting at the Phanar *Orthodoxia.info*. October 1, 2018, <https://orthodoxia.info/news/exclusive-the-dialogue-between-the-patriarchs-of-constantinople-and-moscow-during-their-meeting-at-the-phanar/>, accessed March 16, 2018.

42 “Интервью сербским изданиям «Политика» и «Вечерние новости»” (“Putin’s interview to the Serbian media “Politics” and “the Evening News”), Russian President Website, January 16, 2019, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59680>, accessed March 31, 2020.

dates, and events is quite unambiguous, categorically Russo-centric, and hierarchic with the primacy of Russian culture and language over their Ukrainian (and also Belarusian, Moldovan) counterparts. At the same time, possible alternative interpretations of history are attributed to local "nationalism" and presented as "a trait" or even as a manifestation of "Russophobia."

Russian media in promotion of the Russian world

Russian government-supported media play an important role in the promotion of the Russian world concept. Mostly financed by the government, the media acts as a bullhorn for the promotion of certain ideas that the government wants to introduce to the general Russian public. One good example of manipulation of the public opinion was the program by Kiselyov presented on the eve of the Crimea referendum. Celebrating the anniversary of the Chechen and Ingush deportations, Kiselyov had shown the success of post-war Chechnya, where allegedly all rights and freedoms were granted and widely implemented, and at the same time Mejdli's actions and reputation were heavily disputed. Therefore, all of the actions by the Russian government in occupied Crimea were presented as an "act of salvation" of the Russian-speaking population who, according to the Russian media perception, were de-Russified during the whole period of Ukraine's independence, faced Ukrainization, and slowly started being westernized, which would lead to the loss of Russian culture and, moreover, Russian civilization.⁴³ From one side, the security issues were also melted in the argumentation for "returning" Crimea to Russia; the threat of NATO's presence in Crimea and turning it into the bridgehead of NATO in the nearest proximity to Russia was actively discussed.

Another example of a media entity guarding Russian traditions is the federal information agency Regnum.⁴⁴ Regnum is known for hash reactions to any news coming from the CIS countries that could be, and quite often are, interpreted as de-Russification and an imposition of the new rules and standards aimed at suppressing of Russia-oriented (be that politically or culturally) populations in those states. Usually, the interpretation divides the societies (as the ones wanting, if not unity with Russia, at least close ties and further promotion and support of Russian culture) and the governments (which are usually seen

43 "Крым наш: что нашла, а что потеряла Россия" (Crimea is ours: the gains and the losses of Russia), *Svobodnaya Pressa*, March 16, 2017, <http://svpressa.ru/politic/article/168431/>, accessed 31 March 2020.

44 <https://regnum.ru/>

as the ones against Russian government and aims for the nationalization of its population against its will). Names and prepositions (as in the case of Ukraine) were used as during the Soviet times (Belorussia/Byelorussia not Belarus, Moldavia not Moldova, “on the Ukraine” not “in Ukraine”), and any change of the historical discourse by the countries (any deviation from the Soviet interpretation of the history of these states) is claimed as aiming to re-write the history and to portray Russian state as an aggressor. Likewise, any change of the legislation (e.g., related to the language, education, decommunization) is also seen as exclusively aimed at distancing from Russia, suppressing of Russian supporters, and diminishing the presence of Russian culture and traditions. Such presentations of the situation in the CIS countries is clearly following the concept of the Russian world and its protection.

A news agency Sputnik, formerly known as the Voice of Russia (radio) and RIA Novosti, established by the Russian government-owned news agency Rossiya Segodnya and headed by Dmitry Kiselyov, is another example of state propaganda. This media resource represents a classical variation of criticism of all post-Soviet and post-communist states when their actions are seen as opposed to the Russian position. Thus, the report, while analysing various MPs’ comments used by Sputnik, has identified a common approach in presenting information from abroad. Thus, citing a Lithuanian MP Sputnik uses only the comments that fall in line with the Kremlin’s position:

...a criticism of Ukraine for failing to implement reforms, ... a suggestion that Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine form a joint army unit before considering an application to join NATO. Both of these comments could be construed as in line with the Kremlin’s preferences for portraying Ukraine as ineffective and corrupt and opposing any rapid NATO expansion.⁴⁵

All of the criticism against Sputnik was perceived by the Russian government as proof of effectivity and a proper presentation of information.⁴⁶ Therefore, one may conclude that Russian media is not only supporting the “Russian world” concept, but plays an important role in its distribution, spreading propaganda, and being the bullhorn of the main Kremlin messages aimed not only at the Russian citizens, but also at the citizens of the CIS countries and beyond.

45 Ben Nimmo. Propaganda in a New Orbit. Information Warfare Initiative Paper N2. (Center for European Policy Analysis. January, 2016), 5. http://infowar.cepa.org/files/?id_plik=2083, accessed 31 March 2020.

46 “Захарова о нападках на Sputnik: бьют по тем, кто эффективен” (“Zakharova: whose are beaten who is effective”) *Sputnik*. September, 20, 2018, <https://ee.sputniknews.ru/politics/20180920/12783711/zakharova-napadkah-sputnik-jeffektiven.html>, accessed March 31, 2020.

The view from the other side: Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine⁴⁷

Such an active and sometimes aggressive approach for including the former USSR countries and their citizens into the concept of the Russian world elicits a certain reaction in the involved states, as presented in this subsection. Despite a significant presence of the Russian minority in the all three states addressed in this paper—Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine—these minorities do not constitute a majority in any of those countries. In Belarus the Russian minority represents 8.3% of the population (2009 Census), in Moldova 4.1% (2014 Census), and in Ukraine 17.2% (2001 Census).

Despite the common past as a part of the Russian empire and as a part of the Soviet Union, most of the countries developed their own vision on history, culture, and languages, as well as their own interpretation of certain historical events partially or significantly different from Russia's versions. Most of them from the beginning kept close economic and cultural ties with Russia, but over the years those connections significantly weakened. Moldova and Ukraine became more Western oriented, and Belarus, despite keeping closer ties with Russia compared to the two other states, also developed its own policies and practices aimed at strengthening national identity and differing from the Russian historical interpretation. Therefore, the promotion of the Russian world and compatriots' policies faced certain concerns and sometimes restrictions in the analysed states.

Moldova

One of the most acute issues addressed by the Russian Federation, which became a cornerstone of the Russian world concept, is the Russian language. In Moldova and Ukraine for years the Russian language kept its role as a language of intercultural dialogue, and only in Belarus was it recognized (by the still-debated 1995 referendum) as one of the two official ones. Despite the wide distribution of the Russian language in the three countries, certain legislation was adopted for defining and strengthening the role of the national language in those states. However, with the promotion of the Russian world and with rather aggressive attempts to protect "Russian speakers" (based on the analysis presented above, most of the population of the

⁴⁷ The proposed analysis and cases do not present the full scope of reaction, but rather a selection of the most exemplary, according to the author, cases, and reactions on the concept.

analysed countries could fall under this definition), as it happened in Ukraine, some legislative changes took place in the countries, showing rather defensive reactions to potential and actual Russian intervention.

Thus, in Moldova, on June 4, 2018, the Constitutional Court stripped the Russian language of its status as the “language of inter-ethnic communication.” The Constitutional Court ruled on the constitutionality of certain provisions of the law on the use of languages spoken on the territory of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic, the Law on Publishing and Enactment of Official Acts, the Law on the Rights of Individuals Belonging to National Minorities and Legal Status of Their Organizations, the parliament’s Rules of Procedure, the Code of Constitutional Jurisdiction, and the Law on the Constitutional Court.⁴⁸ Despite the fact that this has not changed the general line-up of the languages for Transnistria and Gagauzia (which has its own legislation regulating the usage of the languages in the Autonomous Territorial Unity), this claim has shown the decreasing influence of Russia and the defensive policies of the state.

Similarly, in June 2018, the Constitutional Court delivered a judgement on the constitutionality of Law no. 257 of December 22, 2017, amending the country’s Audiovisual Code. The new provisions were adopted in December last year to enhance Moldova’s informational security by prohibiting so-called “fake news” and Russian propaganda. Based upon the new provisions, the Coordinating Council on TV and Radio Broadcasting has already fined several broadcasters for the unlawful transmission of Russian programs, including the live address of Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin before the federal assembly or the live broadcasting of the May 9th Victory Day Parade from Moscow.⁴⁹

Ukraine

As a reaction to the policies of the Russian world, which Ukraine faced more harshly than Russia’s other neighbors (Crimea annexation and the war in Donbass), in its position on Article 7 of the Law on Education submitted to the Venice Commission, Ukraine specifically referred to the notion of the Russian world as an instrument that Russia is using against its neighbors and defined Russia’s policies towards post-Maidan Ukraine. Due to the fact that “[t]his policy was used by the Russian Federation as a motive for aggression against Ukraine with the slogan

48 “The Court Examined the Constitutionality of Certain Provisions of the Audiovisual Code on State Informational Security,” Constitutional Court, of Moldova, June 4, 2018, <http://www.constcourt.md/libview.php?l=en&idc=7&id=1210&t=/Media/News/The-Court-Examined-the-Constitutionality-of-Certain-Provisions-of-the-Audiovisual-Code-on-State-Informational-Security>, accessed March 31, 2019.

49 *Ibid*

of preserving the Russian world,⁵⁰ by which the Russian authorities understood all the territories where the Russian language dominated," the Ukrainian authorities explained the need to change the language policies in the sphere of education with the security domain and defined it as a threat towards Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.⁵¹ This document shows that Ukrainian authorities directly link ethnicity and language, considering schools with Russian as the language of instruction not as national minority schools but as "an element of the continued Russification of Ukraine."⁵² After four years of the struggle over that legislation, the adopted law (on September 28, 2017, Ukraine's new education law⁵³ entered into force) triggered a wave of criticism from its neighbors (Bulgaria,⁵⁴ Greece,⁵⁵ Hungary,⁵⁶ Moldova,⁵⁷ Romania,⁵⁸ and Russia) blaming Ukraine for limiting education in minority languages. The Ukrainian position mainly rests on the need to introduce Ukrainian as the obligatory language of instruction in secondary schools, in order to strengthen its position in Ukrainian society, and is seen as a reaction against the spread of the Russian world and the usage of the Russian language as a soft power tool to promote Russian influence (see the comment to Venice Commission above). This law was followed by a draft law on secondary education, and was finally approved on January 16, 2020, and subsequently at least 80% of classes should be taught in Ukrainian. The law on secondary education is a detailed document of the law on education adopted in 2017.⁵⁹

50 Position on Article 7 of the Law on Education submitted by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, CDL-REF(2017)051, [http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF\(2017\)051-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF(2017)051-e), accessed March 31, 2020.

51 *Ibid*

52 *Ibid*

53 The law on Education in Ukrainian (*Закон України Про освіту*), <http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2145-19/print1486580363615849>, accessed April 1, 2020.

54 "Bulgaria: New law On education in Ukraine violates the rights of Bulgarian minorities," *Weapon News*, September 28, 2017, <http://weaponews.com/news/15532-bulgaria-new-law-on-education-in-ukraine-violates-the-rights-of-bulgar.html>, accessed April 1, 2020.

55 "Romanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Hungarian Foreign Ministers Sign Joint Letter on Ukraine's Education Law." *Publika*. September 15, 2017. http://en.publika.md/romanian-bulgarian-greek-hungarian-foreign-ministers-sign-joint-letter-on-ukraine-s-education-law_2640210.html, accessed April 1, 2020.

56 "Hungary Urges Ukraine to Change Education Law," *LB.ua*, September 6, 2017, https://en.lb.ua/news/2017/09/06/4443_hungary_urges_ukraine_change.html, accessed April 1, 2020.

57 "Ukrainian Education Law Is Unfair towards Moldovans and Hungarians, – Dodon." *112 UA*, September 11, 2017, <http://112.international/politics/ukrainian-education-law-is-unfair-towards-moldovans-and-hungarians-dodon-20637.html>, accessed April 1, 2020.

58 Ro Insider, "Romania, Concerned over New Ukrainian Education Law." *Romania Insider*, September 8, 2017, <https://www.romania-insider.com/romania-ukrainian-education-law-september-2017>, accessed April 1, 2020.

59 Rafael Fakhrutdinov, "Less Russian: Parliament adopted a Scandalous Bill" (Рафаэль Фахрутдинов, "Поменьше русского: Рада приняла скандальный законопроект"), *Gazeta.ru*, January 16, 2020, <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2020/01/16/12913280.shtml>, accessed April 1, 2020.

Another public debate arose in Ukrainian society due to the above-mentioned law on the abolition of the exam for citizens of Belarus and Ukraine to obtain the status of Russian native speakers.⁶⁰ This legislation caused a wave of criticism from the Ukrainian side. Thus, Volodymyr Viatrovych, a Ukrainian Parliament (*Verkhovna Rada* [VR]) MP from the ex-president party European Solidarity saw such a law as an attempt to promote his idea that since Ukrainians and Belarusians are considered to be Russian native speakers, they constitute one people. According to Viatrovych, such a vision/perception is being used by the supporters of the Russian world to justify possible further expansion to the both states.⁶¹ He sees the Russian language as a weapon and suggests to expand the usage of Ukrainian in the public sphere, as the Ukrainian language is one of the most powerful factors of national security and state unity, which helps us enforce the independence and integrity of the state. This should clearly be understood by both representatives of power and citizens. And first of all, by the Russian-speaking [Ukrainian] citizens, because the most Russified regions will become the main target of Moscow aggression ... The sooner Ukrainian language will dominate in all public areas at the whole territory of Ukraine, the stronger our unity and security of every Ukrainian will be, regardless of his/her ethnic origin and native language.⁶²

Moreover, as a reaction to the simplification of obtaining a Russian passport, announced by Putin in spring 2019, a draft law was proposed to the VR regarding the use of exclusively the Ukrainian language in the public sphere. Minority languages, including Russian, were proposed to be used only in private. This controversial law is currently under debate. The VR was suggested to postpone working on this draft law before the Constitutional Court makes a decision on it, because on June 21, 2019, MPs from the Opposition Bloc faction submitted to the Constitutional Court a claim that recognizes the Language Law as contradictory to the Basic Law.

Moreover, on December 6, 2019, a report of the Venice Commission on the Ukrainian Language Law was adopted, which states that this law does not provide a balance for the preservation of the language rights of national minorities.⁶³

60 “Путин подписал закон о приеме украинцев в гражданство без экзамена” (“Putin has signed a law on accepting Ukrainians into citizenship without examination”), *RIA Novosti*, March 18, 2020, <https://ria.ru/20200318/1568802080.html>, accessed March 31, 2020.

61 Volodymyr Viatrovych, “Мова як зброя” (“Language as a weapon”), Facebook, March, 11, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/volodymyr.viatrovych/posts/10216468408442233>, accessed March 31, 2020.

62 *Ibid*

63 “В Раду готовят предложения об отмене ряда положений «языкового» закона — Княжицкий” (“The Rada [Parliament] is preparing proposals to cancel a number of provisions of the ‘language’ law—Knyazhitsky”), *UkrInform*, March 23, 2020, <https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-politics/2902748-v-radu-gotovat-predlozenia-ob-otmene-rada-polozenij-azykovogo-zakona-knazickij.html>, accessed April 1, 2020.

Language issue is continue to be a hotly debated topic, as already this year, a national deputy from the Servant of the People party [Слуга народу], Maksim Buzhansky, suggested to allow the usage of the Russian at VR sessions. Though the draft law has not yet been discussed, the general position is that such a disputed proposal should receive at least 70% support from the fraction before it is discussed in the VR, according the Deputy Head of the Faction Evgeny Kravchuk.⁶⁴

The above-mentioned conflict over the independence of the UOC presents another strong case of the existing confrontation between Ukraine and its attempt to prevent the spread of the Russian world. A year after receiving Tomos of Autocephaly, there is still a struggle over every single community as the ROC through the courts attempts to keep them. This creates additional tensions between the believers and contributes to mistrust and anxiety among the population. The conflict between the ROC and the UOC spilled further after the Council of Hierarchs of the Greek (Hellas) Church recognized the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine (on October 12, 2019), and a month later, on November 8, 2020, the same was done by the Alexandrian Patriarchate⁶⁵ ROC after the Greek (Hellas) Church recognized that the UOC ceased Eucharistic communion with the head of the Church of Greece.

The confrontation between Ukraine and Russian over re-written history and changed historical narratives has lasted for several decades. However, the most debatable and irreconcilable topic relates to the interpretation of the actions of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), the commemoration of those who, according to Ukrainian historians, fought for independence from the Soviet rule, and the equalization of Soviet and Nazi rule. The legislation proposed and adopted in Ukraine within the past decades has always been heavily criticized by Moscow. One of the most recent examples deals with the Law on the Condemnation of the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine and the Prohibition of the Propaganda of Their Symbols, dated April 9, 2015, No. 317-VIII as amended and adopted in Ukraine in May 2015. It involves the renaming of all topographical objects whose names refer to the USSR times and rule, as well as the demolition of monuments that, according to Kyiv, propagate communist ideas. In May 2018,

64 "В 'Слуге народа' отреагировали на инициативу Бужанского о русском языке в Раде" (In the "Servant of the People" reacted to the initiative of Buzhansky about the Russian language in the Rada [Parliament]), *Novoe Vremya*, February 26, 2020, <https://nv.ua/ukraine/politics/buzhanskiy-i-russkiy-yazyk-reakciya-slugi-naroda-novosti-ukrainy-50072517.html>, accessed April 1, 2020.

65 "Российская церковь судится за каждую общину, которая переходит в ПЦУ – Епифаний" (Russian Church is suing for every community which is being passed to UOC – Epiphaniy), *Ukrainskaya Pravda*, February 3, 2020, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2020/02/3/7239271/>, accessed April 1, 2020.

the former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko claimed that demolishing about 1,500 monuments to Vladimir Lenin was part of the de-communization program.⁶⁶ This law was also very much debated in Ukraine, but in July 2019 in the Constitutional Court of Ukraine declared the law on de-communization constitutional. The Constitutional Court based its decision on the fact that the communist regime denied and limited human rights and ruled out the democratic organization of state power.⁶⁷ In its statement, the Constitutional Court underlined that “the communist regime was assessed only positively and its crimes were not recognized, although millions of innocent people became victims of this regime;” moreover, the symbols of the communist regime were actively used in 2014 to artificially destabilize the situation in Ukraine, to justify the annexation by the Russian Federation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, as well as armed aggression and temporary occupation by the Russian Federation of part of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, with illegally armed groups, which the Russian Federation created, supports and finances.⁶⁸

With these selected examples, one may see that in relations between Kyiv and Moscow all three components of the Russian world are constantly present in a struggle for its positions: language (education, public sphere, and citizenship), church (separation and independence of the UOC), and historical narratives (commemoration of Bandera and other members of the UPA and controversial heroes as a result of de-communization law).

Belarus

Belarus, among other countries, is seen more loyal to Russia compared to the other former Soviet states. However, the recent court cases aiming at the authors of the federal information agency, Regnum, shows that loyalty can be changed for defensive actions once the authorities see the threat in foreign countries' policies. Considering that Belarus is perceived as an authoritative state and that the presented case caused numerous debates among

66 “На Украине закон о декоммунизации признан конституционным” (“In Ukraine the Law on De-communization is recognized as constitutional”), *Izvestiya*, July 16, 2019, <https://iz.ru/899965/2019-07-16/na-ukraine-zakon-o-dekommunizatsii-priznan-konstitucionnym>, accessed April 1, 2020.

67 “КС признал конституционным закон о декоммунизации” (“Constitutional Court recognized the Law on Decommunization”), *Interfax Ukraine*, July 16, 2019, <https://interfax.com.ua/news/general/600493.html>, accessed April 1, 2019.

68 “КС признал конституционным закон о декоммунизации” (“Constitutional Court recognized the Law on Decommunization”), *Interfax Ukraine*, July 16, 2019, <https://interfax.com.ua/news/general/600493.html>, accessed April 1, 2020.

human rights defenders who see this case also from the perspective of a violation of human rights (freedom of expression), it is nevertheless included into the analysis as an exemplary reaction by the Belarusian government. Three authors of *Regnum*, who are all Belarusian citizens, were accused and sentenced for five years each for the following: texts that contained a "contemptuous attitude to the Belarusian history and language;" accusations of the Belarusian government of forced Belarusianization; determinations of "the history of Belarus as a mythical, Belarusian language as dead, aiming at the Russian audience of readers to form a hostile attitude towards Belarusians as an alien group, understating their significance and discriminating;" and declarations of "the policy pursued by the Belarusian authorities as anti-Russian and aimed at discriminating against the Russian-speaking population of Belarus and pro-Russian citizens."⁶⁹ Based on the national expert commission under the Ministry of Information opinion, these articles were qualified as an attempt to incite national hatred and national enmity and discord.⁷⁰

In the situation when one of the two official languages is dominant, any attempts from the Belarusian side to widen the usage of the Belarusian language have been perceived by the Russian media as forced Belarusianization imposed over Belarusian citizens, and every single action has been condemned for such a promotion. At the same time, Belarusian society within the past several years has become very active in the promotion of Belarusian by providing free initial classes⁷¹ for those who would like to start speaking, refresh grammar and terminology, gain some confidence in communication, and find a partner for practicing the language. The year 2016 became a breaking point when, for the first time since 1999, a person who publicly insulted the Belarusian language was held administratively

69 Геннадий Шарипкин, "«Дело Регнума»: как в Беларуси наказали публицистов российских изданий" (Gennady Sharipkin, "The Regnum Affair": How Authors of Russian Media were Punished in Belarus), February 5, 2018, <http://ru.rfi.fr/evropa/20180205-delo-regnuma-kak-v-belarusi-nakazali-publitsistov-rossiiskikh-izdaniy>, accessed April 1, 2020.

70 Елена Толкачева, "Суд над авторами «Регнума». Все трое вины не признали" (Elena Tolкачева, "The trial on the Authors of Regnum. All three pleaded not guilty"), *TUT.by*, December 18, 2017, <https://news.tut.by/economics/573419.html?crnd=43809>, accessed April 1, 2019.

71 Since 2013, courses organized in a form of public discussions and talk-shows (e.g., Mova nanova, Mova [ci]Kava. The first project Mova [ci]Kava) very soon became popular in Minsk. Mova Nanova, established in 2014, was proposed as a supporting discussion club to satisfy the growing demand from the society. Later the classes of Nova Nanova were organized not only in Minsk but in other cities of Belarus. However, a year after its start, in 2014, Mova(ci)kava was officially closed due to different political view expressed by founder of Mova (ci)kava Kaciaryna Kibalčyč. She was criticized after her statement of the that time situation in Ukraine, which she characterized as a civil war, but not as Russian occupation. See Сняжана Інанец, "Мова ці кава" зачыненая. Стваральнікі апалітычнага моўнага праекта не сышліся ў палітычных пытаннях (Sniazhana Inanec, «Mova (ci)kava» is closed. The founders of the apolitical language project did not agree on political issues"), *TUT.BY*, October 16, 2014, <https://news.tut.by/society/419822.html>, accessed April 1, 2020.

liable for a fine.⁷² After that, a growing number of people who abused, discriminated, or humiliated the Belarusian language for the promotion of Russian were publicly condemned⁷³ and held administratively liable for a fine.⁷⁴ In some cases Belarusian language abusers lost their jobs.⁷⁵

Among most recent events showing resistance against the spread of the Russian world was the wave of protests that took place in Belarus in December 2019. Protests were caused by negotiations on deepening integration within the Union State. For Belarus, such an integration would mean losing its independence (starting with its economic independence), which would lead to the incorporation/absorption of Belarus into Russia. For the first time, Belarusian civil society and opposition focused mainly on protests against Russia and the potential loss of Belarusian independence, but not on protests against dictatorship. The opposition invited pro-governmental organizations to participate in the protests in support of Belarusian independence.

Conclusion

After over two decades since the introduction of the concept of the compatriots policy, Russia has focused on the policy's promotion, and only within the past decade has it merged with the concept of Russian world (since 2007). Russia's attempt to maintain its influence and presence in the post-Soviet countries, which are becoming more attracted to

72 Алёна Германович, “За оскорбление белорусского языка наказана жительница Речицы” (Aliona Germanovič, “Resident of Rečyca punished for insulting the Belarusian language”) *Naviny.by*, February 28, 2017, <https://naviny.by/article/20170228/1488288435-za-oskorblenie-belorusskogo-yazyka-nakazana-zhitelnica-rechicy>, accessed April 1, 2020.

73 На климовичскую тренершу за оскорбление белорусского языка подали в суд. И ее все же лишили премии (The Klimavičy sport trainer was sued for insulting the Belarusian language. And yet she was stripped of the monthly bonuses), *Naša Niva*, April 2, 2020, <https://nn.by/?c=ar&i=249194&lang=ru>, accessed April 2, 2020.

74 Алёна Германович, “За оскорбление белорусского языка наказана жительница Речицы” (Aliona Germanovič, “Resident of Rečyca punished for insulting the Belarusian language”) *Naviny.by*, February 28, 2017, <https://naviny.by/article/20170228/1488288435-za-oskorblenie-belorusskogo-yazyka-nakazana-zhitelnica-rechicy>, accessed April 1, 2020; Алёна Германович, “Бывший милиционер заплатит штраф за оскорбление белорусского языка” (Aliona Germanovič, “Former policeman will pay a fine for insulting the Belarusian language”), *Naviny.by*, January 27, 2017, <https://naviny.by/article/20170127/1485511876-byvshiy-milicioner-zaplatit-shtraf-za-oskorblenie-belorusskogo-yazyka>, accessed April 1, 2020.

75 Оскорбившая белорусский язык айтишница Ольга Малкина больше не работает в EPAM (IT specialist Volha Malkina, who insulted the Belarusian language, no longer works in EPAM), *Naviny.by*, January 23, 2020, <https://naviny.by/new/20200123/1579767167-oskorbivshaya-belorusskiy-yazyk-aytishnica-olga-malkina-bolshe-ne-rabotaet-v>, accessed April 1, 2020.

the EU, is generally shaped in a form of a soft-power, by using language, historical narrative based on unification and brotherhood, and church. However, the proposed actions are not as successful as expected, and more and more efforts and financial support are needed in order to make them work. The soft powers are not working as expected. The political and military threats used in Ukraine have pushed the countries that Russia wants to keep under its control further away, and civil societies (together or without support from the state, depending on the country) are protesting against the spread of the Russian world by refusing to be considered as one with the Russians and by being concerned about their independence. Politicization and hostile attitudes towards the national narratives in particular and to the national policies of the neighboring states in general create additional obstacles for the implementation of the concepts.

Church still plays an important role in the promotion of the concept, but an example from Ukraine has shown that in the case of the political escalation of relations, the church might be divided and the national autocephaly could be granted. That would only deepen the gap and create more hostility and distrust among religious communities. An additional problem in accessing the challenges of the concept of the Russian world is a controversial and often contradicting perception on what is happening in the neighboring states, which creates a totally different picture of Russian society. The gap in perception and understanding will grow with time, especially with the limitation of influence from the ROC and Russian media. The examples from the neighboring states have shown an unwillingness to be included into the concept of the Russian people and the Russian world, as after 30 years since the collapse of the USSR all the states went through nationalizing policies, and even the weakest of them are reluctant to be treated as denationalized and subordinated.