

Magdalena LACHOWICZ

Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4047-2769>

## Defenders of an Imagined Empire. The Russian Diaspora as a Tool of Propaganda and Anti-Democratic Politics in the Central and Southeast Asian Region

**Abstract:** The article analyzes the role of the Russian diaspora in the policy of the Russian Federation authorities during Russia's war in Ukraine. The author analyzes the mechanisms of centralization, consolidation and instrumentalization of organizations of so-called compatriots outside Russia, in the area of Central and Southeast Asia. The process of institutionalization of the diaspora and the creation of a coherent system of economic, cultural and repatriation policy management by the central authorities of the Russian Federation are critically analyzed. Russia, working with the diaspora, is extremely effective in exploiting the potential of its human capital, which, according to UN reports, is estimated at 11 million people, the second largest diaspora in the world after the Indian diaspora.

**Key words:** Russian diaspora in the world, Coordinating Council of Compatriots, Russkiy Mir

---

### Introduction

The history of the Russian diaspora is deeply rooted in history. Today its potential is estimated at 11 million people, the second largest diaspora in the world after the Indian diaspora (*International Migration 2020. Highlights*, 2020, p. 16). We note several significant waves of emigration in the 19th–21st centuries, and we are eyewitnesses to the most recent one arising from mobilization during Russia's war in Ukraine. While until the early 1920s the migration of Russians outside the Russian center was spontaneous, during the USSR period it took on a systemic, structural and institutional character. This was related to industrialization, the Patriotic War, economic migration associated with Soviet post-war modernization projects in Central Asia, among others, or strategic security needs (the Baltic republics). Everywhere, in addition to the productive, labor migration, there emigrated those who constituted the upper class, dominant in the party, economic, planning, decision-making and management spheres. Both migration streams ultimately constituted isolated communities, and this influenced the sense of Russian chauvinism and superiority and inhibited the homogenization processes of Soviet society. After the collapse of the USSR, this part of the societies of the newly formed states was recognized by the Russian authorities as a natural and unquestionable potential for influence in the near abroad, as bearers of ideology and defenders of imperial power. The year 1991 was a watershed moment, as for the first time during Yeltsin's presidency the tradition of so-called political emigration was broken. It was, however, a period of brief liberalization. Putin, in addition to repressing enemies of the system and creating anti-regime emigration, implemented a mechanism of permanent and institutional inter-

action with the traditionally understood Compatriots, incorporating this group into the state propaganda mechanism.

The understanding of the concept of diaspora and compatriot abroad has evolved during the USSR and Russian Federation periods, both as a legal definition and in its colloquial sense. However, the social capital of Russians abroad was always seen and exploited by the central power. Compatriots were instrumentalized and objectified in Russia's foreign policy as an important part of Russian *soft power*. We stereotype the Russian language, Russian high culture or historical projects as traditional elements in the activities of the diaspora outside Russia, but economic, diplomatic activities for business and political connections escape the attention of researchers and analysts. This article is intended to fill this gap and show the mechanisms that are institutionalized to implement Russia's irredentist policy towards the Russian-speaking diaspora of the so-called "near abroad" in Central Asia, as well as in Southeast Asia, and their role in the international political process. In the analysis, I omit the so-called "Global Russians" in Europe and North America, who left voluntarily, for economic reasons, guided by high quality of life and individual career development.

Key concepts were included in works on diaspora studies that emerged in the 1990s. They constitute a canon in social research (Safran, 1991; Brah, 1996; Cohen, 1997; Vertovec, 1997), representing two research streams: an ethnic view, where the priority is the diaspora's relationship to the homeland and nation-state and the creation of community borders, and a postmodern one, in which the diaspora is always in relation to fluid, mobile identities that destabilize borders (Trzszczyńska, 2019, p. 82). A broader approach has been popularized by Brubaker (2005), Sökefeld (2006) Mavroudi (2007), among others. What is important, however, are the links between diplomacy and the diaspora, i.e. the role of the diaspora in economic diplomacy and negotiations, the diaspora as a task of diplomacy or the framework of diaspora lobbying against the interests of the country of origin (Adamson, Demetriou, 2007; Gamlen, 2018). In this sense, diaspora diplomacy is a complex relationship between states, non-state actors and international actors, subject to governance mechanisms and articulated through communication and representation practices, aimed at achieving goals that transcend the home country. Moreover, these goals may conflict with the interests of other groups, the role of the diaspora acquires meaning in given historical and geographical contexts and is subject to a process of structuring (Brika, 2022, p. 54). Central to the consideration is the process of labeling, the creation of community identity and solidarity as a political instrument, including within the *affinity diaspora* and the concept of the *Compatriot* itself.

### **Definition of a Compatriot in the Russian Federation**

One of the first to define *Compatriot* as an individual was the Declaration on Supporting the Russian Diaspora and Protecting Russian Countrymen (Постановление Государственной Думы Федерального Собрания РФ от 8 декабря 1995 г., 1995). National affiliation, ethnicity, language, religion, occupation and place of residence and status were irrelevant, and the term itself remained vague. Compatriots were persons from the Soviet Union and the territory of present-day Russia, and their direct descen-

dants, if they were not citizens of the Russian Federation and clearly declared and confirmed their spiritual or cultural-ethnic connection to the Russian Federation or any of its subjects. The method of confirming this connection remained unspecified.

Let's remember that the statistics of the 1989 All-Union Census clearly indicated the homogeneity of the group of Russians that, under the new conditions, became a new national minority in the newly formed sovereign post-Soviet states. On the eve of the collapse of the USSR, 99.4% of Russians in the republics indicated Russian as their mother tongue, and no other ethnic community showed such a strong attachment to its own language while declaring low competence in the titular languages of the peoples of all the Soviet republics (Shlapentokh, Sendich, Payin, 1994, pp. 56–57). The protection of Russian identity and language in the view of the authorities was not necessary, it became more important to secure economic interests, political rights and social status in the process of the ongoing redistribution of post-Soviet wealth.

On May 17, 1996, the Program of Measures for Supporting Compatriots Abroad (О программе мер по поддержке соотечественников за рубежом, 1996) was adopted, in which the problems of compatriots near abroad were assigned significant social and political importance (vis-à-vis the traditional diaspora), following the Russian Presidential Decree of April 13, 1996. No. 536 “On the Support Fund for Compatriots Abroad “Russians” (Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 13 апреля 1996, 1996). In an analogous spirit, the Federal Law of 1999 was developed. “On the State Policy of the Russian Federation in Relation to Compatriots Abroad,” which includes a definition of Compatriot in Article 1. According to later amendments in the 2010 ed. Compatriots are persons who were born, live or have lived in the same country and share a common language, history, cultural heritage, traditions and customs, as well as descendants of such persons in a direct line. They are citizens of the Russian Federation permanently residing outside the territory of the Russian Federation. Compatriots are also persons and their descendants living outside the territory of the Russian Federation and belonging, as a rule, to nations that historically inhabited the territory of the Russian Federation, as well as persons who made a free choice in favor of a spiritual, cultural and legal connection with the Russian Federation, whose relatives in the direct ascending line previously resided on the territory of the Russian Federation. This group includes, among others, persons who were citizens of the USSR, resided in countries that were part of the USSR, obtained citizenship of these countries or became stateless, and descendants (emigrants) of the Russian State, the Russian Republic, the RSFSR, the USSR and the Russian Federation who held the corresponding citizenship and obtained citizenship of a foreign country or became stateless (article amended by Federal Law No. 179-FZ of 23.07.2010) (Федеральный закон от 24.05.1999 г. № 99-ФЗ, 1999). To this group, the creators of the political concept of the Russian-speaking Compatriot included, in practice, members of the post-Soviet diaspora, whose homeland is long gone. This does not mean, however, that each of them chose Russia itself as their mythical paternal homeland, something that Russian politicians and the creators of the idea of the *Russian myriad seem to have forgotten*. The concept of the Compatriot was political and became an instrument of state ideology. No real action was taken to protect the rights of compatriots on the Russian side and to simplify the bureaucratic procedures for their entry into the country. The idea of implementing a dual citizenship mechanism also fell by the wayside.

The 2010 amendment to the law introduced the principle of voluntariness. Recognition by individuals of their affiliation with compatriots was an act of their self-identification, supported by public or professional activities aimed at preserving the Russian language, the native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation, the development of Russian culture abroad, the strengthening of friendly relations between the countries where compatriots live and the Russian Federation, the support of public associations of compatriots and the protection of compatriots' rights, or other evidence of a compatriot's free will. The 2010 law concretized and enshrined the right of compatriots to register with a compatriots' association existing in their countries of residence and receive standardized certificates attesting to their membership, thus consciously confirming their connection to Russia.

The 2022/2023 amendments were made to the Russian Federation Citizenship Law and the resettlement program, and were linked to the escalation of the war in Ukraine. A new bill on compatriots was rejected, but the debate surrounding it shows that the projected direction of changes in the future will be in line with political demand. Konstantin Zatulin, first deputy chairman of the State Duma Committee on the CIS and a member of United Russia, proposed that the concept of "compatriot" be written into the legislation and include two categories of people: the first are those living abroad, speaking Russian and belonging to peoples historically living on Russian territory; the second are those who have made a choice in favor of spiritual, cultural and legal ties to the Russian Federation and whose relatives in a direct line previously lived on the territory of the former republics of the USSR. The 2022 draft required the first category of people to have language skills. Zatulin proposed that the law's norms define peoples historically living on the territory of the Russian Federation and formulate a government list of such peoples (RIA, 2023).

### **Resettlement program**

Already in the 1990s, in 2006 and in 2012, there were state resettlement (return) programs aimed at attracting Russian speakers from former Soviet countries, but the new legal solutions being worked out in 2022 introduced a new national and international dimension. The terms "Compatriot," "historical homeland" and solutions inspired by ethnic repatriation programs in Germany, Kazakhstan or Israel proved to be key (Указ Президента РФ от 14.09.2012, 2012).

It will now be easier for compatriots living in so-called "unfriendly countries" to join the State Voluntary Resettlement Assistance Program to Russia (Постановление Правительства Российской Федерации от 29 марта 2023 г., 2023; Указ Президента РФ от 30.03.2023;), according to the Russian Government's order of March 29, 2023. In 2022, the decree of the President of the Russian Federation was published that simplified the application procedure for compatriots living in unfriendly countries and wishing to move to Russia (Указ Президента РФ от 12.08.2022). In detail, according to the new version of the Program, the application for participation in the State Program can be submitted to authorized bodies in countries outside the Russian Federation (their citizenship; their permanent residence; their places of residence). This is a proposal for

compatriots permanently residing in the territories of unfriendly foreign countries, the list of which is determined by the Russian government. The decree also expands the circle of people who can apply for the program in Russia. Currently, people permanently residing in the territories of unfriendly foreign countries can apply, as well as those who have been granted refugee status or temporary asylum in Russia. Priority resettlement territories have also been established. They include the following regions of the Russian Federation in 2023: Republic of Buryatia, Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Zabaikal Territory, Kamchatka Territory, Khabarovsk Territory, Amur Oblast, Magadan Oblast Territory, Sakhalin Oblast, Jewish Autonomous Oblast, Chukotka Autonomous District and coastal areas on Sea of the Okhotsk (the Okhotsk Coast, the Okhotsk Coastal Taiga).

The broadening of the definition in 2022 took place due to the deportation of Ukrainians from the areas of military operations and from occupied territories in Ukraine. Ukrainians deemed “co-ethnic” are subject to protection under Putin’s ideology, and Russia is “responsible, in a sense, not only for its own citizens, but also for ethnic fellow citizens who live in other countries” (Brubaker, 1996, p. 5). President Vladimir Putin made a thesis on the unity of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples in his now famous On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians speech in 2021. (Putin, 2021). In August 2022, the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on Amendments to the State Program for Assistance to Voluntary Resettlement in the Russian Federation and its Promotion came into force (Указ Президента РФ от 12.08.2022, 2022). In paragraph 13. the words “Decision on participation in the State Program” were replaced by “Decision on resettlement under the State Program of permanent residence in the Russian Federation”. Paragraph 16 was replaced with the following: “16. On the territory of the Russian Federation, the application for participation in the State Program to the authorized bodies referred to in paragraph 38 of this State Program may be submitted by compatriots who are foreigners:

- a) permanently or temporarily legally residing on the territory of the Russian Federation;
- b) persons who arrived in the territory of the Russian Federation on an emergency mass basis and were recognized as refugees on the territory of the Russian Federation or were granted temporary asylum on the territory of the Russian Federation;
- c) permanently residing on the territory of foreign countries that commit hostile acts against the Russian Federation, Russian legal and natural persons, the list of which is determined by the Government of the Russian Federation, who arrived on the territory of the Russian Federation and were recognized as refugees on the territory of the Russian Federation or were granted temporary asylum on the territory of the Russian Federation” (Указ Президента РФ от 12.08.2022, 2022).

The essential elements here are the skillful use of a conglomerate of post-imperial sentiment among Ukrainians themselves, propaganda, including that spread intensively in the occupied territories, and the strategy of long-term creation of the so-called affinity diaspora. The latter concept is understood as a collection of people who have a different national or ethnic identity from the nation-state, but feel a special affinity or attachment to that nation-state and act on its behalf while living in that state, having returned home or from a third country (Ancien, Boyle, Kitchin, 2009, p. 16). These actors, as third-party diasporas, make certain contributions based on commitment, emotional response, legal

norms and on specific horizontal and institutional structures (Birka, 2022, p. 58). Institutions, on the other hand, provide stable structures for political, economic and cultural initiatives, implemented in program formats rather than point grant projects.

### **Institutionalization**

In order to support and coordinate the activities of the diaspora (Compatriots) with state policy, a number of institutions have been established to integrate and coordinate financial flows, political influence and economic integration. According to Sarah Coolican, they are intended to help enforce the political potential of the Russian diaspora, through hard and soft power measures (Coolican, 2021, p. 9). However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms and their format needs to be thoroughly researched in the context of mobilizing external populations and international communities (Birka, 2022, p. 57). Very important here is the process of creating and supporting information flows, portals and horizontal networks to foster communication between homelands and their diaspora as a political priority.

To serve Compatriots by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation, the non-commercial organization Fund to Support and Protect the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad [Фонд поддержки и защиты прав соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом, <https://pravfond.ru/>] was established on January 1, 2012. The founders of the Fund are the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Federal Agency Rosstrudnichestvo. The purpose of the Foundation is to provide Russian compatriots with comprehensive legal and other necessary support in cases of violations of their rights, freedoms and legitimate interests in accordance with universally recognized principles and norms of international human rights law. The Foundation reports that it works to promote democracy, social justice, respect for human and minority rights and freedoms, improve relations between the individual and society, between the individual and the state, and cultivate citizenship. Targeted legal assistance to individual compatriots and human rights organizations is provided through grants and subsidies, the terms of which can be found on the Foundation's website.

The horizontal network of institutional cooperation also includes Rosstrudnichestvo agencies [Россоотрудничество, <https://rs.gov.ru/>], Russian cultural centers, The World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad [Всемирный координационный совет российских соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом], coordinating councils in individual countries and the "Russian World" foundation [*Russkiy Mir*, Фонд "Русский мир", <https://russkiymir.ru/>]. All institutions work closely with the Federation Council.

Officially, the Rosstrudnichestvo agency's most important activities include promoting Russian education, science and culture, empowering the Russian language, working with youth, including promoting international development and actively supporting compatriots abroad. The agency provides support to public associations of compatriots abroad and facilitates their voluntary resettlement in Russia. The unit carries out historical and commemorative projects. The agency is involved in the maintenance and preservation of burial sites abroad that have historical and commemorative signifi-

cance for the Russian Federation. Rossotrudnichestvo actively engages the potential of non-profit organizations, associations of compatriots, including youth and volunteers in this work. The agency is the main pillar of Russian language expansion based on the so-called Russian Houses. Rossotrudnichestvo actively participates in programs to help foreign countries, assists Russian mediators and organizes training for volunteers and crisis specialists.

The Russian World Foundation was established by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation V. Putin dated June 21, 2007, which was amended by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation “On Certain Matters of the Russian World Foundation” dated April 12, 2021, No. 215. The purpose of the Foundation is to popularize the Russian language. The official notice reads that the main objectives of the Foundation are both to support public and nonprofit organizations, professional associations, scientific and educational institutions whose activities include research and development of teaching methods and programs for the study of the Russian language and Russian literature, as well as research on Russian history and modern Russia. It is important to promote the dissemination of information about modern Russia and Russian compatriots and, on this basis, to form a favorable public opinion of Russia. In addition to supporting national and international organizations and associations of teachers of Russian language and literature, cooperating with Russian, foreign and international state, public, scientific, commercial, non-commercial and charitable organizations, educational and cultural institutions, other organizations and associations, and individuals in the popularization of the Russian language and culture, the foundation is engaged in supporting the activities of Russian diasporas abroad to preserve their cultural identity and the Russian language as a means of inter-ethnic communication, creating a climate of inter-ethnic respect and peace (the main slogan of Russian propaganda, reproduced during conflicts in post-Soviet territory). An important aspect is the promotion of expert support for Russia’s foreign policy, the creation and support of scientific, expert, educational and cultural channels for the development of bilateral relations with organizations of foreign countries and international organizations, consistent with the objectives of the Foundation, and support for the export of Russian educational services. The priority of activities is also to support the development of international ties between partner cities, regions of Russia, and bilateral and multilateral cultural and educational links between Russian and foreign organizations and institutions. The Foundation is a strong supporter of foreign Russian and Russian-language media and information resources. It is engaged in supporting the efforts of public organizations and government institutions to preserve the Russian manuscript heritage and works with the Russian Orthodox Church in promoting the Russian language and Russian culture (Фонд “Русский мир”, 2023).

The Foundation is a priority entity for the authorities pursuing *the soft power* goal of exporting propaganda and disinformation in many areas outside Russia and the so-called “near abroad. Both institutions are effective channels for distributing financial flows to compatriot organizations, including Government-organized non-governmental organizations GONGO, and are instruments of Russian policy in this area. The very idea of the Russian world represented by the Foundation after 2014 has become the base for Russia’s broadly irredentist foreign policy and aggressive geopolitical ideology, going far beyond the previous concept of cooperation with the diaspora. This rhetoric captures the

vision of the “Russian world” as a separate civilization, situated on a distinct territory, ruled by a single political entity and competing with other civilizations for resources and influence. Its meaning has become associated with the idea of “Russian lands,” which is a far cry from, if not contrary to, its original meaning as a network of deterritorialized Russian-speaking communities (Suslov, 2017, p. 26).

The establishment of the above-mentioned institution was the result of the process of centralization and consolidation of government activities in the area of cooperation with the Russian diaspora, but also the creation of an effective system for controlling the flows and instrumentalization of the organization of Compatriots outside Russia. Behind this idea stood Vladislav Surkov and the main slogan of the “Russian world” based on sovereign democracy, understood as a central political value of absolute importance (after Carl Schmitt). The Russian world here was a category of public utility in the area of national security and a soft-power element in the so-called “information war” with the West. Mikhail Suslov points out that this interpretation implies a different logic of territorial organization, according to which a *sovereign state* influences neighboring sovereign states through its diasporic “tentacles,” but in order to perpetuate this influence, the “tentacles” must be well organized, structured and closely connected to the parent state’s organism. Proponents of the imagined “Russian world” wanted to design it as early as the 2000s as a mechanism to translate “the presence” of Russians abroad into “the influence” of Russia abroad (Suslov, 2017, p. 23). In 2009, The World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad was established, uniting scattered local councils from different countries and formalizing their relations with Russian diplomatic missions. A repressive system with an authoritarian power vertical, clerical rhetoric, obscurantism in cultural life and military pressure on neighboring countries, along with the export of the political idea of domination of Russian language and culture, became the main markers of civilizational boundaries. The idea of democracy in Russia has completely eroded, reducing itself to a mere mechanism for expressing the will of the masses, devoid of responsibility and common sense (Budraitskis, 2022, pp. 27–28). The Kremlin’s political narrative leads to the full instrumentalization of systemic institutions, including the Russian diaspora.

Let’s also remember that until the 2000s, policy toward the diaspora was not consistent. The watershed moment was the First World Congress of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad in 2001 with the participation of the President Vladimir Putin. High priority was given to the pragmatic, businesslike approach to the Russian diaspora conceptualized by Piotr Shchedrovitsky and Gleb Pavlovsky, which is still practiced today in Asia and Africa, as well as in Latin America. It focused on successful compatriots, well integrated into their countries of residence and able to act as a link contributing to Russian economic interests.

Currently, the so-called common signs of identity emphasized in the Russian narrative referring to the period of the USSR and further to the common historical development of the peoples of the area of the so-called “near abroad” are more and more often and clearly seen as an anachronism, a manifestation of colonialism and irredentist tendencies in the foreign policy of the Russian Federation (Etkind, 2014, pp. 154–155). The expansion of the definition of the Compatriot is not justified beyond the political goal of integrating the victims of the Russian-Ukrainian war into the system of Russian society



and legally defining real deportation as the implementation of a repatriation program. The symbolic construction of the Compatriot is based today on the myth of the threat from external hostile forces, the labeling of the construction of conflicting identities and the involvement of the Diaspora in the bipolar dispute between the ideologically conceived state and Russian and the rest of the world. The goal is to implement and assemble a coalition of supporters of a common vision of the division of forces in international relations, a civilizational dispute based on the conservative values traditionally represented by the Orthodox Church. Particularly important are those already integrated into the local establishment and corporate business, used as a soft power element in economic policy and diplomacy in the broadest sense for the development of business, cultural, educational cooperation with a very pragmatic dimension – strengthening lasting ties of the host country and its elites with Russia.

### **Activities of the World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots for public diplomacy of the Russian Federation**

The World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad [Всемирный координационный совет российских соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом, <https://vksrs.com/>] coordinates the activities of the diaspora and is the executive body of the World Congress of Compatriots. It is the supreme body ensuring, in the period between world compatriots' forums, the interaction of compatriots' associations with the state institutions of the Russian Federation and its administrative entities. Significantly, the Council has the status of a public association without the creation of a legal entity and acts as a working group in the area of the organization of world formats consolidating the diaspora with the Russian Federation. The composition of the Council in 2022 assumes the participation of representatives of the Russian Diaspora from Kyrgyzstan, Bulgaria, Latvia, Norway, France, Peru, Belarus, Italy, Brazil, Tajikistan, Republic of Congo, Ukraine, Qatar, Korea, Canada, Germany, Israel, Kazakhstan, Spain, Cameroon, Georgia, the United States under the leadership of the Russian Federation. In practice, the Council has focused its activities invariably since 2011 on the African, Asian and Latin American regions, implementing consolidation activities in the economic, cultural, repatriation and informal historical education areas.

A special priority area is business, economic information, business networking, investment market intelligence and building lasting economic ties with Russia. This is evidenced by the specific biographies and competencies of Council members in strategic areas for Russian foreign policy, especially after 2014.

Members of the Council of Compatriots have consistently carried out Russia's directives in the economic area. The first example illustrating the above thesis is the figure of Mikhail Drozdov [Михаил Дроздов], who was elected chairman of The World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad in 2015 and became a member of the Coordinating Council for International Cooperation at the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation at the same time. He directly links and coordinates the work of these two institutions. Significantly, Drozdov served as Chairman of the Coordinating Council of Compatriots in China until May 2015. Like a lawyer and activist, he was a partner of

the China Window Consulting Group in Shanghai, a group founded in 2000 by foreign lawyers with experience in China. Today it is 30 professionals from different countries, running companies in Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong, with licenses to do business there. The group is specialized in pro-business activities, providing services in the areas of law, tax, accounting and market entry opportunities for multinational companies. As they themselves point out, they have an extensive network of Chinese lawyers, accountants and other specialists, as well as contacts in Chinese government agencies. Members of business associations such as the China Mergers & Acquisitions Association (CMAA), Shanghai Huang Pu district Association of Enterprises with foreign investment, China Venture Capital Association. The group provides support, including legal support, for investment projects in China (Hong Kong), Shanghai and Singapore. The wide range of services includes licensing creation of investment models, assistance in litigation, arbitration and resolution of administrative disputes, drafting and legal analysis of commercial solutions. Importantly, the group is focused on corporate social responsibility and actively participates in public projects in China. As Russian experts and founders of the network, they have been responsible for a number of Russian projects over the past decade such as the Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots in China, Shanghai Russian Club, Polusharie (Eastern Hemisphere) – the largest and most popular Russian forum dedicated to life and work in Asia, Chinese Law – a non-commercial educational web-site (which provides Russian translations of Chinese legislation for public use) or Legal First Aid, an online legal guide for Russian compatriots in China.

Another interesting example of business connections is the biography of Igor Yegorov, a member of the compatriots' coordinating council and at the same time founder and honorary chairman of the Russian Entrepreneurs' Council in the United Arab Emirates. Since 1999 he has worked for leading automotive companies such as Daimler, Fiat-Chrysler, and since 2006 he has held senior positions in the representative offices of multinational companies in the Middle East and Africa region. As a member of The World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad, he has been the head of the working group "Commercial and Economic Cooperation and Patronage" since 2015. I. Yegorov is an expert for the only Russian-language business magazine in the Arab region, "Business Emirates," and has been a member of the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation of the Russian Federation-United Arab Emirates since 2013. He is also active in other fields as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the St. Petersburg State University of Economics in the United Arab Emirates.

Russian foreign policy strategy is being implemented by members of the World Council active in the field of Russian politics. An example is Maxim Kramarenko, who has been active in the Kazakhstan area since 2010 as a member of the commission for coordination and interaction with compatriots living abroad through the Presidium of the General Council of the United Russia political party and since 2014 as head of the Information and Analytical Center "Institute of Eurasian Policy."

The goal of Compatriots as a tool of Russian policy is to establish, strengthen and stimulate economic and business ties in the Asian area, including Central and Southeast Asia with the help of the implementation of permanent public policy formats with the support of Russian diplomatic services. The Congresses of Compatriots in the Asian,

Pacific Ocean and African regions are systematically held as a tool for the integration of Russian and Russian-speaking organizations in these regions, but also promote the Russian government's preferred business and cultural model that closely corresponds to the idea of *Russkiy mir*. The approach is consistent with the cultural policy initiated by Vladimir Medinsky, in which culture becomes a "new national idea." The past is experienced by the present and is a resource, analogous to oil and other natural resources. This is because Russia's strong position stems from its attention to its position in the world of competitiveness and effectiveness in the area of moral and cultural values. Most relevant to this strategy is the notion of the interdependence of culture, historical knowledge and national security issues (Budraitskis, 2022, pp. 60–61).

The Council's activities as a collective body in practice boil down to several priority areas and correspond to the Russian diaspora policy strategy implemented by Rossatrudnichestvo and Russkiy Mir Foundations. In practice, it pursues directions of a historical nature – commemorative, linguistic and propaganda – in addition to strengthening economic/business and establishing economic ties, especially in the African, Asian, Latin American regions. Consolidates and concentrates projects around the ideas of commemorating World War II (the Great Patriotic War), defending the Orthodox Church, traditional values and roots of the Russian world, with particular emphasis on the conservative turn. It promotes return migration intensively. The Diaspora is an effective tool for spreading the resettlement program to the Russian Federation. 2022 spoke out against Russophobia. In the Statement of the World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad on the Growth of Russophobia and Anti-Russian Sentiment in Many Western Countries (a proclamation to the leaders of all organizations and associations of Russian compatriots living abroad), we read that the Council is concerned about "the unprecedented growth of Russophobia and anti-Russian sentiment in many Western countries, an aggressive attack on the rights and basic freedoms of the Russian-speaking population." The council made allegations of seeking to establish a principle of punishment for the use of the Russian language, violations of the sanctuary of the Orthodox Church made against the Western state, and allegations of hate speech and openly fomenting anti-Russian and anti-Russian hysteria. Consequently, the charge of creating a threat to the lives and well-being of Compatriots outside of Russia was made.

The council posed the thesis of the dangers coming from two simultaneous phenomena: top-down politically motivated anti-Russian propaganda and the everyday Russophobia of citizens of Western countries. It was recognized that the process has an upward dynamic and poses a threat to the lives and health of members of the Russian diaspora. Examples include cultural figures, artists, athletes, scientists, businessmen and ordinary citizens, according to the Council, who are regularly attacked and persecuted (*Соотечественники в Австрии*, 2022). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation as early as 2021 published a report "On Violations of the Rights of Russian Citizens and Compatriots Abroad," in which U.S. actions against Russians are described as a "manhunt." The social and historical policies of the Baltic States, the US, Canada, France and Ukraine were also heavily criticized. Accusations were made of the introduction of censorship and information attacks on foreign politicians and public figures cooperating with Russian media, and obstruction of Russian journalists. Violations of the rights of Russian citizens were pointed out, including in places of detention (О нарушениях прав российских граждан

и соотечественников в зарубежных странах, 2021). Both documents are propaganda and polemical in nature against the West's position.

In 2022, the council proposed activities, i.e. preserving Russian language centers in compatriots' countries of residence, maintaining a network of organizations promoting Russian culture and developing associations aimed at preserving so-called national history, as well as establishing and developing legal aid centers for Russian compatriots living abroad and taking care of educational and upbringing structures for children and young people. The primary goal was to become the use of democratic tools of legal protection to counter manifestations of nationalism, racial discrimination, ethnic, linguistic and religious hatred, including Russophobia, and to counter the deterioration and isolation of Russians in the world (Заявление Всемирного координационного совета российских соотечественников, 2022, pp. 1–2). Consistently, therefore, the mechanisms of Western countries' democracies would be used against themselves to demonstrate violations of the rule of law and human rights against Russians in democratic systems.

### **Regional Conference of Russian Compatriots**

Coordinating Councils in countries united by formula regularly participate in regional conferences of compatriots of Asia, Africa and the Pacific Ocean. During Russia's war in Ukraine, they became an instrument of consolidation, solidifying the diaspora in selected countries and strengthening integration around the Russian perspective of the conflict. Currently, Bair Zhamsuev, Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council Committee on International Affairs, Senator of the Russian Federation, plays a special role strengthening communication and relations between the Russian government and the diaspora (compatriots). At the 2022 compatriots' conference held in Thailand, lawmakers proposed the active use of "sanction" measures to influence those countries and their officials that violate the rights of Russian compatriots. Attention was paid to the need to develop joint approaches to organizing against manifestations of intolerance on national grounds against compatriots and to simplify the procedure for obtaining Russian citizenship. The issue of expanding compatriots' access to general education in Russian in accordance with federal educational standards was raised. Conference delegates unanimously adopted a statement condemning Russophobia and anti-Russian sentiment in unfriendly countries, attempts to "cancel" Russian culture and the policy of destroying monuments to Red Army soldiers (among others, representatives of compatriot organizations from Bangladesh, India, Cambodia, China, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Singapore, Thailand and Japan, along with representatives of the executive authorities of a number of subjects of the Russian Federation). As early as 2020 in India in New Delhi, in a conference resolution, delegates of the regional conference of Russian compatriots in the Asian region reproduced the main demands of the authorities in foreign policy. In discussing the results of the work of the national coordination councils of Russian compatriots' organizations in India, Cambodia, China, Korea, Mongolia, Nepal, Singapore, the Kingdom of Thailand and Japan for 2019, they pointed to intensive work in organizing the 75th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War, in particular the St. George's Ribbon campaign, the marches of the Immortal Regiment and

other projects, as well as strengthening the content of Russian propaganda in compatriots' electronic media and social networks. An extensive disinformation campaign was planned. In addition, support was declared for memorial work and the expansion of the volunteer movement for veterans among compatriots. It was declared to do everything to preserve among compatriots and citizens of the countries of residence the memory of the decisive role of the Red Army and the Soviet people in achieving victory over Nazism and liberation from the "brown plague" of all mankind, and to spread among young compatriots the knowledge of the course of World War II and the Great Patriotic War, information about the exploits of Soviet soldiers and frontline workers, the preservation of family histories related to World War II. They wrote about strengthening the memory of the horrors of war, the memory of the millions of dead, the besieged Leningrad, the hell of the Holocaust and the extermination camps clearly declared that every effort should be made to prevent the re-emergence of nationalist ideology, regardless of its form. These declarations foreshadowed and promoted the posture toward Ukraine and the concept of justifying disinformation in connection with the military escalation in February 2022. The need to counter attempts to revise the effects of World War II in favor of the current political situation, the falsification of history and the glorification of Nazism was clearly emphasized. During the period 2020–2022, a number of projects were implemented to disseminate the above vision and priorities through Compatriot organizations in Central and Southeast Asian countries. The narrative has been systematically reinforced since 2014 and has been part of disinformation in the ongoing hybrid war.

### Summary

The Diaspora in current Russian policy is subject to instrumentalization, which deprives this group of subjectivity in political processes. It has become an element of effectively implemented pro-Russian propaganda and economic diplomacy in favor of close cooperation with partners in the Central and Southeast Asian region. The legal mechanism of the Compatriot itself makes it possible to conceal the extent of political deportations of Ukrainians, and goes far beyond the cultural ties of cooperation with the pobrats remaining outside the borders of the country of origin. The concept, on the other hand, has been systematically developed since the 1990s and is the result of an evolving Kremlin policy, consistently implemented from the top down. The social capital of compatriots is treated on a par with the country's natural resources and is objectified in the struggle for dominance in global processes under conditions of economic, economic, cultural, and ultimately civilizational competitiveness. Russia's irredentist policy requires carriers familiar with the cultural context and effective instruments to win supporters for the Russian perspective. The Russian Diaspora integrated into the political center in the Kremlin effectively fulfills this role.

### Author Contributions

Conceptualization (Konceptualizacja): Magdalena Lachowicz

Data curation (Zestawienie danych): Magdalena Lachowicz

Formal analysis (Analiza formalna): Magdalena Lachowicz

Writing – original draft (Piśmiennictwo – oryginalny projekt): Magdalena Lachowicz

Writing – review & editing (Piśmiennictwo – sprawdzenie i edytowanie): Magdalena Lachowicz

**Competing interests:** The author have declared that no competing interests exist  
(**Sprzeczne interesy:** Autor oświadczył, że nie istnieją żadne sprzeczne interesy)

### Bibliography

- Adamson F. B., Demetriou M. (2007), *Remapping the Boundaries of 'State' and 'National Identity': Incorporating Diasporas into IR Theorizing*, "European Journal of International Relations", vol. 13, issue 4, pp. 489–526, DOI: 10.1177/1354066107083145.
- Ancien D., Boyle M., Kitchin R. (2009), *Exploring Diaspora Strategies: An International Comparison, Jan. 26th–28th 2009*, NUI Maynooth, Workshop report, pp. 1–39.
- Brah A. (1996), *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, London.
- Birka I. (2022), *Thinking diaspora diplomacy after Russia's war in Ukraine*, "Space and Polity", 26:1, pp. 53–61, DOI: 10.1080/13562576.2022.2104632.
- Brubaker R. (1996), *Nationalism reframed: Nationalhood and the national question in the New Europe*, Cambridge University Press, DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511558764.
- Brubaker R. (2005), *The "diaspora" diaspora*, "Ethnic and Racial Studies", 28, no. 1, pp. 1–19.
- Budraitskis I. (2022), *Dissidents among dissidents*, London–New York.
- Cohen R. (1997), *Global Diasporas. An Introduction*, London.
- Coolican S. (2021), *The Russian Diaspora in the Baltic States: the Trojan Horse that never was*, LSE Ideas, Strategic Update, 1–22.
- Etkind A. (2014), *Post-Soviet Russia: the Land of the Oil Curse, Pussy Riot, and Magical Historicism*, "Boundary 2: an international journal of literature and culture", vol. 41, no. 1, pp. 153–170, DOI: 10.1215/01903659-2409712.
- Федеральный закон от 24.05.1999 г. № 99-ФЗ О государственной политике Российской Федерации в отношении соотечественников за рубежом [The Federal Law of 24.05.1999 № 99-FZ On State Policy of the Russian Federation in Relation to Compatriots Abroad], <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/13875>.
- Фонд "Русский мир" (2023), <https://ruskiymir.ru/fund/>.
- Gamlen A. (2018), *Diaspora Institutions and Diaspora Governance*, "International Migration Review", 48(1), pp. 180–217, DOI: 10.1111/imre.12136.
- International Migration 2020: Highlights* (2020), ed. C. Monozzi, V. Mishra, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Population Division, New York, pp. 1–60.
- Mavroudi E. (2007), *Diaspora as Process: (De)Constraining Boudaries*, "Geography Compass" 1, no. 3, pp. 467–479.
- О нарушениях прав российских граждан и соотечественников в зарубежных странах* (2021), Доклад Министерства иностранных дел Российской Федерации, Москва, pp. 1–36.
- О программе мер по поддержке соотечественников за рубежом, Постановление Правительства Российской Федерации от 17 мая 1996 года N 590 "О программе мер по поддержке соотечественников за рубежом, Docs.cntd.ru – электронный фонд нормативно-технической и нормативно-правовой информации Консорциума Кодекс [On the Program of Measures to Support Compatriots Abroad, Government of Russian Federation Decision of May 17, 1996 N 590 "On the Program of Measures to Support Compatriots Abroad, Docs.cntd.ru

- electronic fund of regulatory and legal information Consortium Code], <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/9019851>, 20.03.2023.
- Постановление Государственной Думы Федерального Собрания РФ от 8 декабря 1995 г. № 1476-1 ГД “О Декларации о поддержке российской диаспоры и о покровительстве российским соотечественникам”. Собрание законодательства Российской Федерации, 1995, № 52, ст. 5131 [The Decree of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation dated 08/12/1995, No. 1476-1 GD “On the Declaration on Supporting the Russian Diaspora and Protecting Russian Compatriots”].
- Постановление Правительства Российской Федерации от 29 марта 2023 г. № 497, О внесении изменений в некоторые акты Правительства Российской Федерации и признании утратившими силу некоторых актов Правительства Российской Федерации либо их отдельных положений [The Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of March 29, 2023 № 497, On Amendments to Certain Acts of the Government of the Russian Federation and the Annulment of Certain Acts of the Government of the Russian Federation or Certain Provisions Thereof].
- Putin V. (2021), *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.
- RIA Novosti (2023), *В Госдуме предложили законодательно установить понятие “соотечественники”*, 15.02.2023, [https://ria.ru/20230215/sootchestvenniki-1852177943.html?utm\\_source=yxnews&utm\\_medium=desktop](https://ria.ru/20230215/sootchestvenniki-1852177943.html?utm_source=yxnews&utm_medium=desktop), 20.04.2023.
- Safran W. (1991), *Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return*, “Diaspora” 1, no. 1, pp. 83–99.
- Shlapentokh V., Sendich M., Payin E. (ed.) (1994), *The New Russian Diaspora. Russian Minorities in the Former Soviet Republics*, Routledge, London–New York, 1–323.
- Соотечественники в Австрии. Сборник правовых случаев за 2022 год.*, 2022, Центр правового просвещения российских соотечественников в Австрии, 1–16.
- Sökefeld M. (2006), *Mobilizing in Transnational Space: A Social Movement Approach to the Formation of Diaspora*, “Global Networks”, 6, no. 3, pp. 265–284.
- Suslov M. (2017), *Russian World: Russia’s Policy toward its Diaspora*, Notes de l’Ifri Russie.Nei. Visions 103, pp. 1–32.
- Trzszczyńska P. (2019), *Diaspora – Pamięć – Miejsca. Ukraińcy z Polski z lat 80. XX wieku w Kana-dzie. Studium etnograficzne*, WUJ, Kraków, pp. 1–346.
- Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 13 апреля 1996 г. № 536 “О создании фонда по поддержке соотечественников за рубежом ‘Россияне’” [The Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 536 of April 13, 1996 “On the Establishment of the ‘Russians’ Fund to Support Compatriots Abroad”], [https://yeltsin.ru/uploads/upload/2015/06/12/up-1996\\_0536.pdf](https://yeltsin.ru/uploads/upload/2015/06/12/up-1996_0536.pdf).
- Указ Президента РФ от 14.09.2012 N 1289 (ред. от 12.08.2022) “О реализации Государственной программы по оказанию содействия добровольному переселению в Российскую Федерацию соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом [The Decree of the President of the Russian Federation from 14.09.2012 N 1289 (ed. from 12.08.2022) “About realization of the State program on rendering assistance to voluntary resettlement of compatriots living abroad to the Russian Federation”].
- Указ Президента РФ от 12.08.2022 N 547 “О внесении изменений в Государственную программу по оказанию содействия добровольному переселению в Российскую Федерацию соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом, утвержденную Указом Президента Российской Федерации от 22 июня 2006 г. N 637” [The Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 12.08.2022 N 547 “On amendments to the State program to assist

the voluntary resettlement to the Russian Federation of compatriots living abroad, approved by Presidential Decree of 22 June 2006 N 637”], <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202208120011?index=0&rangeSize=1>.

Указ Президента РФ от 30.03.2023 N 219 “О внесении изменений в Государственную программу по оказанию содействия добровольному переселению в Российскую Федерацию соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом, утвержденную Указом Президента Российской Федерации от 22 июня 2006 г. N 637” [The Decree of the President of the Russian Federation from 30.03.2023 N 219 “On amendments to the State program to assist the voluntary resettlement to the Russian Federation of compatriots living abroad, approved by Presidential Decree of 22 June 2006 N 637”], <https://www.garant.ru/hotlaw/federal/1616637/>.

Vertovec S. (1997), *Three Meanings of “Diaspora,” Exemplified among South Asian Religions*, “Diaspora” 6, no. 3, pp. 277–299.

Заявление Всемирного координационного совета российских соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом, в связи с ростом русофобии и антироссийских настроений в ряде западных стран, Проект, Всемирный координационный совет российских соотечественников Москва, 16 июня 2022 г., pp. 1–2.

---

## **Obrońcy wyobrazonego imperium. Diaspora rosyjska jako narzędzie propagandy i polityki antydemokratycznej w rejonie Azji Środkowej i Południowo-Wschodniej**

### **Streszczenie**

Artykuł analizuje rolę diaspory rosyjskiej w polityce władz Federacji Rosyjskiej w okresie wojny Rosji w Ukrainie. Autorka dokonuje analizy mechanizmów centralizacji, konsolidacji i instrumentalizacji organizacji zrzeszających tzw. rodaków poza granicami Rosji, na obszarze Azji Środkowej i Południowo-Wschodniej. Analizie krytycznej poddano proces instytucjonalizacji diaspory i wykreowanie spójnego systemu zarządzania polityką ekonomiczną, kulturalną i repatriacyjną przez władze centralne Federacji Rosyjskiej. Rosja, współpracując z diasporą, niezwykle efektywnie wykorzystuje potencjał kapitału ludzkiego, który według raportów ONZ szacuje się na 11 mln osób, co stanowi drugą po hinduskiej diasporę na świecie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** diaspora rosyjska w świecie, Rada Koordynacyjna Rodaków, Russkij Mir