

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN THE NATIONAL SECURITY DOCUMENTS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

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Abstract: *Russia has rediscovered public diplomacy as a way to re-establish its international presence and boost its reputation. Disillusioned by Western policies of coercive democratization, Russian public diplomacy has developed its own approach to international audiences. This paper examines how Russia seeks to change the opinions of Western experts and the general public. This will be described as a context for analyzing Russian public diplomacy in National Security Documents, including what its aims, players, and tools are, how they are reflected in the Russian "Foreign Policy Concept," and how they are perceived and implemented in the Russian case.*

Keywords: *public diplomacy, Russian Federation, soft power, strategy, security.*

I. Introduction

Early Russian public diplomacy activities were primarily based on informational solutions to an image issue, stemming from Foreign Policy Doctrine that focused on creating effective means of influencing public opinion abroad.

The Russian government launched the Cultural Diplomacy Concept in 2010, which emphasized the promotion and popularization of Russian language and culture around the world, as well as the preservation of Russia's cultural heritage in the near vicinity. Although culture has long served as a propaganda axis for the Soviet Union, the new concept of cultural and public diplomacy, which is closely aligned with soft power (non-coercive power of attraction) and incorporated into foreign policy, arrived in Russia only after the breakup of the Soviet Union.¹

In December 2012, The Council on Foreign and Defense Policy met to discuss how to shape Russia's international profile. They defined four

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¹ Jan Melissen, *The New Public Diplomacy Soft Power in International Relations*, on http://culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/pdf/research/books/soft_power/The_New_Public_Diplomacy.pdf pp.28-29, date accessed: 19 April, 2021

elements from which to choose in order to improve the state image: *ideas, pictures, money, and arms*. The following conclusions were reached: image changes would not occur automatically; purposeful and focused work would be required; and imagination would be an important component of the process. The ability to incorporate the best of Russian history and culture was seen as the way forward in order to improve the image².

This perspective changed the emphasis from promoting a favorable picture of Russia to promoting a pro-Russian identity outside the country's borders, with the Russian language and culture serving as central components of Russia's strategic cultural diplomacy efforts. The key themes of the Russian Cultural Diplomacy Concept study were as follows: (1) the strategic motives behind Russia's cultural diplomacy initiatives; (2) the strategic focus on Russian Diaspora and compatriots abroad; and (3) the role of the Russian language³.

Basically, the major fields of Russian public diplomacy are roughly divided into the following categories, although it is noted that not all of them are equally implemented by Russia:

- Working with compatriots
- Public diplomacy to support the historical truth and countering falsification of history in the international public space
- International youth cooperation
- State-supported NGOs and funds in the sphere of public diplomacy
- The Russian phenomenon of Facebook and Twitter diplomacy
- Formats of cultural and language diplomacy abroad.

II.A historic approach of Russian Federation public diplomacy

After a period of decline in interest in public diplomacy in the world and in Russia in the 1990s, its revival took place in the 2000s. Russia, like a number of other countries, turned to an instrument of public diplomacy, which became an important part of its foreign policy. This is due to both the

² Evgeny Primakov, *Russia-2012: challenges and problems*, 01.16.2013, <http://www.svop.ru/news/2545/>.

³ Klyueva, Anna & Tsetsura, Katerina. (2016). *Strategic Aspects of Russia's Cultural Diplomacy in Europe: Challenges and Opportunities of the 21st Century*. 10.13140/RG.2.1.2965.7206. date accessed: 19 April, 2021.

revival of public diplomacy in the world as a whole and the foreign policy goals of Russia.⁴

Russian interest in public diplomacy at the official level is reflected in the adoption of strategic documents, as well as in the development of public diplomacy practice. Some areas in which public diplomacy was used during the Cold War (media, cultural, scientific, and sports diplomacy) continue to be used nowadays. At the same time, new tools of public diplomacy have emerged. Thus, Internet technologies, including Web 2.0 technologies, have become an integral part of Russia's public diplomacy. In addition, the number of Russian participants in public diplomacy has increased dramatically, both in terms of their total number and in terms of the diversity of groups that have become involved in public diplomacy. This has led to the fact that Russia's public diplomacy, despite the creation of a number of new state structures, has become less centralized in comparison with the Soviet time.

The term *public diplomacy* was not used in the USSR. Instead, a new concept was introduced: "*people's diplomacy*", which was described as the work of scientists, artists, astronauts, and others to promote a positive picture of the Soviet Union abroad. As a result, *public diplomacy* was effectively confined to the realm of non-state or formal non-state actors. The principle of "*people's diplomacy*" did not include official structures operations in the international arena. However, the ideological foundation vanished, despite the fact that public speeches given by Soviet officials were often addressed to an external audience.

In terms of public diplomacy, the USSR founded the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) in the mid-1920s, with the aim of popularizing the culture of the Soviet Union's peoples abroad while also introducing the culture of foreign states to the citizens of the USSR.

Based on VOKS, the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (SSOD) was founded in 1958

⁴ Yelena Osipova, *Russia's Public Diplomacy: In Search of Recognition (Part 1)* <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/russia%E2%80%99s-public-diplomacy-search-recognition-part-1>, date accessed: 19 April, 2021.

with the purpose of strengthening cultural and scientific links between the USSR and foreign countries through public organizations, agencies, and individual representatives of science and culture.⁵ During the Soviet era, scientific relations grew, mainly within the USSR Academy of Sciences. The Pugwash movement of scientists for peace, disarmament, international security, and the prevention of nuclear war, which began operating in the 1950s and played a major role in the prevention of nuclear war, included Soviet scientists as active participants⁶.

During the Soviet era, the media became an important instrument of public diplomacy. Moscow Radio began broadcasting to foreign countries on a daily basis in 1929. The aim of this radio station was to familiarize international audiences with Russian life and the Russian perspective on current affairs around the world⁷.

In the Soviet Union, cultural diplomacy (theatre tours, exhibits, etc.) was also used. Sports diplomacy, science diplomacy, and peacemaking are only a few examples.

As a result, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia had some experience with *public diplomacy* (“*people's diplomacy*”). This experience, however, was first associated with the Cold War era – a time of conflict with the West. Second, the USSR's public diplomacy was strongly centralized. It was primarily orchestrated by the government. Third, despite the fact that many public diplomacy activities were widely reported by the media, the number of public diplomacy participants was small. Young academics, for example, traditionally shied away from public diplomacy practices.

III. The Russian Federation's definition of *public diplomacy* as described in official documents.

Since the early 2000s, the topic of public diplomacy and soft power has been addressed in official Russian documents, most notably in the Russian Foreign Policy Concept, which lays out the country's key foreign

⁵ VOKS - Rossotrudnichestvo: a 90-year history, <http://rsvk.cz/blog/2015/12/25/voks-rossotrudnichestvo-istoriya-dlinnoyu-v-90-let/> date accessed: 19 April, 2021.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ Allan Jones, review of *Russia in the Microphone Age: A History of Soviet Radio, 1919-1970*, (review no. 1907) DOI: 10.14296/RiH/2014/1907, date accessed: 19 April, 2021

policy objectives. As a result, the manner in which they identify the position and role of public diplomacy and soft power is crucial. At the same time, public or cultural diplomacy are not common words in Russian political thought since they are borrowed concepts from Western scholarship. In Russian, the word "*public diplomacy*" has many unofficial translations. *Public diplomacy* is sometimes translated as *obshchestvennaya diplomatiya* ["public's diplomacy"], *publichnaya diplomatiya* ["public diplomacy"], or *narodnaya diplomatiya* ["people's diplomacy"]. Despite the fact that they have different connotations and major semantic distinctions, these words are often used synonymously.

From 2000 to the present, Russia has adopted four foreign policy concepts. Simultaneously, the strategy for influencing a global audience was more defined. The *Information Security Doctrine of September 2000* opened the way for the establishment of international broadcasting and media outlets aimed at stemming the flow of negative and non-objective information about Russia in the global information space. These assets serve a broader role of news management by producing and disseminating news from the perspective of the Russian government.

In the year 2000, the Russian Foreign Policy definition included a section on "*information support of foreign policy activity*" – this section outlined the intention of shaping the societies of other countries by providing objective and accurate information about their positions on major international issues, Russian Federation foreign policy initiatives, and acts, as well as the accomplishments of Russian culture, research, and intellectual imagination to large circles of the international community.

In 2008, the term public diplomacy was first used in the Russian Foreign Policy Concept. Public diplomacy was described as a tool for providing information support to foreign policymakers. The Concept emphasized that Russia would pursue an impartial view of the world and establish its own successful means of influencing public opinion abroad through information.⁸ At the same time, the Concept used the words

⁸ The Foreign Policy Concept of The Russian Federation Approved by Dmitry A. Medvedev, President of the Russian Federation, on 12 July 2008, the Foreign Policy Concept Of The Russian Federation (russiaeu.ru), date accessed: 19 April, 2021.

people's diplomacy to describe the capacity of civil society institutions alongside public diplomacy.

The Russian government launched the Cultural Diplomacy Concept in 2010, which emphasized the promotion and popularization of Russian language and culture around the world, as well as the preservation of Russia's cultural heritage in the near vicinity⁹.

The main directions of Russian policy in the field of international cultural and humanitarian cooperation were established in a document accepted by the Russian Federation's president in 2010: *The Main Directions of Russian Policy in the Field of International Cultural and Humanitarian Cooperation*.¹⁰ According to the paper, competition in the cultural and civilizational dimensions is growing, necessitating the use of cultural diplomacy. It is noteworthy that the term *public diplomacy* was not used in it. Instead, this document addressed cultural diplomacy and *people's diplomacy*, which were broadly interpreted to include bridging international divides, promoting modernization, and promoting Russian culture as a global commodity.

The role of Russian information power in the world was confirmed in the Foreign Policy Concepts of 2013 and 2016. Following a description of Russia's goals and position in dealing with public diplomacy, the documents are presenting numerous current and emerging national problems.

The 2013 Concept lays out how Russia can react to changes in the international relations climate, as seen through the lens of meeting the challenges posed by a number of threats. The communication strategy is based on the obsolete system of passive one-way mass communication, which is used by International Broadcasting properties. Considering the vast array of competitive assets from other countries, this is unlikely to be very

⁹ Klyueva, Anna, Mikhaylova, Anna. *Building the Russian World: Cultural Diplomacy of the Russian Language and Cultural Identity*, on https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317852716_Building_the_Russian_World_Cultural_Diplomacy_of_the_Russian_Language_and_Cultural_Identity/citation/download, date accessed: 19 April, 2021.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

successful, as the target audience may choose what and what they want to watch/listen to, as well as whether they want to watch/listen at all.¹¹

According to the Russian Foreign Policy Concept from 2016 *Russia seeks to ensure that the world has an objective image of the country, develops its own effective ways to influence foreign audiences, promotes Russian and Russian-language media in the global information space, providing them with necessary government support, is proactive in international information cooperation, and takes necessary steps to counter threats to its information security.*¹²

Furthermore, the 2016 Concept places a strong focus on Russian cultural identity, Russian education and science, and the consolidation of the Russian-speaking diaspora. Russia almost dismissed collaborating with compatriots living overseas until the turn of the twenty-first century. The situation began to shift dramatically after the introduction of the Federal Law on the Russian Federation's State Policy in Relation to Compatriots Abroad in 1999.¹³

In Russia, the term *compatriot* is widely acknowledged. It includes not only Russian citizens, but also people who share the same language, culture, cultural background, practices, and customs as Russians, as well as their descendants. A *Fund for Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad* was established in May 2011 through Presidential Decree. The fund's aim is to provide legal and other assistance to Russian citizens in need.¹⁴

¹¹ Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, on https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents//asset_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/122186. date accessed: 19 April, 2021

¹² *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*. Approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016, from www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents//asset_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/2542248 date accessed: 19 April, 2021

¹³ Federal Law of The Russian Federation of May 24, 1999 No. 99-FZ, *About state policy of the Russian Federation concerning compatriots abroad*, <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=1407>, date accessed: 19 April, 2021.

¹⁴ World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots, <https://pravfond.ru/> date accessed: 19 April, 2021.

IV. Russian public diplomacy institutional framework and communication methods

According to the President of Russia's Decree, the *Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States* (Rossotrudnichestvo) was founded in 2008¹⁵, based on Roszarubezhtsentr, for compatriots living abroad and international humanitarian cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo), focusing on issues of promoting the Russian language and culture, as well as interaction with compatriots. Rossotrudnichestvo had 97 representative offices in 80 countries at the beginning of 2020, including 73 Russian science and culture centers in 62 countries and 24 department members in 21 embassies.¹⁶

Government agencies operating internationally and with international audiences (the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies, consulates, and others) started to establish their own websites as part of the state's public diplomacy strategy. They also provide information through social media. Official structures in Russia and abroad use social media and blogs to varying degrees and with varying degrees of success.

The development of suitable mechanisms for its implementation was reflected in the course taken in official documents on the use of public diplomacy means. Established systems were reformed on the one side, and a lot of new ones were built on the other. The media, such as Voice of Russia and RIA-Novosti, are among the structures that have been reformed and should be highlighted.

There have been a number of new systems created. One of the most notable developments in the field of mass media was the establishment of the foreign broadcasting channel Russia Today (later named RT) in 2005. The creation of Russia Today in English (and later Arabic and Spanish) was intended to fill one of the holes identified in the *Doctrine of Information Security*: the state's ability to directly broadcast to a foreign audience. The channel's mission is to provide the information about Russia as well as a Russian perspective on current affairs around the world. In principle, there

¹⁵ Decree "On the Russian Center for International Scientific and Cultural Cooperation under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation". <https://culture.gov.ru/en/date> accessed: 19 April, 2021.

¹⁶ Rossotrudnichestvo website. <http://rs.gov.ru/en> date accessed: 19 April, 2021

was nothing new here in terms of the challenge as compared to radio broadcasting. As time went by, the channel's definition evolved.¹⁷ Russia Today is also active on social media, with accounts on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. The TV channel debuted in 2005 and now boasts coverage in over 100 countries across five continents. The desire to "show you how any story can be another story altogether" is their promotion/differentiation.¹⁸

A number of funds were created in the 2000s. The President of Russia decided to create the *Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund*. The fund's goals include promoting favorable public opinion toward Russia abroad, promoting social, cultural, educational, research, and management initiatives in the field of international relations and other fields, promoting Russia's intellectual, cultural, scientific, and business capacity, and participating in the educational process and other activities.¹⁹ The Balkan, Baltic, and Caucasian Dialogues, as well as the Dialogue for the Future, are among the many scientific and educational programs that the fund runs.²⁰ They have members from civil society as well as former diplomats.

The *Russkiy Mir Foundation* was another fund established in 2007 as a result of a Presidential Decree. One of the fund's primary priorities was to popularize the Russian language, which is an integral part of Russian and world culture, as well as to promote Russian language study programs abroad. The fund is financed by state budget as well as contributions from private organizations.²¹ The year 2007 has been designated as Russian Language Year. The president's address to the Federal Assembly focused on the country's Russian language growth, support for Russian language study

¹⁷ Simonyan Margarita Simonna: biography, personal life and interesting facts. RT TV channel: "*Russia must resist the mainstream media company RT information TV channel*", <https://personarossii.ru/en/pol/simonyan-margarita-simonovna-biografiya-lichnaya-zhizn-i/> date accessed: 19 April, 2021

¹⁸ Greg Simons, *Taking the new public diplomacy online: Russia and China*, on https://www.academia.edu/11522224/Taking_the_new_public_diplomacy_online_Russia_and_China date accessed: 19 April, 2021

¹⁹ *Aleksander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund*, on <https://gorchakovfund.ru/en/>, date accessed: 19 April, 2021

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ *Russkiy Mir* website, on <https://russkiymir.ru/en/> date accessed: 19 April, 2021

programs in the near and far abroad, and overall promotion of Russian language and literature around the world.²²

In the 2000s, Russia focused on public diplomacy opportunities such as higher education and academic exchanges. Network universities have been developed to enhance cooperation with integration entities such as Russia – the CIS, Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). The network university is made up of several universities that have formed alliances and offer students the opportunity to study for a period of time at a partner university.

It should be remembered that, in order to influence an international audience, Russia started to employ the services of foreign public relations firms, among other items. The American firm Ketchum was one of the most well-known examples in this field. The arrangements for the G8 summit in St. Petersburg in 2006 marked a significant turning point in the company's activities in Russia²³.

Russia's foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, wrote in a March 2013 article that: “*the main task of the international activity of Russia is to create favorable external conditions for the rise of its economy, its transfer to innovative rails, increasing living standards of people.*”²⁴, which in some way determines the goals of Russian public diplomacy.

V. Conclusions

To conclude, Russian public diplomacy has recently shifted away from its conventional cultural diplomacy approaches in favor of strategic communication that includes political marketing, this adjustment was required because a number of current challenges confront Russian public diplomacy, as well as efforts to project a more positive picture of Russia abroad.

²²Message from the President of the Russian Federation dated April 26, 2007, <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/25522>, date accessed: 19 April, 2021

²³ Curry Jansen, *How Western PR Firms Quietly Push Putin's Agenda*, 07.01.2017, on <https://www.fastcompany.com/40437170/russia-quiet-public-relations-war>, date accessed: 19 April, 2021

²⁴ Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov “*Russia's Foreign Policy Philosophy*” published in the magazine “*International Affairs*” of March 2013, on <https://www.rusemb.org.uk/article/211>, date accessed: 19 April, 2021

Russia also has a host of image issues that it is attempting to address by rehabilitating old and unwelcome stereotypes and biases. Kremlin administration is still struggling to overcome the Soviet era's legacy, and any attempts to transcend the Cold War's bipolar atmosphere and collaborate multilaterally have been thwarted by its unwillingness to get over a "us-vs.-them" mentality. Basically, Russia is attempting to portray itself as a proactive force in international affairs, capable of contributing positively to processes and events and despite spending a lot of time, financial resources, and effort on various programs, the search to be liked proves to be difficult.

Although Kremlin was critical of the US's policies, now most of the Russian leaders seem to recognize that Russia, too, might use similar strategies and tactics to further its own goals and objectives. As the public diplomacy concept was almost non-existent in official Russian foreign policy discourse after the Soviet period now NGOs and agencies (such as Rossotrudnichestvo or Russky Mir Foundation) use cultural and educational exchanges, as well as humanitarian assistance, to establish relationships with their target audiences.



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