Russian Soft Power in Kazakhstan (and Central Asia): Taken for Granted?

Edited by Anna Gussarova
Almaty 2017
CONTENT

Introduction 3

Russian Soft Power: Rossotrudnichestvo’s network and instruments 4

Establishing Soft Power and the use of force: Russia’s version of the concept 18

Conclusions 22
Introduction

‘Russian Soft Power in Kazakhstan (and Central Asia): Taken for Granted?’ is a think piece, proposed by CAISS (Central Asia Institute for Strategic Studies) experts with an objective to (a) analyze the actors, instruments and costs of Russian soft power with a particular focus on Kazakhstan, (b) determine the perception of Russia in Kazakhstan both in political discourse and informational space and (c) compare Russian attempts to promote its soft power internationally (primarily for U.S. and EU) and in Kazakhstan as well as Central Asia. Furthermore, this memo also puts an emphasis on challenges and opportunities, Kazakhstan might face in terms of identity, nation-building and political cooperation with the Kremlin in days to come.

After the crisis in Ukraine three positions are visible in the Central Asian region regarding the prospects of regional integration under the aegis of Russia: (a) a centrist (traditional), (b) an extreme (the concept of the “Russian World” and “Great Russia”), and (c) a skeptical (expectation of a weakening position of Russia in Central Asia and the probability of inter-state and inter-ethnic escalation).

A centrist model (predominant before Crimea) tries to explain bilateral relations “by default”, considering common history, language, and cultural background. Extreme and skeptical positions seem to obtain greater support in Kazakhstan (after Crimea and incidents with Turkey) and Uzbekistan, while Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan prefer to balance between some centrist and skeptical models of interaction. Central Asian states are increasingly trying to forge their own ideology and historic interpretation. For example, there are attempts to establish a new symbol to commemorate May 9. Such steps were primarily intended to prevent Russia’s usurpation of the commemoration of the victory in the war and accommodate the changing meaning of St. George’s ribbons in the context of the Ukrainian conflict.

Due to the weakened Russian economy, sanctions regime and unstable global energy prices Eurasian integration needs to be discussed from a standpoint of risk management. It has a direct impact on the economy of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) member states (falling turnover, pressure on national currencies1, and remittances2) and their relations with Russia (trade and hybrid wars). There are still lots of fears, myths and phobias, associated with Russian influence in the region, including military presence, political lobby, mass and social media, language, and culture. There is a need to reassess the “taken for granted” approach for Russian soft power within Kazakhstan and Central Asia states accordingly.

*This paper was written with the support of the Representation of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Kazakhstan. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

1 Lillis Joana, Central Asia Battered by Currency Turmoil // http://www.eurasianet.org/node/75136
2 Pannier B. In Central Asia, The Bad Times Have Arrived // http://www.rferl.org/content/qishloq-ovozi-economy-roundtable/27520517.html
Russian Soft Power: Rossotrudnichestvo’s network and instruments

One of the main Russian actors in soft power implementation is the Federal Agency for CIS Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (commonly known as Rossotrudnichestvo, established in September 2008 and subordinated to the Foreign Ministry), which promotes international humanitarian cooperation and fairly represents contemporary Russia abroad. Currently, the organization has 95 offices in 79 countries all over the world with 72 Russian centers of science and culture in 62 states and 23 representatives within Russian Embassies in 21 states, including Latin America, Northern America, Europe, Africa and Asia (Chart 1). Nevertheless, its activities concentrate on primarily CIS member states with Russian Science and Culture Centers (RSCC) in each country.

Chart 1 Rossotrudnichestvo’s Foreign Representative Offices

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<th>AFRICA</th>
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<td>Russian Center for Science and Culture in Addis Ababa</td>
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<td>SOUTH AFRICA</td>
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<td>ARGENTINA</td>
<td>Russian Center for Science and Culture in Buenos Aires</td>
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<td>Deputy Representative (within Consulate General) in San Paolo, Representative (within Embassy) in Brasilia (2)</td>
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<td>CANADA</td>
<td>Representative (within Embassy) in Ottawa</td>
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<td>CHILE</td>
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<td>CUBA</td>
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<td>NIKARAGUA</td>
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<td>PERU</td>
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<td>Russian Center for Science and Culture in Washington, Deputy Representative (within Consulate General) in New York (2)</td>
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<td>VENEZUELA</td>
<td>Russian Center for Science and Culture in Caracas</td>
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<td>AFGHANISTAN</td>
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<td>BANGLADESH</td>
<td>Russian Center for Science and Culture in Dhaka</td>
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<td>CAMBODIA</td>
<td>Russian Center for Science and Culture in Phnom Penh</td>
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<td>CHINA</td>
<td>Russian Center for Science and Culture in Beijing</td>
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<td>INDIA</td>
<td>Russian Center for Science and Culture in Delhi and Chennai (2), Russian Cultural Center Department in Calcutta, Mumbai, and Trivandrum (3)</td>
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<td>Russian Center for Science and Culture in Jakarta</td>
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<td>IRAN</td>
<td>Representative (within Embassy) in Tehran</td>
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3 Rossotrudnichestvo official website //http://rs.gov.ru/en/about
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<th>Country</th>
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<tr>
<td>ISRAEL</td>
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<td>AZERBAIJAN</td>
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<td>BELARUS</td>
<td>Russian Center for Science and Culture in Minsk, Brest and Gomel (3)</td>
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<td>KAZAKHSTAN</td>
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<td>KYRGYZSTAN</td>
<td>Russian Center for Science and Culture in Bishkek and Osh (2)</td>
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<td>UKRAINE</td>
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<td>MONTENEGRO</td>
<td>Representative (within Embassy) in Podgorica</td>
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<td>POLAND</td>
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<td>SWITZERLAND</td>
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In 2013, Rossotrudnichestvo’s budget estimated 2 bln rubles. And there was an idea to increase the number to 9.5 bln rub in 2020. However, due to financial crisis, devaluation of the Russian currency, oil prices fall and economic sanctions such growth seems difficult to achieve.

Since 2015 the Agency’s principle of humanitarian work has received a country-based approach that considers specific characteristics of each state and provides an individual program for cooperation. It should be also noted that such a program or a concept, both for Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries, is not publicly available. In 2015, the Agency turned to a project-based work and tried to explore new formats for RSCCs in the humanitarian sector.

Rossotrudnichestvo’s activity is built under Sub-Program 3 “Activities in International Humanitarian Cooperation (IHC) and International Development Assistance (IDA)” within the State Program on “Foreign Policy Activity”5. In 2016, the amount of money which the Agency originally planned to spend for Sub-Program 3 reached 3.7 bln rubles.

It is also important to note that Sub-Program 3’s share in total budget for “Foreign Policy Activity” until 2019 does not exceed 3% (Chart 2). In early November of 2016 State Duma Committee for International Affairs and CIS Affairs reviewed a draft law on 2017 Federal Budget and a planning period of 2018-2019 which proposed to increase expenses by 5.8 bln rubles in three years.

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5 Russian “Foreign Policy Activity” State program is composed of three sub-programs: Sub-program 1 ‘Development and implementation of state policy and normative legal regulation in the sphere of international relations of the Russian Federation’. Sub-program 2 ‘Financial obligations of the Russian Federation to ensure interstate structures established by CIS member-states’. Sub-Program 3 ‘Activities in International Humanitarian Cooperation (IHC) and International Development Assistance (IDA)’
However, in general sub-programs on cultural and humanitarian assistance costs remain relatively low. In this regard, the Committee’s report on the draft law states that “the Agency’s effective implementation and priorities of state foreign policy, funding its programs, foremost Russian language support and promotion, increasing the number of RCSCs abroad becomes quite problematic.”

Leonid Kalashnikov, Chairman of the Committee on CIS Affairs, during budget discussions in 2016 also noted insufficient funding in this particular direction, “Everyone is talking about soft power, but when it comes to the allocation of funds, no one is ready to provide them. What information war we are fighting against, as we are not able to add any extra ruble neither to Russian teachers, nor Russian students.”

The main goals of Sub-program 3, relevant to Kazakhstan and Central Asia, are the following:

(a) To promote Russian science, culture and education in foreign countries

Rosotrudnichestvo is proactive in export of Russian education and promotion of science achievements, aimed at maintaining and strengthening the prestige of the Russian educational system and scientific community.

Providing education to Kazakhstani students is an important instrument of Russian soft power, as youngsters accept certain values and shape attitudes during their education period. Russian schools’ attractiveness among Kazakhstan students is much related to the quality of education, language availability, geographical proximity and similarity in mentality. Moreover, lots of graduates intend to stay in Russia for further employment, while a Russian university diploma often increases chances for successful employment in Kazakhstan as well.

As of 2014 more than 50,000 Kazakhstani students got their education abroad, with 28,000 students trained in Russia. According to this indicator, Russia ranks 1st (followed by China with 11,200 students), which shows the high attractiveness of Russian education among students of Kazakhstan.

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6 Report of the Committee on CIS Affairs, Eurasian Integration and Relations with Compatriots on the draft federal law 15455-7 “On the Federal Budget for 2017 and the planned period of 2018 and 2019.”

7 Бюджет в погоне за внешним эффектом // http://www.rbc.ru/newspaper/2016/11/07/581b50cd9a7947327024cffa
Kazakhstan. Moreover, Kazakhstani students are entitled to enjoy the same opportunities for tuition free scholarships at any public university in the Russian Federation as Russian citizens do. In addition, since 2003 the Russian Ministry of Education through Rossotrudnichestvo's channel has been providing grants (free education) for Kazakhstani students. For instance, in 2014, the quota was 150, while they received double the number of applications. In 2015, the quota increased to 240, and submitted applications to 400. In 2016, the number of quota reached 300⁸. Thus, the last two years have seen a distinct increase in both educational grants (2 times) and interest on the part of Kazakhstani students.

To be able to estimate the numbers of those Kazakhstani students, who might become interested in getting Russian higher education, one should look on language skills. For example, in the beginning of the 2015/2016 academic year Kazakhstan had 127 institutions of higher education with the total number of 459,369 students. 62.7% were enrolled in the state language Kazakh, 34.3% in Russian and 3% in English.⁹

At the same time, Russia reports about 237,538 international students to study in the 2015/2016 academic year. 79.2% of them (188,130) came from CIS member states and 67,727 from Kazakhstan.¹⁰ It turns out that almost every fourth international student in Russia is from Kazakhstan. And in fact, some believe that Kazakhstan’s students’ amount is 2-2.5 times underestimated¹¹.

The Rossotrudnichestvo Agency’s representation annually supports the participation of Russian universities in educational exhibitions and establishes partnerships with leading educational institutions and research centers in Kazakhstan. During the 2015 “Education and Science” International Exhibition in Astana 40 representatives of domestic and foreign universities gathered, with more than a half (26) coming from Russia.¹² Getting a university degree under Russian standards is also an option in Kazakhstan. There are 6 branches of Russian universities: Moscow State University branch (Astana), Academy of Labor and Social Affairs (Almaty), Moscow State University of Economics, Statistics and Informatics (Ust-Kamenogorsk), Chelyabinsk State University (Kostanay), St. Petersburg Humanitarian University of Trade Unions (Almaty), and Moscow Aviation Institute (Baikonur). There is no Slavic University in Kazakhstan, which was opened jointly with Russia, such as in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The Kazakh-Russian University in Astana, which was established based on an agreement between the

⁸ МОН РФ в 2016 выделяет 300 квот на обучение казахстанским студентам // http://forbes.kz/news/2016/03/04/newsid_107459
⁹ Высшие учебные заведения Республики Казахстан в 2015/2016 учебном году. 04.10.2016 // http://www.nomad.su/?a=3-201601280015
¹¹ Шибутов М. Пути повышения эффективности управления государственными активами в образовании // http://agkipr.kz/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/%D0%98%D1%81%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5%D0%B1%D1%83%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B2-%D0%9C-%D0%9E%D0%91%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BD%D1%8B%D1%85-%D0%B0%D0%BA%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%B2%D1%8B.pdf
¹² МОН РФ в 2016 выделяет 300 квот на обучение казахстанским студентам // http://forbes.kz/news/2016/03/04/newsid_107459
Ministries of Education of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan in 1998, was closed in 2014 due to non-compliance within its educational activity.

To strengthen mutually beneficial relations with the representatives of political, public, academic and business communities in Kazakhstan, the Kazakhstan Association of graduates from Russian (soviet) higher education institutions was established in 2007. The association’s mission is to preserve and strengthen historically developed intellectual and human relations between Kazakhstan and Russia, maintain and develop a common cultural and educational environment, protect the secure and sustainable development of the states, and spread democratic values and principles of tolerance. In 2015 they launched a project called “Foreign graduates from Russian (soviet) higher education institutions Day”.

In April 2016, the RSCC in Astana hosted a forum of Kazakhstan graduates from Russian (soviet) higher education institutions titled “From Education to Career”, where the participants discussed the prospects of bilateral relations and CIS cooperation, the development of the Eurasia Economic Union (EAEU), the role of Russian education and current trends in higher education in Kazakhstan.

(b) To distribute and strengthen Russian language worldwide. One of the key directions of Moscow’s soft power approach is to promote and support Russian language. The “Russian Language” Federal Target Program for 2016-2020 is a strategic tool for this policy.

For the last 5 years 79 Rossotrudnichestvo’s offices and partner institutions jointly with the Russian Ministry of Education and Science and the A. Pushkin Institute of Russian Language have been constantly hosting different cultural, educational, research and methodological activities and projects. 55,821 copies of educational, fictional and non-fictional, as well as reference books and multimedia publications have been distributed in 61 countries and donated to national educational institutions, libraries, associations of compatriots and other NGOs. Russian Language Day has been widely celebrated with support of Rossotrudnichestvo’s foreign missions in more than 500 events. 64 multipurpose projects (research conferences, festivals of Russian poetry, theater performances, literature and music, seminars for teachers of Russian language, master classes, round tables, virtual tours, modern and classic cinema, workshops, book fairs, etc.) have been implemented with Compatriots Program as well in 80 countries throughout the world.

The Rossotrudnichestvo Agency also offers courses for professional development and Russian language in their Russian Science and Culture Centers. In 2015, these language courses were held

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by 63 Agency offices in 58 countries around the world with 20,000 trainees annually. In that regard, the Federal Agency for CIS Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation is the only government institution that systematically carries out language courses abroad.\(^\text{16}\) In 2016, about 16,000 people took Russian language courses in 58 countries within 63 offices of Rossotrudnichestvo\(^\text{17}\).

The RSCC office in Astana provides regular courses in Russian studies. Previously such courses were carried out in autumn. In December 2015, a winter school with participants (teachers of Russian language) from Astana and surrounding areas was added. It is also planned to hold such courses in Almaty, Uralsk, Ust-Kamenogorsk and Petropavlovsk. At the end of the course, the participants are given a special certificate, which allows the teacher to receive salary bonuses.

In 2007, the Russian Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Education and Science established the “Russian World” Fund to promote the Russian language and support programs to study Russian in Russia and abroad. The fund implements a range of international education and training, including education programs in the humanitarian field. It also supports contests and competitions as a means of increasing interest in in-depth studies of the Russian language, culture and history, and calls for cooperation and coordination among competent, active, and creative representatives of the ‘Russian world’. The Fund’s soft power objective is to promote information about Russia and Russian compatriots and thereby forming a favorable public opinion on relations with Russia.

In Kazakhstan, the Fund is represented by a network of ‘Russian centers’ in Ust-Kamenogorsk, Kazakh-Russian International University in Aktobe, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University in Almaty. Russian centers also operate in Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek, Osh, and Kant) and Tajikistan (4 centers within universities in Dushanbe). Russian centers provide broad access to cultural, historical and literary heritage of the Russian world, methodology and practice of Russian education. The centers organize their work on the principles of openness, publicity and tolerance.\(^\text{18}\)

Another major project is the “Russian World” Internet portal, a virtual cultural and educational information platform, which publishes a “Russian world” newsfeed as well as materials of professional journalists, sociologists, historians and linguists. This portal also functions as part of a soft power policy as its goal is to spread online objective and reliable information about Russia, its current social and political life, history, culture, sport and Russian diaspora abroad. In addition, the portal covers the “Russian world” Fund’s activities to promote a positive image of the organization and expand its humanitarian influence. The annual audience of the portal exceeds more than 1 million users and in 2015 it was visited by users from 189 countries. Even though the Russian population continues to dominate as content consumers, the share of foreign visitors is constantly growing. Kazakhstan takes the second place in the top ten countries with

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\(^{16}\) ibid.

\(^{17}\) Доклад о результатах деятельности Россотрудничества по реализации возложенных на него полномочий за 2016 год // http://rs.gov.ru/ru/pages/389

\(^{18}\) ‘Russian World’ Fund Official website //http://www.russkiymir.ru/
most active readers of the portal, along with Ukraine, Belarus, Germany, the United States, Bulgaria, Moldova, Latvia, Israel, and France.

Later in 2015 the ‘Russian World’ Broadcasting Company was established based on the internet portal, which published 376 educational, research, informational, analytical, literary and historical programs for a total of over two hundred hours of exclusive content.

The level of proficiency in Russian in Central Asia is not the same. According to Gallup, high proficiency is registered in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – 99.9% and 87.1% respectively. The level of Russian language proficiency in Tajikistan is declining (68.5%). In Uzbekistan, the data is inconsistent, however 99.2% respondents indicated knowledge of the language.19

The number of students enrolled in Russian declined in Uzbekistan between 1990 and 2011 from 636,000 to 221,000 (65%), in Tajikistan from 120,000 to 47,000 (61%), and in Turkmenistan from 127,100 to 6,500 students (95%). In Turkmenistan, Russian based language education is now almost eliminated, and in Tajikistan and to a lesser extent in Uzbekistan decreased to a level, which makes it hard to maintain the Russian language information and its cultural environment. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the situation with Russian based language education is more favorable.20 It is obvious that the deterioration of Russian language knowledge in Central Asia in future could threaten relations with Russia (cultural, political), and challenge identity issues in Kazakhstan.

According to the 2014 joint report of the Federal Agency for CIS Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation and the Ministry of Education and Science on the status of the Russian language in Russia and abroad, there is a significant deterioration of conditions to learn the Russian language in most countries, in post-soviet states and a risk of losing positions in several European countries due to anti-Russian sentiments. The document states that “government measures with the positive dynamics of certain individual indicators over the past 10 years has not yet had a decisive positive impact on the position of the Russian language in the world.”21

However, the Russian language promotion policy is currently facing tremendous financial and resource challenges. “Russian language” Federal Target Program for 2016-2020 has allocated 7.5 bln rubles (Chart 3), which is less than in other countries. According to rough estimates, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, China and South Korea in 4-5 years spend 60 bln rubles each for their respective language development and promotion during four-five years.22

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21 Минобрнауки просит на пропаганду русского языка 7 млрд рублей // http://izvestia.ru/news/577070
22 ibid.
Thus, insufficient funding for Russian language educational programs among the population of Central Asia, the rise of nationalism and a reducing number of representatives of the Russian non-titular nation in the long term could lead to the Russian language losing its status of lingua franca.

(c) To support compatriots abroad. Russian Federal Agency for CIS Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation proactively cooperates with fellow organizations through joint activities for people, who continue to identify themselves with Russia, and develop friendly bilateral relations.

In Kazakhstan, the Rossotrudnichestvo Agency cooperates with 30 organizations, including the Cossacks, Orthodox, Slavic and educational communities, as well as youth, research and ethnic centers. The Program for compatriots (2015-2017) is aimed at widely promoting the consolidation of these public associations and their informational autonomy, as well as supporting Russian-speaking communities in maintaining their intellectual, cultural and linguistic background, developing educational, cultural, research and religious ties, supporting youth and socially vulnerable compatriots. To implement this program, the Agency has conducted related activities in 77 countries. For instance, Almaty hosted a traditional campaign “Ring of Memory”, dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War on August 24, 2015. This event is held annually in the city of Almaty and Almaty region with the support of the Russian Federation Consulate General and Rossotrudnichestvo. The members of “Eaglet”, children’s patriot club, together with veterans visited military burials.

In 2015, the Agency provided support to associations of compatriots all over the world in conducting more than 90 festivals, concerts, exhibitions, fairs, competitions and about 170 events dedicated to the memorable dates and anniversaries of Russian history and culture. The biggest events were educational trips to historical places of Russia (“Hello, Russia!”), when more than 900 young compatriots from 47 countries visited Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Kazan in October 2015.

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Another significant event, the V\textsuperscript{th} World Congress of Compatriots, took place in November 2015 and gathered over 400 leaders and activists of public associations of compatriots from 97 countries, including Kazakhstan, representatives of federal legislative and executive bodies, and executive bodies of Russian Federation entities, Russian foundations and NGOs.\textsuperscript{25}

Rossotrudnichestvo jointly with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs also aids with the protection of rights and legitimate interests of compatriots, e.g. through the Fund for support and protection of compatriots’ rights living overseas (non-profit organization, established by Presidential Decree on January 1, 2012). The Agency also participates in the activities of the Government Commission on the Affairs of Compatriots Abroad, i.e. providing comprehensive information support to activities undertaken by the Commission.

(d) \textit{To develop public diplomacy, research, educational, cultural, economic, informational and other humanitarian ties with both state and non-state structures of CIS member states and other countries, international and regional organizations.} Rossotrudnichestvo’s task is to boost cooperation among NGOs, foundations, associations and other institutions.

The main pillar of the Russian public diplomacy as a component of soft power is the “Russian world”, a concept of inter-state community that connects people abroad, who feel the need to maintain contact with Russia, the Russian language and culture. It is expected that public diplomacy will provide a favorable external environment and strengthen Eurasian integration, not only promoting sympathy for Russia, but supporting foreign policy interests by means of public and interpersonal levels of communication.

The A. Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund (est. on February 10, 2010 by D. Medvedev Decree) is a first example of private-public partnership in the sphere of foreign policy. The Gorchakov Fund is a non-profit organization dedicated to Russian foreign policy, support for research, expert and public initiatives in the field of public diplomacy and public, political and business climate abroad. The Gorchakov Fund holds an annual School for young experts from Central Asia and the” Security in Eurasia” program, including lectures on geopolitics, economics, security and information technologies with participation of Russian and foreign experts. For instance, several alumni of the Gorchakov Fund Program remembered that “there was a lack of money, attitude, infrastructure and comfort with a huge ideological propaganda in comparison to American and European counterparts, who promote their soft power with a means of educational and research programs.\textsuperscript{26}

The Russian Council on International Affairs (RCIA), a non-profit partnership, is another substantial actor in soft power policy implementation among expert communities. RCIA was founded by the Russian Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Education and Science. The main objectives are the establishment of non-commercial partnerships to boost international research

\textsuperscript{25} ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} Oral interviews with alumnus
in Russia, specialists’ training in the field of foreign policy and regional studies, as well as interaction between Russian research organizations and foreign think tanks on international relations. In 2015, the Russian Council on International Affairs jointly with the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) held a Summer School on “Eurasian Economic Integration: Priorities, Perspectives and Tools”, where young scientists, experts and journalists from Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia took part in master classes, lectures, round tables, and trainings on skills development (analysis and presentation).

Valdai Discussion Club’s (whose founders are RCIA, Higher School of Economics, MGIMO University, Council on Foreign and Defense Policy) goal also aims to promote dialogue of Russian and international intellectual elites and to deliver independent objective scholarly analysis of political, economic, and social developments in Russia and abroad.27

There are also several relatively new and recently established initiatives on promoting Russian image abroad and Eurasian integration for both young leaders and prominent experts, including Kazakhstan and Central Asia, which are the following:

- **Center for the Support and Development of Public Initiatives Creative Diplomacy (PICREADI)**, a Russian NGO working in the field of soft power and public diplomacy. It implements educational projects focused on young Russian professionals in the field of public diplomacy. In 2017, the PICREADI launches a new English-language public diplomacy program for young leaders “Meeting Russia” for 20 young U.S. and EU leaders from government institutions, parliaments, think tanks, media and journalism, and the private sector. “Meeting Russia” participants will be able to discuss current international issues related to Russian foreign policy and Russia’s relations with the West and meet with senior Russian officials and top experts.28

- **Eurasia-Volga Information and Analytical Center**, a non-profit organization whose main objectives lie within the Eurasian Economic Union, impartial coverage of Eurasian integration advantages and disadvantages, critical analysis of the cross-border cooperation and the establishment of a regional center and a new discussion platform that will form a regional agenda and provide high-quality analytical services.29

- **The North-South Political Science Center**’s goals vary from networking, education and information projects to promotion of integration processes and principles of post-soviet states’ sustainable development.30

- **Information and Analytical Center for Social and Political Processes in the post-soviet space**, established at the M. Lomonosov Moscow State University, Department of History. It serves as a tool to restore a common research and education space within CIS.31

27 Valdai Discussion Club website // http://valdaiclub.com/about/valdai/
28 Meeting Russia // http://www.picreadi.ru/meeting-russia/
29 See http://evrazia-povolzhie.ru/o-nas/
30 See http://pcsu.ru/%d0%be-%d0%bd%d0%b0%d1%81
31 See http://ia-centr.ru/about/
To develop regional and sub-regional integration, strengthen common CIS humanitarian space. The RCSS has become a place for joint programs and activities with other organizations and diplomatic missions of the CIS member states.

To assist the regions of the Russian Federation and municipalities in establishing, maintaining and developing relationships with partners in foreign countries, the Federal Agency for CIS Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation conducts economic presentations, cultural, research, educational events for regions and municipalities, compatriot programs, as well as exhibitions, festivals, concerts, etc. At the same time, the latest available information about a presentation of the regions dates to 2009, when the RCSS Office in Astana hosted a presentation of economic and investment potential of the Kurgan region. Most work in Astana is focused on cultural, historical, memorial and literary events.\(^{32}\)

Another way to interact with the entities of the Russian Federation is to inform the compatriots living abroad on the government program to facilitate their voluntary resettlement to the Russian Federation. Kazakhstan sees a tendency of constant outflow of the Russian population. Over the past 10 years the share of representatives of Russian ethnicity decreased from 26.14% in 2006 to 20.61% in 2016, and in absolute terms, the decline amounted to 334,800 people. Since 2005, on average annually 34,600 Kazakhstani emigrated abroad, 70% of them were Russians (Chart 4). Almost all Russian emigrants move to live in Russia.

Chart 4 Total number of emigrants and number of Russian emigrants from Kazakhstan, in thousand people

![Chart 4](http://bnews.kz/ru/news/ekonomika_i_biznes/644341-2009_04_21-644341)

The main reasons to relocate concern favorable conditions for retirement (earlier than in Kazakhstan and a higher level of pensions), expected improvement in the standard of living, as well as a – as some ethnic Russians perceive it – growth of domestic nationalism and discrimination due to the expansion of the use of the state language Kazakh. Even though there is

no common definition of domestic nationalism, growing social distance between ethnic groups already results in the fact that e.g. the employees of enterprises or whole branches are increasingly mono-ethnic.

(f) To implement the Concept of State Policy on International Development Assistance (IDA). Russia’s policy in the IDA area aims at a sustainable social and economic development of Russian aid-recipient countries by promoting the development of technical, financial, humanitarian and other spheres.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Financial Tracking Service from 2010 to 2016, Russia allocated about USD 40.4 million as humanitarian aid to the countries of Central Asia, most of which was directed to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan - 54.4% and 41.9% respectively. Kazakhstan is not a recipient of Russian humanitarian aid.

Rossotrudnichestvo puts an emphasis on young representatives of political, public, academic and business communities of foreign countries, so called “New Generation”, a program of short-term study visits to the Russian Federation approved by Presidential Decree as of 19 October 2011 N 1394. The program’s idea is to strengthen positive attitudes towards Russia among youth from the CIS and other countries and develop partnerships. Between 2011 and 2015, 3,350 people from 90 countries – including Central Asia – attended the program. In 2015, the budget of the program estimated 144 mln rubles.

(g) To develop, implement and monitor information and analytical policy to strengthen Russia's unbiased perception, cultural and humanitarian presence. Constant informational presence and expansion in the Internet are other forms of soft power by means of social media and cinema industry. Main information resources are the official website of the Federal Agency for CIS Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation and the sites of its missions abroad.

In 2015, Rossotrudnichestvo together with the RTVi TV channel created a series of programs for foreign audience, dedicated to the Russian language, culture and other aspects of cultural and humanitarian cooperation between Russia and other countries. Attention in the context of foreign policy was paid to the informational promotion of the 70th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War and the implementation of various media projects. Rossotrudnichestvo’s local offices jointly with the Russia Today TV channel showed a series of videos about the victory. The “George Ribbon” information campaign took place in 70 countries around the world.

In Kazakhstan, Russian media are very popular in terms of social, political and international issues, even though you rarely find there any news or programs about Kazakhstan. However, the

34 Russia uncooperated // http://kommersant.ru/doc/2747025
Including data from Report «On the Results of Activity of Rossotrudnichestvo for 2015»
Kazakhstan’s TV industry is less professional and therefore cannot compete. Given the pro-government agenda of Russian media, their influence on the informational space in Kazakhstan could raise some challenges and risks to domestic stability and harmony. Russian media news coverage on the situation in Ukraine caused a split among Kazakhstan’s population into supporters and opponents to the Kremlin’s foreign policy.

Currently III domestic TV channels are officially registered on the territory of Kazakhstan, 24 of which are countrywide and 87 regional. There are 4 channels in Akmola, Almaty and Pavlodar regions, 14 in Almaty, 4 in Astana, 5 television stations in Aktobe region, 3 in Atyrau, 6 channels in East Kazakhstan and Kostanay region, 1 channel in Zhambyl region, 2 channel in North, West Kazakhstan and Kyzylorda regions, 13 TV channels in Karaganda region, 19 television stations in South Kazakhstan region. 36 254 foreign TV channels also present in Kazakhstan’s media environment.

For instance, a recent sociological report shows the diverse media preferences in Almaty and thereby the content of the Kazakh- and Russian-speaking discourses respectively. Every fifth Almaty resident finds out global news from the Euro News Channel, i.e. obtaining information mostly in Russian. KTK and Eurasia channel 1 are very popular among Russians. The level of trust among ethnic Russians in Russian television channels (Russia Channel 1 and Russia 24) is almost two times higher than that of Kazakhs and other ethnic groups. 38 Kazakhstan’s 2016 ban on foreign television channels advertisement has removed Russian TV from its second-largest market 39.

It is expected that Sub-program 3 implementations will form a more favorable image of Russia and optimal conditions for the promotion of Russian business, science, education and culture. Rossotrudnichestvo will continue to develop contacts with Central Asia states, focusing on regional security, stability and cooperation, strengthening and improving economic and trade ties. As noted in the report on the main results of the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation of 2015, special attention is paid to the strategic partnership with Kazakhstan, which, being a leading economy in the region, remains Russia’s most important ally on several fronts, including further development of integration processes in Eurasia.

38 Роль СМИ, социальных сетей в общественно-политической жизни горожан и угроза формирования протестного потенциала» (по результатам социологического исследования). ГКП «Центр информации и анализа» Управления внутренней политики города Алматы, 2015, p. 7-8
Establishing soft power and the use of force: Russia’s version of the concept

The 2016 Portland Soft Power Index (‘Soft Power 30’) for the first time in its history ranked Russia 27th out of 30th with the US, UK and Germany to hold leading positions. Hereby the Russian Federation has become the first among authoritarian regimes, overtaking China. The British Agency emphasized the Kremlin’s “tremendous efforts” to improve the country’s image, both at national and international levels. The main tool of Russian soft power is state-controlled television and RT first channel (originally Russia Today), which is broadcasting around the world in English, Arabic and Spanish (French and German soon to be introduced).

Diplomacy is another strength of Russia which has become increasingly involved in solving major international issues (Syria, Iran), and negotiations with the United States. Portland Communications puts Russia on the 8th place on “involvement in international affairs”, 11th in the “digital technologies” and 14th on “culture”. The report also mentioned Russia’s main weakness – corruption, discriminatory legislation against sexual minorities and economic breakdown.

Intensive discussions at all levels over Russia’s soft power concept took place in 2010-2013 during the wave of modernization, when major NGOs and non-profit organizations entered the third sector of the country. But unfortunately, it did not last long due to the annexation of Crimea, and the unfolding events in Donbas and Syria. It turned out that the need to enhance hard power has outweighed the arguments for improving the attractiveness of Russia to a foreign audience. The significance which Russia attaches to the military sector is clearly visible; however, Russia should be careful not to let it monopolize its foreign policy priorities.

The development of a soft power concept, which was discussed in 2013, as a result drowned in numerous discussions and analyses without getting in practice. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian crisis, in turn, has become a symbol of the failure of Russian soft power due to the lack of work with the Ukrainian society before the Maidan. This crisis has also become a sort of pivot towards a rigid foreign policy. On the other hand, Russia’s strong position yielded much approval among those in the world who favor the concept of great powers and a strong leader and maybe miss this kind of strategic thinking in their respective political elites.

The widespread presence of officials in the Russian political establishment, who have military background and ties to security structures, explains much of Russia’s actions, both domestically and internationally, including its global ambitions, sudden military exercises, and unilateral actions abroad. The Cold War paradigm still dominates in Russia both within the Information and Communications Strategy and the National Security Strategy. With its intentions for leadership in the international arena and the economic recession in 2016, Russia’s refusal to maintain its regional commitments (such as the counternarcotic initiative), along with its lack of

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41 Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 05.12.2016 г. № 646 Об утверждении Доктрины информационной безопасности Российской Федерации // http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/41460
strategic and institutional discipline within the EAEC, has significantly increased geopolitical
turbulence in the region and cast doubt on the prospect of meaningful integration in Eurasia.

Russia’s military and national security establishment consider the use of force as an instrument
of foreign policy and ensuring national interests abroad. Military and political foreign policy views
tend to match as the two groups are part of the executive power. When it comes to the source
and magnitude of external threats, there is still a gap between the two bodies (civilian and military
elites). Different viewpoints of military and political expertise on national security issues has
become a challenge to decision-making processes in the Kremlin, which has led Russia to the use
of force in Abkhazia, Chechnya, Ossetia, Tajikistan, Transnistria, Ukraine and Syria.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin is seeking opportunities to establish security structures in certain
countries where the Russian government and business have interests. Deputy Prime Minister
Dmitry Rogozin announced an idea to create security structures with veterans of special services
to protect Russian economic entities abroad. Thereby, the Russian political establishment is
trying to compete with American and British Private Military Contractors (PMCs) to protect
LUKoil and GAZPROM facilities abroad, e.g. in Iraq. Therefore, it is necessary to have inter-
state agreements that entitle employees of Russian companies to keep and bear arms in other
countries. However, there are certain difficulties as such kind of arrangements tend to be bilateral
and allow foreign companies to operate in Russia the same way which is seen to be unacceptable.
In addition, this business sector tends to be illegal and shady, as it doesn’t pay taxes. Russian
Criminal Code modification seems to start a legalization process, which could lead to a revealing
of organized crime and criminal groups within Russian military operations in Syria.43

It’s high time to recognize and accept the changing agenda in the cooperation with Russia, which
is related to the “great war” of Moscow with the West (e.g. arms race, military reforms and budget,
and Syria). This is distinctly noticeable in official statements and the behavior of the Russian
political establishment as well as the 2015 National Security Doctrine.44 Official confrontation
and enemy images are articulated to describe the need to maintain fighting capabilities, the
defense industry and military-industrial complex as well as a propaganda machine. Large-scale
military exercises within Russian borders as well as with foreign partners (e.g. ‘Sea Interaction-
2015’ with China in the Mediterranean Sea) show the militarization of Russian politics and
strategy.

Having a look at the background of the current governors and special envoys in the federal
districts the role and vision of the military in Russia’s political system becomes clear. 22 governors
out of the 85 federal districts were related to the “United Russia” Presidential political party, the
Ministry of Emergency (EMERCOM) and military/security forces, including Ministry of Interior,
Ministry of Justice, General Prosecutor’s Office, Foreign Intelligence Service, Tax Police and Navy.
The majority have the highest military ranks and posts such as Generals, Major-Generals,

43 Частные военные компании: легализация наемных убийц или армия будущего? //
http://rapsinews.ru/international_publication/20140707/271667681.html
44 Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 31 декабря 2015 года N 683 «О Стратегии национальной
безопасности Российской Федерации» //https://rg.ru/2015/12/31/nac-bezopasnost-site-dok.html
Lieutenant-Generals, Colonels and Lieutenant Colonels.\textsuperscript{45} Seven out of nine federal districts Special Presidential Envoys had a military background. The growing influence of so called siloviki in Russian government to some extent leads to conflicts in relations between the federal center and the regions. In part, security forces always adhere to certain hardline, thus provoking tense relations, e.g. confrontation\textsuperscript{46} between feds and Chechnya Leader Ramzan Kadyrov security forces because of conducting special operations on the territory of Chechnya without coordination with local law enforcement.

In the meantime, the Russian military budget (2010-2015) has increased almost five times since 2010. Russia’s military spending, presented below, clearly shows the sharp increase in fixed costs since 1990 (Chart 5).

Chart 5 Russia Military Spending 1988-2015, in constant bln rubles\textsuperscript{47}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart5.png}
\caption{Russia Military Spending 1988-2015, in constant bln rubles}
\end{figure}

Source: The SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2014

After the annexation of Crimea, the Kremlin has finally introduced the hybrid information provocation and propaganda as a discourse of war. Recent cases within Eurasia First Channel TV program\textsuperscript{48} give examples. TV hosts tried to prove that people were paid 50-150 USD for the participation in protests throughout the country against a land reform. Right after the land protests a group of agitators tried to manipulate public opinion by sending fake messages and postings in social media on a new law on “Paid Ambulance”. According to the same TV host, Kazakhstani would have free access to the ambulance only four times per year. And if this was exceeded, the person should either pay or die. These two cases have become a first serious example of Russian propaganda and hybrid war in Kazakhstan and Central Asia.

\textsuperscript{45} A non-public research, conducted by the author in 2015.
\textsuperscript{46} МВД: слова Кадырова о стрельбе по силовикам недопустимы //http://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2015/04/150423_kadyrov_shooting_scandal_mvd_statement
\textsuperscript{48} Kazakhstan: State TV Hatchet Job Sparks Indignation // http://www.eurasianet.org/node/78791
Currently, Russia actively increases its presence and influence in Kazakhstan and Central Asia via “Public Diplomacy Web 2.0”. And Kazakhstan is seen to some point as relay station and key partner in public diplomacy within the EAEU, which is supposed to increase the attractiveness of the economic zone to other countries and lead to its further enlargement. Efforts are made to establish a positive perception of the EAEU among experts and academia. Almost every week there is an event both in Russia and Kazakhstan, which is devoted to EAEU challenges and perspectives both in universities and analytical centers. Special courses in Eurasian integration and diplomacy are currently being included into higher education, summer schools for students and conferences for young scholars and researchers. This unofficial networking is an important instrument for Russian GONGOs (NGOs with government financial assistance) to spread ideas, gather information and influence the young generation.

Most Central Asian societies are part of a Russian informational and media space (Russian TV, radio and social media such as Odnoklassniki.ru, Vkontakte.ru, Mail.ru). So, there is also a huge potential of influence via the Internet. The analysis of Kazakhstani population using social platforms shows a gap between the expert community and society. While the expert community, which is supposed to shape public opinion, uses Facebook and Twitter; the population relies on Russian social media. This demonstrates the low influence of the state and affiliated experts on public opinion among the internet community.

Russia has rather displayed its hard than its soft power over the past several years. Yet, despite the revanchist foreign policy, Russia has deep reserves of cultural soft power. It is, after all, the home of the Hermitage Museum, the Bolshoi Ballet, Chekov, Dostoyevsky, Malevich, Tchaikovsky, and Bulgakov. Moreover, global opinion on Russia varies widely throughout the world. Russia performed markedly better on the international polling in 2016, compared with 2015. Perhaps a (relatively) quieter period in eastern Ukraine, and an attempt to cast Russia as a leader in the fight against Daesh in Syria, is having a positive effect on global perceptions of Russia.

Conclusions

A month after 2008 military conflict between Russia and Georgia, when the Kremlin recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, The Federal Agency for CIS Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (known as Rossotrudnichestvo) was established. The Agency was supposed to become Russian USAID, while its ongoing activities should contribute to overcoming cultural barriers, negative stereotypes and other obstacles to develop international cooperation and peace through strength.

Since that time, Russian has been trying to strengthen its soft power through different means. The Kremlin logic was to promote Russian language, culture, “Russian world” concept and ‘traditional values’ throughout the world, including Central Asia as described in Chapter I.

However, introducing American or European soft power concept did not work out, as the main goal of the political leadership was to gain power and counterbalance the West and the United States.

Relying on hard power and the use of force in neighborhood, Russian soft power appeared as a state program or a plan with subordinated agencies to introduce the topic to achieve certain feeling of power on international arena. In addition, the Kremlin tries to engage the military in the creation of soft power. In addition to the aura of power that is generated by its hard-power capabilities, the military has a broad range of officer exchanges, joint-training, and assistance programs with CIS countries within Civil Defense Academy, EMERCOM Russia, Land Forces and Air Forces institutions, etc.

When Russian soft power failed in Ukraine and it could not convince the Ukrainians of the attractiveness of their culture, language, traditional values, and economic prospects within the EAEU and CIS, it was the use of force to settle down the ongoing conflict. And it becomes clear that militarization of political establishment impedes the development and proper implementation of Russian soft power ideas and projects as well as significantly worsens Russian image abroad (while improving within the country).

To understand the logic of the Russian soft power, it is necessary to remind Joseph Nye soft power conversation processes. In 2004, he introduced three primary sources of soft power, which are culture, political values, and foreign policy. According to Nye, soft power strategies have nothing to do with the traditional foreign policy tools of carrot and stick, working instead to persuade by constructing and mobilizing networks, developing and communicating compelling narratives, establishing international norms, building coalitions, and drawing on the key resources that endear one country to another.

In the case of Russia, there is a mix of soft components of language, culture (even religion with orthodox branches in CIS member-states) and education but based on political decision and

51 Путин назначил Любовь Глебову главой Россотрудничества //http://tass.ru/politika/1847647
52 Подготовка сержантского и офицерского состава ВС государств Центральной Азии, входящих в Организацию Договора о коллективной безопасности //http://arsenal-otechestva.ru/article/114-podgotovka-sostava
reason. Eventually Russia has substituted the concept and made it ultimately about whose story wins. Defeating its global ambitions, Russian fell falling behind in the soft power race, as the digital components of engagement, attraction, and persuasion play a larger role.

It is clear that’s the logic of Russian soft power severely contradicts Nye’s concept. For obvious reasons, stick and carrot cannot be a part of the soft power concept in comparison to the US, the EU and China’s approaches. In the end, it turns out that a non-democratic state in crisis has been trying to announce a new model of hybrid power, which is pushing traditional values, state use of force and non-democratic development.

Therefore, Russian soft power in Kazakhstan and Central Asia raises more questions than answers. While promoting Russian language, culture, and literature abroad, Russia’s current political leadership still relies on common soviet heritage and identity. Therefore, the outcomes of Russia’s soft power strategy remain unclear. Official statements and behavior of the Russian political and military establishment resulted in militarization of Russian politics and strategic culture. Meanwhile, each crisis, Russia is somehow involved in, negatively affects Kazakhstan and the Central Asian states. If the case of Ukraine was not a final indicator, the situation with Turkey (warplane incident, trade and tourism wars, and sanctions) became a challenge for Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in terms of strategic partnership with Ankara and the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY).

Among three primary sources of soft power, Russia’s cultural influence is seriously underestimated in Kazakhstan and to a lesser degree in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. However, considering current demographic trends, the Russian language would most likely lose its lingua franca status in Kazakhstan and its famous model of interethnic harmony could be challenged. While losing its positions and influence in the region Russia tries to substitute the soft power agenda to propaganda and hybrid wars as containment against the United States.

At the same time, Russian soft power is taken for granted in Kazakhstan as public discourse and attitude toward its neighboring state is determined by post-Crimea phobias and drama rather than education, culture and language. Education programs as an instrument of soft power are being implemented by copy pasting Western models and no one can assess the potential of networking in long term perspective. Considering the Kremlin’s global ambitions, Kazakhstan’s society would ideally stay divided between the Russian world, democratic values and a national idea. For instance, the Russian ban on Western NGOs as well as the Law on “Non-profit organizations” and criminal responsibility influences Central Asian democratization and prospects for growing wealth. Laws tightening authoritarian measures and attempts to influence on civil society together with unpopular ineffective social and economic policy, including contradictions within the EEU constitute a challenge for all Central Asian societies.

In general, Russia’s refusal to maintain its regional commitments (e.g. Counternarcotic initiative), its lack of strategic culture and institutional discipline within the EAEC significantly increases the degree of geopolitical turbulence in the region and casts doubt on the prospects for a meaningful integration in the post-Soviet space. There is a certain fatigue and annoyance with Post-Soviet terminology, particularly in younger generation throughout Central Asia. Apart from
that there is a need to build a common understanding and a basis for further mutually profitable changes.

The attitude towards Russia is sometimes referred to as “forced interdependence” or “let the sleeping dog lie where it is”. On one hand, there is criticism of Russia’s foreign policy and global ambitions, even within intergovernmental bodies and organizations. On the other, downgrading relations and interactions with Russia can deteriorate bilateral relations (labor migrants, dual citizenship, water and energy resources, etc.). As a result, Russia should take a leading position in foreign economic relations with Central Asia, in its role as a source of remittances and as a rule-setter in trade.

However, economic crisis, the Ukrainian crisis-related sanctions and the falling oil price have forced the Central Asian states to seek alternative opportunities to adapt to contemporary challenges, without publicly confronting Moscow. At the same time, Russia’s role and influence in Kazakhstan and Central Asia both on national and regional security has been largely mythologized and not been properly and honestly discussed. Different fears and phobias still influence the decision-making process. The Kremlin itself seeks to combat myth-making and Anti-Russian information campaigns in mass and social media, while stressing integration projects and cultivating its image abroad.

Under these circumstances, Kazakhstan should keep the distance when it comes to language, social media and TV industry, and nation-building process on the edge of upcoming political transit, and focus on national interests and priorities.
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