



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



Edited by Anna Gussarova
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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.

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

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 states³, 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

AFRICA	
 EGYPT	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Cairo and Alexandria (2)
 ZAMBIA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Lusaka
 MOROCCO	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Rabat
 THE REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Brazzaville
 TANZANIA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Dar Es Salaam
 TUNISIA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Tunisia
 ETHIOPIA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Addis Ababa
 SOUTH AFRICA	Representative (part of the Embassy) in Pretoria
AMERICA	
 ARGENTINA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Buenos Aires
 BRAZIL	Deputy Representative (within Consulate General) in San Paolo, Representative (within Embassy) in Brasilia (2)
 CANADA	Representative (within Embassy) in Ottawa
 CHILIE	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Santiago
 CUBA	Representative (within Embassy) in Havana
 MEXICO	Representative (within Embassy) in Mexico City
 NIKARAGUA	Representative (within Embassy) in Managua
 PERU	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Lima
 UNITED STATES	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Washington, Deputy Representative (within Consulate General) in New York (2)
 VENEZUELA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Caracas
ASIA	
 AFGHANISTAN	Representative (within Embassy) in Kabul
 BANGLADESH	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Dhaka
 CAMBODIA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Phnom Penh
 CHINA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Beijing
 INDIA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Delhi and Chennai (2), Russian Cultural Center Department in Calcutta, Mumbai, and Trivandrum (3)
 INDONESIA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Jakarta
 IRAN	Representative (within Embassy) in Tehran

³ Rossotrudnichestvo official website //http://rs.gov.ru/en/about

 ISRAEL	Russian Cultural Center in Tel Aviv
 JAPAN	Representative (within Embassy) in Tokyo
 JORDAN	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Amman
 LAOS	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Vientiane
 LEBANON	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Beirut
 MALASIA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Kuala Lumpur
 MONGOLIA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Ulan Bator
 NEPAL	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Kathmandu
 PAKISTAN	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Karachi
 PALESTINE	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Bethlehem
 REPUBLIC OF KOREA	Representative (within Embassy) in Seoul
 SRI LANKA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Colombo
 SYRIA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Damascus
 TURKEY	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Ankara
 UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	Representative (within Embassy) in Abu Dhabi
 VIETNAM	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Hanoi

COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES

 ABKHAZIA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Sukhumi
 ARMENIA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Yerevan
 AZERBAIJAN	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Baku
 BELARUS	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Minsk, Brest and Gomel (3)
 KAZAKHSTAN	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Astana
 KYRGYZSTAN	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Bishkek and Osh (2)
 MOLDOVA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Chisinau
 SOUTHERN OSSETIA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Tskhinvali
 TAJIKISTAN	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Dushanbe
 UKRAINE	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Kyiv, Deputy Representative (within Consulate General) in Odessa (2)
 UZBEKISTAN	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Tashkent

EUROPE

 ALBANIA	Representative (within Embassy) in Tirana
 AUSTRIA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Vienna
 BELGIUM	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Brussels
 BULGARIA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Sofia
 CROATIA	Representative (within Embassy) in Zagreb
 CYPRUS	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Nicosia
 CZECH REPUBLIC	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Prague
 DENMARK	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Copenhagen
 FINLAND	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Helsinki
 FRANCE	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Paris
 GERMANY	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Berlin
 GREAT BRITAIN	Representative (within Embassy) in London
 GREECE	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Athens
 HUNGARY	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Budapest

 ITALY	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Rome
 LITHUANIA	Representative (within Embassy) in Vilnius
 LUXEMBURG	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Luxemburg
 MACEDONIA	Representative (within Embassy) in Skopje
 MALTA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Valetta
 MONTENEGRO	Representative (within Embassy) in Podgorica
 POLAND	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Warsaw, Russian Cultural Center Department in Gdansk (2)
 PORTUGAL	Representative (within Embassy) in Lisbon
 SERBIA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Belgrade
 SLOVAKIA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Bratislava
 SLOVENIA	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Ljubljana
 SPAIN	Russian Center for Science and Culture in Madrid
 SWITZERLAND	Representative (within Embassy) in Bern

Source: Rossotrudnichestvo official website // <http://rs.gov.ru/en/contacts>

In 2013, Rossotrudnichestvo's budget estimated 2 bln rubles. And there was an idea to increase the number to 9,5 bln rub in 2020⁴. 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.

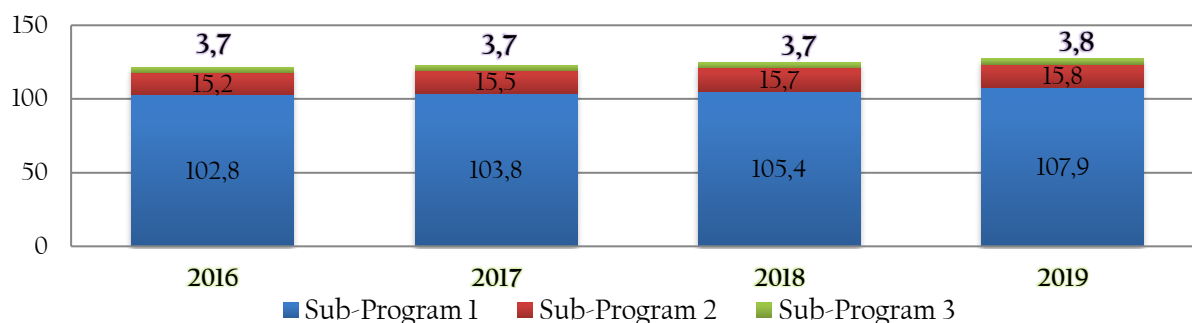
Rossotrudnichestvo's activity is built under Sub-Program 3 "Activities in International Humanitarian Cooperation (IHC) and International Development Assistance (IDA)" within the State Program on "Foreign Policy Activity"⁵. In 2016, the amount of money which the Agency originally planned to spend for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

⁴ Бюджет Россотрудничества вырастет почти до 10 миллиардов рублей // <http://russkiymir.ru/news/50417/>

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)'

Chart 2 Financing of State program “Foreign Policy Activity” by Sub-programs, in bln rubles



Source: 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.”

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.”⁶

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.”⁷

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. Rossotrudnichestvo 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

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> [7]

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>

¹⁰ НИУ ВШЭ. Факты образования. Академическая мобильность иностранных студентов в России. Выпуск №7. Июль 2016 г. // <https://ioe.hse.ru/data/2016/08/04/1119531130/%D0%A4%D0%9E7.pdf>

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%B4%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5_%D0%A8%D0%B8%D0%B1%D1%83%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B2-%D0%9C_%D0%9E%D0%B1%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BD%D1%8B%D0%B5-%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 Kazakhstani 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.¹³ 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.¹⁴

- (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.¹⁵

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

¹³ Ministry of Education and Science of the RF // <http://www.russia.edu.ru/support/asia/3301/>

¹⁴ В Астане прошел Форум казахстанских выпускников российских (советских) вузов «От образования к карьере»//<http://kaz.rcnk-rs.ru/press/news/v-astane-proshel-forum-kazahstanskih-vypusnikov-rossiyskih-sovetskih-vuzov-ot>

¹⁵ Report «On the Results of Activity of Rossotrudnichestvo for 2015» // http://rs.gov.ru/uploads/document/file/199/doklad_2015.pdf

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.¹⁶ In 2016, about 16 000 people took Russian language courses in 58 countries within 63 offices of Rossotrudnichestvo¹⁷.

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.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

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

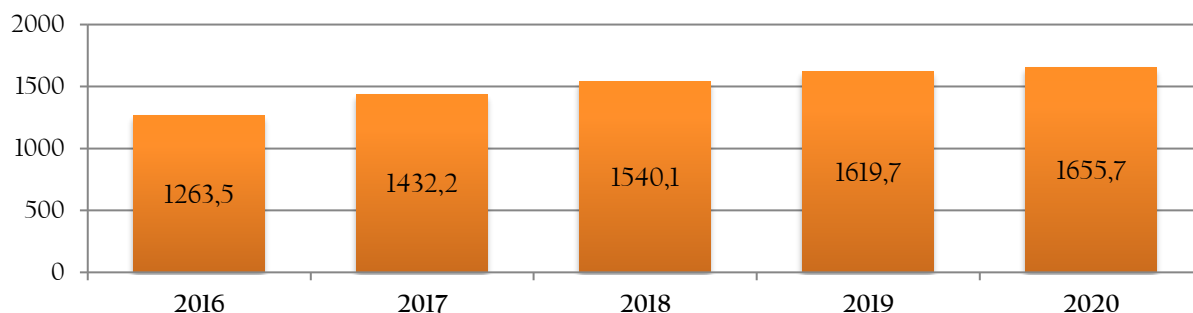
¹⁹ Русский язык начинает уходить из стран СНГ? // <http://www.russkiymir.ru/publications/86120/>

²⁰ Русский язык «уходит» из Центральной Азии // <https://365info.kz/2015/12/russkij-yazyk-uhodit-iz-tsentralnoj-azii/>

²¹ Минобрнауки просит на пропаганду русского языка 7 млрд рублей // <http://izvestia.ru/news/577070>

²² *ibid.*

Chart 3 “Russian Language” Federal Target Program for 2016-2020, costs in mln rubles



Source: Постановление Правительства РФ от 20.05.2015 N 481 (ред. от 02.04.2016) «О федеральной целевой программе "Русский язык" на 2016 - 2020 годы»

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.²³

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 2015.²⁴

²³ При поддержке РЦНК в Казахстане прошла акция «Кольцо памяти» // <http://cis.minsk.by/news.php?id=5520>

²⁴ Report «On the Results of Activity of Rossotrudnichestvo for 2015» // http://rs.gov.ru/uploads/document/file/199/doklad_2015.pdf

Another significant event, the Vth 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.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) *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.”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

²⁵ *ibid.*

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-povolzhye.ru/o-nas/>

³⁰ See <http://pcsu.ru/%d0%be-%d0%bd%d0%b0%d1%81>

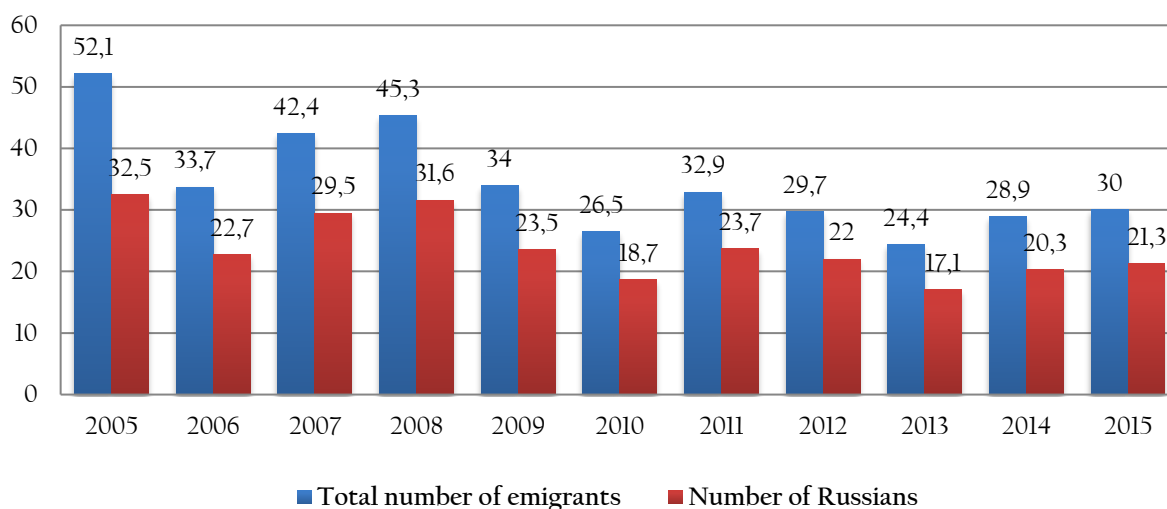
³¹ See <http://ia-centr.ru/about/>

(e) 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 Kazakhstanis 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



Source: Statistics Committee, Kazakhstan Ministry for National Economy

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

³² The exhibition of leading enterprises of the Kurgan region opened in Astana // http://bnews.kz/ru/news/ekonomika_i_biznes/644341-2009_04_21-644341

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.³³ 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.³⁴

- (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.³⁵

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

³³ Financial Tracking Service // <http://ftsbeta.unocha.org/donors/5189/summary/2016>

³⁴ Russia uncooperated // <http://kommersant.ru/doc/2747025>

Including data from Report «On the Results of Activity of Rossotrudnichestvo for 2015»

³⁵ Report «On the Results of Activity of Rossotrudnichestvo for 2015» //

http://rs.gov.ru/uploads/document/file/199/doklad_2015.pdf

Kazakhstani 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 111 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.³⁷

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 market³⁹.

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.

³⁶ Реестр отечественных телеканалов (2015). – Министерство по инвестициям и развитию РК Комитет связи информатизации и информации // http://info-con.mid.gov.kz/sites/default/.../reestr_otechestvennyh_telekanalov_0.doc

³⁷ Реестр иностранных теле-, радиоканалов, поставленных на учет и распространяемых на территории республики Казахстан (2015). – Министерство по инвестициям и развитию РК Комитет связи информатизации и информации // <http://info-con.mid.gov.kz/ru/pages/reestr-inostrannyh-tele-radiokanalov-postavlennyh-na-uchet-i-rasprostranyaemyh-na-territorii>

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, р. 7-8

³⁹ Russia's Ragtag Eurasian Economic Union // <http://www.gmfus.org/blog/2016/02/23/russias-ragtag-eurasian-economic-union>

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).⁴⁰

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 Strategy⁴¹ and the National Security Strategy⁴². 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

⁴⁰ The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power // <http://softpower30.portland-communications.com/ranking/>.

⁴¹ Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 05.12.2016 г. № 646
Об утверждении Доктрины информационной безопасности Российской Федерации // <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/41460>

⁴² Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 31.12.2015 г. № 683 О Стратегии национальной безопасности Российской Федерации // <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/40391>

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,

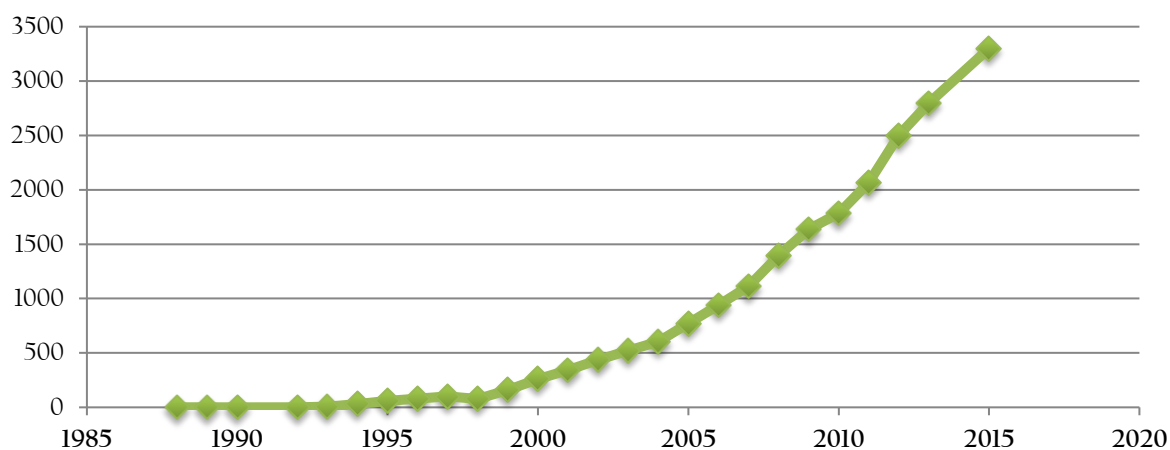
⁴³ Частные военные компании: легализация наемных убийц или армия будущего? // http://rapsinews.ru/international_publication/20140707/271667681.html

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.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. confrontation⁴⁶ 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 rubles⁴⁷



Source: The SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2014
http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database/milexdata1988-2012v2.xls

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 program⁴⁸ 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, Kazakhstanis 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.

⁴⁵ A non-public research, conducted by the author in 2015.

⁴⁶ МВД: слова Кадырова о стрельбе по силовикам недопустимы
http://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2015/04/150423_kadyrov_shooting_scandal_mvd_statement

⁴⁷ The SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2014
http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database/milexdata1988-2012v2.xls

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, V Kontakte.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 media⁴⁹. 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.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Интернет-коммуникации в Казахстане: степень мобилизационного потенциала (по результатам социологического исследования). Алматы: КИСИ при Президенте РК, 2014. — 172 с. – С.136

⁵⁰ The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power // <http://softpower30.portland-communications.com/ranking/>.

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 activities⁵¹ 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 1.

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.⁵²

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 processes⁵³. In 2004, he⁵⁴ 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><http://tass.ru/politika/1847647>

⁵² Подготовка сержантского и офицерского составов ВС государств Центральной Азии, входящих в Организацию Договора о коллективной безопасности <http://arsenal-otechestva.ru/article/114-podgotovka-sostava>

⁵³ Nye, J. (2011) *The Future of Power*, New York, Public Affairs

⁵⁴ Nye, J. (2004) *Soft Power: The means to success in world politics*, New York, Public Affairs

reason. Eventually Russia has substituted the concept and made it ultimately about whose story wins. Defeating its global ambitions, Russia 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 identically 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.

Information about the authors

Anna Gussarova, CAISS Co-founder and Director, expert in transnational security

Yevgeniy Khon, CAISS Deputy Director, expert in international political economy

CAISS, established on 11 May 2016, is an Almaty-based independent think tank. The CAISS primary goal is to conduct interdisciplinary, applied and collaborative research on a wide range of security, political, economic and development issues, provide consulting services and project management with a particular focus on Central Asia and broader Eurasian Neighborhood (more on caiss.expert).

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