Introduction

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Language and Culture in Russia's Soft Power Toolbox

Christian Noack

This book zooms in on language promotion as a mainstay of the Russian Federation's recently reinvigorated cultural diplomacy activities. Russia is currently attempting an economic and political reintegration of the post-Soviet space based on geopolitical discourses of Eurasianism and arguments stipulating the region's civilisational distinctness from the West. In such discourses, the uniqueness of Russian culture and Russian language, as well as the latter's role as an overarching lingua franca serve as important arguments. The authors of this collection sound out how Russia's language promotion takes shape in a number of targeted countries, ranging from former Soviet republics like Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan or Moldova, to Western countries like Germany and the Republic of Ireland. We examine the use and status of the Russian language in these countries, analyse the role of Russian-language media, and discuss whether or not this provides Russia with significant foreign policy leverage. Research for this book was, among others, conducted in the framework of the Jean Monnet network 'Memory and Securitization in the European Union and Neighbourhood' (NEMESIS), Project Number 565149-EPP-1-2015-1-RU-EPPJMO-NETWORK.

The authors take Russia's impressive capacity building in the realm of cultural and public diplomacy as a starting point. Since 2007, non-governmental foundations like the Russkii Mir[1] Foundation, and a new branch of the Foreign Ministry named the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (or Rossotrudnichestvo for short), have been created with the aim of rebranding Russia internationally. The promotion of the Russian language and of Russian culture abroad is one of the most important tasks for both the Russkii Mir Foundation and for Rossotrudnichestvo. Referring to one's

cultural achievements and historical accomplishments, and promoting one's language is of course in no way unique in cultural diplomacy. What is remarkable in the Russian case, though, is the political context in which Russia resumed its cultural diplomacy activities after a hiatus of more than a decade. It coincides with an overall reorientation of foreign policy and with the rise of a debate in the country about the need to apply soft power. At the same time, the renewed cultural diplomacy activities are closely intertwined with other political discourses rising to prominence during the 2000s, namely those of the 'compatriots' (i.e. Russian speakers living beyond Russia's borders, mainly in the former Soviet space) and of the 'Russian World'. Both claim the existence of a larger polyethnic civilisation deeply influenced by Russian culture and language, which transcends the borders of the Russian Federation and is largely congruent with a Eurasian space earlier covered by the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire. Indeed, Russia's foreign policy doctrines since the mid-2000s hardly conceal the Kremlin's intention to play a pre-eminent role in this area, unofficially called the 'near abroad'.

Scrutinising Russia's language promotion in theory and practice thus means engaging with a core aspect of the Kremlin's geopolitical reorientation, in which both the rise of the term 'soft power' and the focus on the former Soviet space can hardly be overlooked. At the intersection of the two, promotion of language and culture has an important role to play, as Russia sees preserving, and possibly expanding, the role of the Russian language and of Russian culture in this area as a guarantee of political influence.

With the term 'soft power', Joseph Nye famously described the exertion of power by attraction rather than by coercion. Without denying the importance of 'hard power' in the shape of military threats or economic pressure, Nye aimed at a re-evaluation of the importance of 'soft' factors in international relations, such as cultural clout and shared values. With Nye, the authors of this volume consider public and cultural diplomacy as important domains of soft power, in which states actively promote their cultural appeal. In so doing, they are not just striving to enhance mutual understanding between cultures, but trying to influence opinions and actions in other countries and societies to advance certain interests and values (Nye 2004, 2008).

Nye's soft power concept has been severely criticised for its vagueness and its failure to conceptualise the 'power' part of it. This is particularly true for the question of actorness; in Nye's concept, this is mainly allocated to the countries that exert soft power, which for Nye is mainly the US. This generates substantial methodological and source problems. While the intention to 'attract' can be fairly easily traced in policy

documents, the actual effect of 'being attracted' is much more difficult to track and measure at the receiving end (Feklyunina 2016; Cheskin 2017). Hence, the authors of the volume analyse Russia's promotion of culture and language beyond the question of political intention (who is targeted?), exploring the actual process of cultural mediation in the target countries (how is the Russian language promoted?) and the perceptions on the receiving side (for whom is the Russian language attractive, and why?).

RUSSIAN SOFT POWER AND THE RETURN OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

Putin's self-assured speech at the 2007 Munich security conference and the 2008 war between Georgia and the Russian Federation dominated the Western perception of the Kremlin's turn to a more assertive foreign policy after the mid-2000s. Arguably, the use of military force against pro-Western Georgia made some contemporary observers overlook Russia's attempts during the same period to diversify its foreign policy and revitalise public and cultural diplomacy instruments and policies.

A number of more specific factors facilitated this reorientation. First, economic stabilisation and growth during Putin's first two terms paved the way for conducting a much more self-assured foreign policy, above all in Russia's immediate neighbourhood. Up to this point, the Commonwealth of Independent States had never developed into a functioning institution and the Putin administration itself, in its quest to secure Russia's position as the dominant regional power, had started several inconclusive initiatives aiming at reintegration of the former Soviet space. Only with the creation of the Customs Union in 2010 and the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015 did these attempts acquire a more distinctive shape.

Second, political technologists increasingly influenced the conduct of politics in Russia, applying their skills above all in media communication and the organisation of elections in the service of Putin's 'sovereign democracy'. In this context, Russia perceived Western attempts to promote democratisation through moral and financial support of nascent civil society structures as the soft power facade camouflaging the West's attempts to deploy 'political technologies' that would undermine Russia's position in its own sphere of interests. The successful 'Rose' and 'Orange' revolutions seemed to be just two particularly alarming examples. If Russia's foreign policy was to serve both international and domestic interests efficiently, it needed to acquire the same capacities as

its Western competitors to influence public opinion abroad (Saari 2014: 50–1). In that sense, Putin himself has never ceased treating soft power with some ambivalence, seeing it as a tactical ruse but, at the same time, a capacity Russia needed to be able to apply.

Alongside 'hard' power, the Kremlin therefore has sought to mobilise 'soft' or cultural resources in its foreign policy. As a rule, these initiatives emphasise the shared experiences and values across post-Soviet space, as opposed to the ostensibly 'different' development paths of the West, allegedly imposed on states like Georgia or Ukraine. This reading links questions of identity and belonging in Eurasia intrinsically to the influence of the distinctive Russian culture that shaped first the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union. The idea of a common civilisation or a 'cultural ideational space' (Hudson 2015: 331) in the shape of a 'Russian World' rose to prominence in Russia's recent attempts to recalibrate its foreign policies and to incorporate cultural diplomacy and soft power tools.

Against this backdrop, the Kremlin's take on soft power has oscillated between two positions: adopting international 'best practice', epitomised in the public diplomacy of Western states like the US, UK or Germany (or more recently that of the Chinese competitor in the East) versus creating its own brand of public diplomacy, based on Imperial Russian and/ or Soviet traditions (Saari 2014: 56). The two positions are not entirely incompatible, but at least in the political discourse, the 'best practice' concept seems to have won the upper hand and allowed the term 'soft power' to enter the vocabulary of Russia's leading politicians by the second decade of the twenty-first century.

In 2012, for example, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov publicly declared soft power to be 'one of the main components of countries' international influence'. However, he found Russia's progress in the field still wanting: 'We cannot deny that Russia is well behind other countries in this respect.' Notably, he conceived of the 'Russian World' as 'a huge resource that can help strengthen Russia's prestige globally' (quoted in Forsberg and Smith 2016: 131). Introducing the new Concept of the Foreign Policy in the Security Council in 2013, President Putin himself employed the term 'soft power', too, emphasising that the new Concept focused 'on modern foreign policy tools, including economic diplomacy, elements of so-called soft power, and careful integration into the global informational space' (quoted in Simons 2014: 444).

Indeed, the 2013 Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation fully reflects this change in attitude. Article 9 stipulates that 'today traditional military and political alliances cannot protect against all the existing transborder challenges and threats'. Article 10 adds:

Economic, legal, scientific, environmental, demographic and IT factors become as important for states in influencing the world politics as the military power. Of increased relevance are issues related to sustainable development, spiritual and intellectual education of population, improving its well-being and promoting investment in human capital. (Concept 2013)

The understanding of twenty-first century policies as being based on a clash of cultures becomes fully evident in Article 13, which states:

For the first time in modern history, global competition takes place on a civilizational level, whereby various values and models of development based on the universal principles of democracy and market economy start to clash and compete against each other. Cultural and civilizational diversity of the world becomes more and more manifest. (Concept 2013)

Article 20 recognises soft power as 'a comprehensive toolkit for achieving foreign policy objectives, building on civil society potential, information, cultural and other methods and technologies alternative to traditional diplomacy'. The same article, however, contains an only slightly veiled critique of Western interventionism, alluding to Colour Revolution scenarios:

[I]ncreasing global competition and the growing crisis potential sometimes creates a risk of destructive and unlawful use of 'soft power' and human rights concepts to exert political pressure on states, interfere in their internal affairs, destabilize their political situation, manipulate public opinion, including under the pretext of financing cultural and human rights projects abroad. (Concept 2013)

What is particularly relevant for the studies collated in this volume is that the document further defines the former Soviet space as the key target area for the Russian Federation's foreign policy. The concept justifies the need for closer regional interaction with the 'common historical background' of the CIS, greatly enhancing the 'capacity for integration in various spheres'. Article 44 prioritises the Eurasian Economic Union as 'a model that would determine the future of the Commonwealth states'. Links between members are seen in Article 45 as being built on 'preserving and increasing common cultural and civilizational heritage which is an essential resource for the CIS as a whole and for each of

the Commonwealth's Member States in the context of globalization'. Russia explicitly pledges to provide support for 'compatriots living in the CIS Member States' and to help them negotiate agreements 'on the protection of their educational, linguistic, social, labour, humanitarian and other rights and freedoms' (Concept 2013). Against this backdrop, cultural diplomacy took on the task of proving a deeper, 'civilisation' linkage unifying this area, and principally opposing Western attempts to drag individual states out of this civilisational entity.

THE 'RUSSIAN WORLD' AND ITS MAINSTAYS

Russia's new geopolitical focus was often couched in quite explicit cultural terms. A 2011 opinion piece in the governmental newspaper *Rossiiskaia gazeta* by the chair of the Institute of Contemporary Development, Igor Jurgens, claimed that Russia's soft power rested on three pillars. First, Russia as the patron of Orthodoxy acted both as an *antemurale* against the eastern expansion of Latin Christendom and, simultaneously, as a harbinger of European civilisation in the vast expanses of Eurasia. Second, the Orthodox empire functioned as a defender of 'multi-ethnic alliances of nations' against the expansion of the nation state principle (quoted in Simons 2014: 445). Last but not least, the Soviet Union managed to portray itself as a credible ideological alternative to the liberal-capitalist model of the West.

Most contemporary analysts within and outside Russia concur that Russia at present does not field an alternative ideological profile any more, even if Russia is often described as a stronghold of conservative values. Of the remaining two arguments, Orthodoxy may hold a degree of potential attraction in south-eastern Europe and the Middle East, but it is definitely in the core area of the former empire and the Soviet Union, that is, the Eastern Slavic republics of Belarus and Ukraine, that such arguments are potentially most persuasive. As to the imperial past, it is indeed often presented by the current political elite in Russia as the historical warrant of cultural and ethnic diversity. An outstanding example of this was Putin's speech before the Federal Chamber after the annexation of Crimea on 18 March 2014. 'Crimea', Putin claimed, 'is a unique blend of different peoples' cultures and traditions. This makes it similar to Russia as a whole, where not a single ethnic group has been lost over the centuries' (Putin 2014). Like Putin, apologists of empire argue that such cultural diversity is manageable and defendable only through a strong state bridging the petty egoisms of the nationalities that, according to a broadly shared sentiment in Russia, lie at the core of the

disunion that terminated the Soviet experiment. Such views neither take into account that the Union was finally dissolved as a result of a political initiative originating in Russia, nor do they reflect that even within the Russian Federation, it is the Russian people that form the demographic backbone. Not all of the people 'saved' by imperial magnanimity would necessarily subscribe to the view that Russian language and culture, supposedly due to their higher level of development, naturally serve as a common denominator of regional integration, as suggested by the Kremlin's political elite (Rukavishnikov 2011: 79–80).

To be sure, such imperial rhetoric is substantially toned down when practical steps are undertaken towards a reintegration of the Soviet space under Russian leadership. At least on the surface, however, the status and the functioning of the Russian language, and with it of Russian culture, is a highly politicised issue, which any exploration of Russia's current language promotion has to take into account. Whether referring to the function of Russian as the lingua franca of the dissolved Soviet Union implicitly or explicitly, Russian discourse discards institutional multilingualism, such as practised by the EU, as a weakness and suggests at the same time that there is no viable alternative to Russian as the means of internal communication. Putin himself spoke in 2013 of the 'very many advantages' of Russian being the prospective common language of the whole Eurasian Union. Other Russian experts likewise have emphasised the role of a common language for integration, pointing to research that allegedly proves that 'the use of a common language has a positive effect on the intensity of trade and investment relationships' (quoted in Ryazanova-Clarke 2017: 448). As discussed in the chapters by Mark Brüggemann or Natalya Kosmarskaya and Igor Savin in this book, the reactions to such 'rational' Russian designs of 'communicational integration' on the basis of the 'language of the rouble' (Ryazanova-Clarke 2017: 448) have been cautious even in member states of the Eurasian Union such as Belarus or Kazakhstan.

ASYMMETRIC BILINGUALISM, OR WHY THE STATUS OF A LANGUAGE MATTERS

The prominence of Orthodox and Russian cultural heritage in Russia's soft power strategies mirrors the progression of a protracted identity debate in post-Soviet Russia (Shevel 2011: 179–92). After 1991, most of the other former Soviet republics embarked on state-building projects that followed the principle of 'one nation – one language', and thus pursued nationalising linguistic policies. By contrast, Russia, as

a multinational state in which the titular nation's share amounted to about 80% in 2010, adhered to Soviet multinational and multilinguistic philosophies. Soviet policies of language had already been based on the ascription of a particular status to the Russian language, which was not so much seen as the expression of a Russian *Volksgeist* but as a vehicle of transnational modernisation. Although many observers identified the survival of imperial heritage as one of the key problems of Russian state building (Hosking 1997), Russia's economic and social instability and the fact that about one-fifth of the population was ethnically non-Russian rendered 'one nation – one language' policies unrealistic.

Moreover, both the imperial and Soviet predecessor states had conceptually distinguished between the state and the nation, describing the former with the term 'rossiiskii' and the latter with 'russkii'. Rhetorically adhering to the theory of polyethnicity and multilingualism, the Soviet Union developed a delicate balance between the preservation and development of minority languages and cultures ('national in form, socialist in content') on the one hand, and advancing Russian language and culture as a proxy for denationalised common 'achievements' of the Soviet peoples on the other. Even in periods that are generally perceived as 'Russifying' in terms of language and culture, like the late 1930s, Stalin's regime consciously avoided the impression that the spread of Russian, necessary as it may have been (e.g. in the Red Army), would proceed at the expense of the status of and proficiency in minority languages (Blitstein 2001). The outcome of this Soviet language policy was the development of an asymmetric bilingualism in the USSR. In the Union republics, but even more so in the national republics and autonomies within the RSFSR, the non-Russian population was as a rule bilingual, whereas only a small percentage of ethnic Russians living in the non-Russian republics or national territories were fluent in the titular languages. Until the late Soviet period, Russian functioned not only as the lingua franca but also as the main means of social ascent (Brubaker 1996; Tolz 1998; Pavlenko 2006).

After 1991, the political elite in the Russian Federation favoured the 'statist' interpretation of a Russian nation and shied away from openly declaring the new state as being exclusively the home of ethnic Russians. This option had two important consequences. In terms of language policy, the new state replicated the Soviet multilinguist rhetoric, but secured in practice the predominance of Russian in those subjects of the Federation where Moscow's weakness during the 1990s had resulted in far too self-assertive language policies by the titular nations, such as in Tatarstan (Wigglesworth-Baker 2016). Therefore, the former Soviet asymmetric bilingualism was hardly ever superseded by a real bilingualism. In terms

of territory, however, the new state of the Russian Federation was considerably smaller than its predecessors, and the shrinking of the borders left larger groups of Russian speakers 'stranded' in newly independent states, whose language policies granted Russian a minority language status at best, or no status at all. For these groups of Russian speakers, the experience of being a less favoured linguistic minority replaced the privileges that they had enjoyed under the conditions of Soviet-style asymmetric bilingualism.

In many independent states, except for the two Eastern Slavic republics, Ukraine and Belarus, Russian speakers seemed to face the alternative of linguistic assimilation or re-migration to the Russian Federation (Pavlenko 2006: 88). Such re-migration characterised demographic trends above all in the 1990s, yet it was limited by the extent of the contemporary economic and social crisis in the Russian Federation (Chudinovskikh and Denisenko 2014: 8–10). In this situation, Russian politicians discovered the beached diaspora and claimed that the Federation had legal and moral obligations towards their 'compatriots', as this group was increasingly called in the public discourse.

RUSSIAN SPEAKERS AS 'COMPATRIOTS'

The State Duma passed its first 'Federal Law of the Russian Federation about state policy of the Russian Federation concerning compatriots abroad' while still under Yeltsin in 1999. The law has been substantially amended several times since, most recently in 2013. Initially, the definition of who belonged to these compatriots was based on the citizenship principle, and all former USSR passports holders were in principle eligible for the status of 'compatriot'. At the same time, the subjective will of an individual formed the basis for inclusion into the group of compatriots; it was therefore open to anyone identifying with the fate of the Russian state, Russian culture or the Russian language. In the long run, the re-migration option, which included a simplified process for acquiring Russian citizenship (still nominally pegged to compatriot status in paragraphs 5 and 11 of the 2010 version of the Federal Law), was found unpromising by the compatriots themselves, as it quickly became apparent that Russia intended to address its demographic and structural problems by settling the re-migrants in depopulated and unattractive border regions. The number of compatriots returning to Russia in the 2000s remained insignificant, and the Russian government realised that the preservation of a numerically strong diaspora beyond the borders was politically more advantageous, in particular if these people

could be nudged into demonstrating a degree of loyalty to the Russian Federation (Shevel 2011: 196).

With later revisions of the 'Law on the compatriots', above all those in 2010 and 2013, 'essentializing measurements of "compatriotism"' were introduced (Ryazanova-Clarke 2017: 446). The amended law lists some objective criteria according to which individuals are identified as potential compatriots. Paragraph 1 enumerates 'citizens of the Russian Federation who are constantly living outside the territory of the Russian Federation' and 'individuals and their descendants living outside the territory of the Russian Federation that belong, as a rule, to peoples which were historically living on the territory of the Russian Federation', and includes 'persons who are direct descendants of people who once lived on the territory of the Russia Federation and who have made a deliberate choice for spiritual, cultural and legal bond with the Russian Federation',[2] even if they emigrated and acquired foreign citizenship (Federal Law 2010). If there is one factor potentially uniting them, it is knowledge and use of the Russian language, which Russia sets out to perpetuate with its language promotion.

Many observers have pointed out the deliberate vagueness of the concept of 'compatriots' (*sootechestvenniki*) (Shevel 2011: 192–9). On the one hand, it allows politicians in Russia to include the largest possible groups of Russian speakers outside the Federation into a constituency for which Russia claims responsibility, thus creating a 'globally sprawling virtual expanded nation' (Ryazanova-Clarke 2017: 447). On the other hand, the centrality of language and the fact that the status of compatriots is linked to subjective, active and even emotional identification with Russian language and culture suggests the cultivation of a Herderian concept of language as an expression of a national spirit. Therefore, the 2010 amendment of the law does not automatically include descendants of USSR passport holders in the near abroad in the category unless they actively identify as compatriots. This sense of 'belonging' requires active promotion of the Russian language, supported by evidence of 'civic or professional activity to preserve the Russian language . . . [and] culture abroad' (Federal Law 2010). Here the subjective identification becomes instrumental, potentially transforming 'loyalty to the Russian culture and the Russian language . . . into the loyalty to the Russian state' (Ryazanova-Clarke 2017: 447).

In other words, Russian legislation suggests a close interrelationship between language preferences and identity, rather than using a thoroughly ethnic definition of Russianness. This could not but politicise the Russian Federation's language, above all in the near abroad. In extreme cases, such as Ukraine, fears that Russia would use the language issue as

a sort of Trojan Horse were not exactly alleviated by repeated threats to furnish compatriots, or even all willing Ukrainians, with Russian passports (Underwood 2019). Against this backdrop, the chapters in this book dealing with the promotion of the Russian language in the so-called near and far abroad examine the potential responsiveness of the target audience members themselves. The chapters by Michał Wawrzonek, Mark Brüggemann, Natalya Kosmarskaya and Igor Savin, Feargus Denman, and Olga Tikhomirova document a quite weak link between the use of language and identity. What is more, Ekaterina Protassova and Maria Yelenevskaya's contribution documents the first signs of a parting of ways between the Russian language(s) spoken in the Russian Federation and elsewhere. Such pluricentrism will in the future possibly weaken the Russian Federation's claim of 'ownership' of the Russian language, which President Lukashenka in Belarus already disputes for political expediency, as Brüggemann shows.

THE POLITICS OF THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE BEYOND RUSSIA (STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE BOOK)

Recent research has proved the possibility of applying the concept of soft power more productively, shifting the emphasis from 'examining elite outlooks' to 'focus on reception'. Cheskin (2017), Hudson (2015) and Feklyunina (2016) emphasise the constructive nature of (soft) power as negotiated. Soft power is thus created through a continuous renegotiation process of collective identities. We can assess the weight of a state's soft power vis-à-vis another state by investigating the extent to which a discursively constructed collective identity projected by the first state is accepted or rejected by different audiences in the second state (Hudson 2015: 331–2).

In this understanding, soft power emerges as an 'accumulated ideological potential, which then may serve to frame certain policies', and research shifts to the response of the target audiences to the communicated message, as soft power measures 'do not inevitably yield the results intended' (Hudson 2015: 331–2).

This approach informed the nine studies on Russian language promotion abroad collected in this volume. The first three chapters deal with the linguistic situation in Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, three countries with significant Russian minorities and an even more significant spread of the Russian language among the population as a whole.

The first chapter by Michał Wawrzonek, 'The "Russian World" and

Ukraine', discusses the clashes of Ukrainian and Russian state interests in the field of language policies in this country. The Ukrainian government actively promotes the spread of Ukrainian as part of the state's assertion of its sovereignty in public discourse. By contrast, Russia's foreign policy aims at buttressing the widespread use of Russian in Ukraine, regarding the Russian-speaking population as 'compatriots'. Wawrzonek's research, like that of many other recent studies of the perception of the 'Russian World' in Ukraine (Feklyunina 2016; Cheskin 2017; Ryazanova-Clarke 2017), points out Russia's inflexible and self-assertive approach to the 'imagined' community. He suggests that the 'Russian World' ideology, with its religious overtones, was already incompatible with the very idea of Ukraine being a separate nation and Ukrainian being a language (and not merely a dialect of Russian) before the Maidan and the schism of the Orthodox Church. Russia's aggression since 2014 has obviously further enhanced civic identification with the Ukrainian state and its independence, which proved to be detrimental for the concept of the 'Russian World'.

Mark Brüggemann's chapter, 'Russian in Belarus: A Feature of Belarusian Identity or Moscow's "Trojan Horse"?' explores the coexistence of three linguistic codes in this country: Belarusian, Russian and a Belarusian–Russian mixed speech, *trasianka*. Russian had been the preferred language during the Soviet period, but this shifted to Belarusian during the early years of Belarusian independence. From Lukashenka's ascent to power in 1994 until 2014, bilingualism was the official doctrine in state language policies. The chapter explores how, in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis, the government's position has changed and Belarusian is cautiously employed as an element of distinction from Russia. At the same time, Lukashenka continues to challenge Russia's claim to sole ownership of the Russian language, since historically Belarusians contributed to the latter's development extensively.

In the third chapter, 'Between Emotions and Pragmatism: The Russian Language in Kazakhstan and the "Russian Factor"', Natalya Kosmarskaya and Igor Savin offer both a micro- and a macro-perspective on the linguistic situation in that country. Building on a series of interviews and roundtables with Kazakhstani students and experts, as well as basing themselves on a broad array of earlier studies, the authors deconstruct Russia's claim that the Russian cultural and linguistic space in Central Asia is dependent on Russia's external support. Kosmarskaya and Savin show that the Russian language is used almost equally by ethnic Russians, Kazakhs and other minorities in the country. Neither the symbolic upgrading of the Kazakh language nor Russia's inept attempts at influencing the situation have significantly changed this. The authors suggest that the Russian Federation should readjust its external

promotion of language and culture, which has so far been geared almost exclusively to the so-called compatriots, and should take the needs of non-Russian Russian speakers into serious consideration.

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the use of the Russian language in the 'far abroad'. In his contribution, 'Speakers of Russian in Ireland: "What unites us is language, but in all other respects we are different"', Feargus Denman explores language use and identity issues among Russian speakers in the Republic of Ireland. In the Republic, some 20,000 people speak Russian. A good fifth of this population is Irish-born, while only 9% are Russian nationals. The majority of people who speak Russian in Ireland have arrived since 2000 from the Baltic EU member states and other former Soviet republics. Denman analyses how gaps between the de facto community in conversation and a putatively general community of speakers of Russian within Ireland are negotiated and how the links between them are alternately invoked and challenged.

Like Denman's contribution, Olga Tikhomirova's chapter, 'Media Use of Russian Speakers in Germany', suggests that the language–identity nexus is less tightly knit outside the former Soviet space, whether in countries with small Russophone communities like Ireland or those with more sizeable groups like Germany. In the case of the 3–4 million Russian speakers in Germany, Tikhomirova points to the irony that the larger parts of this group emigrated from the Soviet Union and its successor state precisely because they saw themselves not as Russians, but as Germans or Jews. Nonetheless, German society tends to perceive them as *Deutschrussen*, particularly because of their continuous use of Russian as a first language in oral communication. For the German case it has often been argued that this makes the group particularly perceptive to disinformation spread via Russian-language media. Tikhomirova sketches a more nuanced picture, showing that the Russian speakers are indeed consuming Russian-language media to a substantial degree, but that they prefer entertaining content over informational formats.

Dmitry Yagodin's chapter, 'The Role of Russian for Digital Diplomacy in Moldova', analyses the use of the Russian language in media as well, returning to the former Soviet space. The Republic of Moldova is ridden with political uncertainties, divided by acute language and media policy issues, and plagued by a continuous national identity crisis. Yagodin analyses Moldova's exposure to Russian public diplomacy initiatives, in particular those implemented with the help of social media formats recently growing in popularity and sophistication. By comparing the approaches of two competing actors, the EU and Russia, in their use of social media as foreign policy tools, Yagodin found the effectiveness of Russian-language digital diplomacy rather wanting.

The third part of the book zooms out again and discusses the role and importance of the Russian language abroad in comparative terms. In Chapter 7, Sirke Mäkinen discusses the promotion of Russian higher education abroad. Across the globe, attracting foreign students to one's universities has become an ever more important aspect of cultural diplomacy, partly due to commercial considerations, partly to secure influence on future generations of foreign elites. Which role does the Russian language play in this context? Mäkinen finds surprisingly cynical attitudes towards the use of Russian among Russian educational managers. While acknowledging that offering more courses in English than in Russian would facilitate the internationalisation and commercialisation of the Russian educational system, leading Russian specialists admitted that much of the educational promotion still rests on the assumption of the widespread use of the Russian language. Quotas for compatriots and other student groups from the near abroad suggest that a political agenda, that is, retaining Russia's primacy as an educational great power, prevails over attempts at a broad and commercially successful internationalisation of education.

In Chapter 8, 'Stable or Variable Russian? Standardisation versus Pluricentrism', Ekaterina Protassova and Maria Yelenevskaya discuss the relationship between metropolitan and diasporic Russian. They provide an overview of variations of Russian as it is spoken outside the Russian Federation. The authors record numerous lexicographical and grammatical changes under the influence of the titular languages spoken in the former Soviet republics and other countries with sizeable Russian minorities, such as Israel or Finland. At the same time, both Russian authorities and Russian-language teachers, the main mediators of the language, display a stunningly conservative attitude towards language changes, vigorously rejecting neologisms.

The institutional basis of Russia's soft power has so far rarely been reviewed in comparative perspective. This is addressed in the concluding chapter by Christian Noack, 'The Russian World in Perspective: Comparing Russian Culture and Language Promotion with British, German and French Practices'. Starting from the question of whether Russia's recent cultural diplomacy offensive is based on international best practice or is a revival of Soviet traditions, Noack finds both, embodied in the Russkii Mir Foundation and the state agency Rossotrudnichestvo, respectively. While, for example, French cultural foreign policy resembles Russia's in terms of having a similar structure that combines public and state institutions, Russia's language and culture promotion differs from Western practice in important ways. It is essentially unidirectional, instead of inviting cultural exchange, and it is geared towards defend-

ing the status and use of the Russian language, in particular in the near abroad. As discussed above, the suggestions of a close nexus between language use and identity and the narrow focus on 'compatriots' do nothing to increase the attractiveness of Russia's activities. Finally, in terms of practical material in the fields of online teaching and teacher training, the quality and quantity of Russkii Mir's and Rossotrudnichestvo's offers lag significantly behind those of their Western European peers. This inertia, also discussed in the country studies in Chapters 1–3, can only be partly explained by a lack of funding.

What do these findings about Russian language promotion and its perception in the 'near' and 'far' abroad tell us about the 'attractiveness' of Russian soft power politics? Starting from the reception of Nye's concept, we discerned a very instrumental approach towards soft power among Russia's political elite. Foundations like Russkii Mir formally emulate Western models of culture and language promotion. The financial dependence of both Russkii Mir and Rossotrudnichestvo on state funding and the narrow political definition of aims and targets in Russian legislation cast severe doubts on their relative independence. Indeed, chairs and boards of both organisations are occupied by representatives from the inner circle of Russia's political elite.

In terms of the target audiences, we find a strong focus on the former Soviet space. While Russkii Mir and Rossotrudnichestvo claim to promote access to Russian culture and language promotion for anyone abroad, actual Russian language promotion aims primarily at preserving existing cohorts of Russian speakers across the near abroad, who are conceived as quasi-natural agents of Russian influence in these countries. The Kremlin seems to assume that shared historical experiences provide a fertile ground for a positive perception of Russian language and culture. There is an almost unquestioned expectation that the Russian language will play the same integrative functions for the former Soviet space that it had been ascribed in the USSR. Our research has shown that this is hardly the case, even in the linguistically closely related Eastern Slavic states of Ukraine and Belarus. True, across the former Soviet space the command of the Russian language still offers important advantages, in terms of access to the Russian labour market, educational system and the broad informational space of the Runet, for example. The willingness to engage with Russian language promotion is seriously diminished, however, by the ideological loading of culture and language in Russian discourse, of which the compatriot laws and the 'Russian World' ideology are the most visible expressions.

Beyond that, Russia's external cultural promotion preserves a rather traditional understanding of high culture with essentialist and static

features, of which the Russian language is the most visible expression. There is little space for popular culture in this culture promotion, and instead of seeing culture as an autonomous free space for negotiation of political possibilities, identification with Russian culture serves rather as a bone of contention in the target societies, in particular in the near abroad. By promoting an understanding of Russian culture in terms of a narrowly codified high culture and by declaring the active use of Russian as an expression of national attachment, Russia's policies almost exclude utilitarian approaches to the learning of the language by non-Russians. Enforcing a civilisational choice between Russia and Europe on independent Ukraine, Moscow's policies clearly floundered, and it did not make bigger inroads anywhere else in the former Soviet space. We found this to be somewhat less the case in other countries with sizeable groups of Russian speakers, like Germany, Israel or Ireland, where a more obvious disjunction between language and identity is at play, for example in the case of Russian-speaking Germans or Jews.

Interestingly, many of the potential mediators, that is, the teachers of Russian language outside the Russian Federation, seem to share the very normative take on the Russian language and readily support Moscow's claim to impart a 'correct' version of the language as codified in the Russian Federation. In the long run, it is rather doubtful that this 'frozen' language, which increasingly differs from spoken language both in Russia and in the 'near abroad', will help spread the use of the Russian language and secure its status as a world language. While the Russian discourse on the promotion of Russian culture and language pays lip service to cultural exchange, Russia's policy in practice focuses on the preservation of the beached diaspora in the former Union republics. For this target group, command of the Russian language is instrumental for access to Russian-language media or the Russian educational system. The political convenience of buttressing this cohort is obvious, yet the actual support often seems rhetorical rather than genuine.

NOTES

1. The Foundation renders its name as *Russkiy Mir* on its website. In this book we use *Russkii Mir* with capital letters for the organisation, the spelling in accordance with the Library of Congress transcription system for Russian names and terms. The concept is referred to as *russkii mir* in small letters.
2. Translations from this document here and below by the author, Christian Noack.

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