

## **‘RUSSIAN WORLD’: INTERPRETATIONS OF A DYNAMIC TOOL OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION’S FOREIGN POLICY**

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**Abstract:** *The collapse of the Soviet Union, and the rise of sovereign states on its ruins, including an independent Russia, made the political elite of the Russian Federation reconsider the ideological platform that would clarify the place of the new Russia in international relations. In response to this need, the country's intellectual circles generated the ‘Russian World’ concept, which politicians adopted and employed as a foreign policy tool. Simple and, at first glance, relatively straightforward, the term ‘Russian World’ has not benefited from a coherent definition, as it is a dynamic and constantly expanding concept. Despite this, the specificity of the concept can be identified by analysing its evolution. The central element of the concept is the Russian language, to which another element is added, represented by the idea of the ‘Great Russian Nation’, which would encompass the three nations of the Eastern Slavs (Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian). With the launch of the concept in the political arena in 2007, but especially since 2014, the ‘Russian World’ has become a frequently used term in the speeches of the Russian political elite. Gradually, the concept was permanently enshrined in the architecture of Russian foreign policy, and it was intensively promoted in the Russian Federation's new Concept of Foreign Policy, adopted in 2023.*

**Keywords:** *Russian World, Russian Federation, international, political concept, foreign policy.*

**Rezumat. „Lumea Rusă”:** *interpretarea unui instrument flexibil al politicii externe a Federației Ruse. Prăbușirea Uniunii Sovietice, apariția unor state suverane pe ruinele acesteia, inclusiv a unei Rusii independente, au determinat elita politică a Federației Ruse să regândească platforma ideologică care să clarifice locul noii Rusii în cadrul relațiilor*

*internaționale. Ca răspuns la această necesitate, cercurile intelectuale ale țării au generat conceptul „Lumea Rusă” care a fost preluat de politicieni și transformat într-un instrument de politică externă. Simplu și, la prima vedere, destul de clar, termenul „Lumea Rusă” nu a beneficiat de o definiție coerentă, fiind un concept dinamic și într-o continuă amplificare. În ciuda acestui fapt, specificul conceptului poate fi identificat analizând evoluția sa. Elementul central al conceptului îl constituie limba rusă, căruia i se adaugă un alt element reprezentat de ideea „marii națiuni ruse” care ar îngloba cele trei națiuni ale slavilor răsăriteni (rusă, ucraineană și belarusă). Odată cu lansarea conceptului în spațiul politic, în anul 2007, și mai ales începând cu anul 2014, „Lumea Rusă” a devenit un termen folosit frecvent în discursurile elitei politice ruse. Treptat, conceptul a fost înscris definitiv în arhitectura politicii externe ruse, fiind intens promovat în noul „Concept al politicii externe a Federației Ruse”, adoptat în anul 2023.*

## INTRODUCTION

In one of his public speeches, Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation, compared Russia to a vacuum cleaner that, throughout history, has absorbed various peoples, ethnicities and nations.<sup>1</sup> This comparison, while lacking the aestheticism of Russia's national poets, faithfully conveys the truth. Today, Russia is the world's largest state, home to over 300 peoples and nations. Throughout history, the Kremlin has sought ideological, sometimes messianic, justifications for its insatiable thirst for war. Thus, Slavism was one of the pretexts for Russia's territorial conquests and expansion of its sphere of influence. Starting from the historical reality that both Russians and most of the Balkans and Eastern Europe nations are Slavs, the Kremlin has constructed and promoted ethnopolitical ideas favourable to its foreign policy.

In the 20th century, Russia collapsed twice, each time having to re-invent itself. First, when the Tsarist Empire fell due to an ideologically motivated revolution, this task was solved by default. The disintegration of the Soviet Union, on the other hand, forced the Russian Federation to rebuild its ideological identity completely. Consequently, the challenges of self-identification and modern Russia's influence on world architecture pushed the country's intellectual and political circles towards new concepts, such as the 'Russian World' (Russian: Русский мир).

Today, the 'Russian World' is an ideological concept that is part of the toolbox of the Russian Federation's foreign policy. Although the term's origin is

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<sup>1</sup> *Prjamaja linija s Vladimirom Putinym* [Direct line with Vladimir Putin], 2014, in <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796> (Accessed on 12.02.2023).

much older, no clear and unanimously accepted definition exists. The 'Russian World' is a raw, flexible concept that allows Russian politicians to use it as a foundation for the national vision of post-Soviet Russia. This study explores the origins of the 'Russian World,' following its evolution as a concept and identifying its features.

### STAGE I. HISTORICAL PREMISES

The term 'Russian World' was traced to several medieval works in Kievan Rus'. The religious work *Slovo na obnovlenie Desjatinnoj cerkvi* (Russian: Слово на обновление Десятинной церкви) from the late 11<sup>th</sup> to the early 12<sup>th</sup> century first mentions the term, "(...) we glorify, praise and worship in the Trinity the glorious God, with gratitude to the faithful servant (Clement of Rome -AN) who multiplied his master's talent not only in Rome but everywhere: in Kherson as well as in the Russian World."<sup>2</sup> Another mention of the term is attested in the early 13<sup>th</sup>-century work *Poslanie episkopa Simona Polikarpu* (Russian: Послание епископа Симона Поликарпу), "(...) apostles were sent throughout the universe and, as enlightened illuminators, they enlightened the whole Russian land with Holy Baptism. The first of them – Leontie, Bishop of Rostov (...) after many torments, was killed by pagans – he was the third citizen of the Russian world (...)."<sup>3</sup>

However, the term 'Russian World' is not used as frequently as 'Russkaya strana/strana Russkaya' (Russian: Русская страна/страна Русская); 'zemlya Russkaya' (Russian: земля Русская); 'Rusi' (Russian: Русь)<sup>4</sup> etc., in the medieval works of the East Slavs, and its mention is sporadic and without a precise definition. Today, Russian and Western scholars believe that the term refers to the Eastern Slavic-inhabited principalities,<sup>5</sup> such as Kyiv, Chernihiv, Smolensk or

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<sup>2</sup> Aleksandr Nazarenko, "*Slovo na obnovlenie Desjatinnoj cerkvi*", ili k istorii počitanija svjatelja Klimenta Rimskogo v Drevnej Rusi [A word on the renewal of the Church of the Tithes, or on the history of the veneration of St. Clement of Rome in Ancient Rus'], Moskva, Svjato-Ekaterinskij Mužskoj Monastyr', 2013, p. 185.

<sup>3</sup> Dmitrij Abramovich, *Paterik Kievskago Pecherskago Monastyrja* [The Paterik of the Kievan Caves Monastery], S.-Peterburg, Imperatorskaja Arheograficeskaja Komissija, 1911, p. 76, <https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/books/original/8292-Киево-Печерский-патерик.pdf> (Accessed on 13.02.2023).

<sup>4</sup> The terms were written according to current Russian spelling norms.

<sup>5</sup> John O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal, Vladimir Kolosov, *Who Identifies with the 'Russian World'? Geopolitical Attitudes in Southeastern Ukraine, Crimea, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria*, in "Eurasian Geography and Economics", 2016, Vol. 57, no. 6, p. 747,

Novgorod. Therefore, despite its ancient origins, the term has only a semantic connection with the concept promoted by the Kremlin today.

According to modern scholars, the term 'Russian World' was (re)discovered by Russian intellectual circles only in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>6</sup> during a time that witnessed the flourishing of pan-Slavic ideals in the Tsarist Empire. It was also during this time that numerous ancient texts written in Kievan Rus' and other principalities were introduced to the cultural circuit. In particular, the work *Slovo na obnovlenie Desjatinnoj cerkvi*, mentioned above, was originally published in 1850 by the archival historian Mikhail Obolensky, who claimed to have found a 14th-century copy of the work and reconstructed the original relying upon it. However, neither the original nor the manuscript was ever found.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly to the Middle Ages, the term 'Russian World' did not take on the characteristics of an ideology throughout the nineteenth century and was rarely mentioned in the works of Russian Slavophiles. Modern research released around the 2007 launch of the political concept 'Russian World' has accentuated its origin and current significance. The term's ambiguity has led to attempts to age and ennoble the 'Russian World' concept. For example, some Russian scholars believe that the modern meaning of 'Russian World' stems from the pan-Slavist Nikolay Danilevsky's *Russia and Europe* (1872).<sup>8</sup> In his work, considered the most representative of Russian pan-Slavism, Danilevsky expresses his vision of the future of 'Slavic civilisation' whose "cultural-historical core" would be best expressed through the Russian people, positioned in contrast to Western Europe. In this sense, he was firmly convinced<sup>9</sup> that the Russians would win the

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2017.1295275> (Accessed on 19.01.2023); Aleksandr Romenskij, "Ruskij mir" v drevnerusskoj literature: istoričeskij kontekst i semantika termina ["Russian world' in ancient Russian literature: historical context and semantics of the term], in S. I. Posokhov, S. B. Soročan (Eds.), *Laurea I: Antichnyj mir i Srednie veka: čtenija pamiaty professora Vladimira Ivanoviča Kadeeva*, Khar'kov, OOO "NTMT", 2015, p. 140, [https://khiao.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/laurea\\_i.pdf](https://khiao.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/laurea_i.pdf) (Accessed on 19.01.2023).

<sup>6</sup> John O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal, Vladimir Kolosov, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Aleksandr Nazarenko, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Anastasija Bezrodnaya, *Vlijanie istoriko-kul'turnogo konteksta na funkcionirovanie koncepta "russkij mir"* [The Influence of the Historical and Cultural Context on the Functioning of the 'Russian World' Concept], in "Izvestia Ural Federal University Journal", Vol. 26, 2020, no. 4, p. 71–72, <https://doi.org/10.15826/izv1.2020.26.4.071> (Accessed on 22.01.2023).

<sup>9</sup> David MacKenzie, Michael W. Curran, *A History of Russia, the Soviet Union, and Beyond*, Belmont – Calif, Wadsworth Pub. Co, 1993, p. 435.

“civilizational war” with Europe and succeed in creating the Slavic federation. However, the term ‘Russian World’ does not appear in any of Danilevsky's works.

Similar to the above example, other modern Russian scholars have tried to justify the idea that the current concept ‘Russian World’ originates from the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky.<sup>10</sup> For the most part, this research focuses on the analysis of the writer's diaries in which he, like many other personalities of Russian culture, ponders Russia's role and place in the world, expressing ideas influenced by pan-Slavism. For example, Dostoevsky notes “Russia cannot betray the great idea bequeathed to it for several centuries, which it has followed hitherto steadily. This idea is, by the way, the unity of the Slavs, but this unity is not one of conquest or violence but of service to humankind.”<sup>11</sup> As with Danilevsky, Dostoevsky never used the term ‘Russian World’.

With the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, the Kremlin rejected Pan-Slav ideas that Vladimir Lenin considered “an expression of the chauvinist imperialism of tsarism.”<sup>12</sup> Although the Soviet Union replaced the tsarist ideological platform with communist internationalism, Russian pan-Slavism experienced a brief revival during World War II. However, during the existence of ‘Soviet pan-Slavism’ (1941-1947), which was nothing more than Moscow's attempt to unite the Slavic peoples outside the USSR in the struggle against the Axis, there was no mention of the term ‘Russian World’. Despite this, some features of Slavic ideas remained veiled in the vocabulary of the USSR's state apparatus even after the demise of Soviet pan-Slavism. Specifically, elements of the modern ‘Russian World’ concept may be detected in the KGB's strategy towards the Russian diaspora. The Soviet secret police worked to dissolve anti-Soviet organisations abroad while also creating pro-Soviet, so-called ‘progressive’ organisations<sup>13</sup> to exercise influence in the

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<sup>10</sup> O. S. Soina, V. Sh Sabirov, *Russkii mir v vozzreniiakh F.M. Dostoevskogo. Monografiia* [The Russian world in the views of F.M. Dostoevsky. Monograph], Moskva, Flinta – Nauka, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Fedor Dostoevskij, *Sobranie sochinenij v pjatnadcati tomah* [Complete works in fifteen volumes], Vol. 13, Leningrad, Nauka, 1994, p. 205.

<sup>12</sup> Vladimir Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenij* [Complete works], Vol. 26, Moskva, Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1969, p. 329.

<sup>13</sup> A. Fabrichnikov, I. Ovchinnikov, *Ispol'zovanie vozmozhnostej sovetskogo komiteta po kul'turnym svjazjam s sootchestvennikami za rubezhom v razvedyvatel'noj rabote* [Using the capabilities of the Soviet Committee for Cultural Relations with Compatriots Abroad in Intelligence Work], Moskva, Nauchno-izdatel'skij otdel Shkoly No. 101 MVD SSSR, 1968, p. 6, [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kbcWaaaEbxz\\_lIFXHg9BRDtZKfo-xD1e/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kbcWaaaEbxz_lIFXHg9BRDtZKfo-xD1e/view) (Accessed on 27.01.2023).

capitalist bloc countries. Following the strategy of “who is not with us is against us”, such organisations sponsored by the KGB focused their activities on representatives of the Soviet diaspora. Specifically, they sought to “convert” neutral emigrants, including second and third-generation emigrants, to increase their “patriotic and progressive” spirit, to link them to the USSR through culture or “other ties”,<sup>14</sup> and, finally, to create espionage networks.<sup>15</sup> According to the KGB handbook, *Using the possibilities of the Soviet Committee for Cultural Relations with compatriots abroad in espionage activity*, the structure focused its work with the diaspora on ‘Motherland’. Thus, the KGB was counting on the diaspora's patriotism and nostalgia for the homeland.

Later, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Slavic/nationalist movements began to emerge in post-Soviet Russia, where attachment to the state, but not to the ‘historical homeland’, was no longer fundamental. Most of these movements focused, like the KGB strategy mentioned above, on the Russian diaspora, particularly those remaining in the former Soviet states. Diaspora, in this case, is a term that includes not only Russian Federation nationals but also Russian speakers or those who consider themselves Russians.

Consequently, the term ‘compatriots from abroad’ appeared in public discourse in Russia as early as the 1990s, and this will be considered the beginning of the ‘Russian World’ concept. Regardless, the term was too vague since it only implied people of Russian nationality or those who also held citizenship of the Russian Federation. However, according to some research, the term was viewed far more generally in the Russian consciousness and it included people who felt an affinity for Russia.<sup>16</sup> The term has an important semantic nuance in Russian. Thus, the English ‘Russian world’ is a translation of *Russkiy mir*. *Russkiy* is a term that refers to everything Russian, including ethnicity, culture, and history, indicating that it includes an ethnic component. In Russian, there is also the term *rossiyskiy*, which refers strictly to everything related to the Russian state, encompassing all inhabitants of Russia, regardless of ethnicity. Likewise, *russkie* are ethnic Russians who do not necessarily live in Russia. At the same time, *rossiyane* are people who are citizens of the Russian Federation but not necessarily ethnic Russians. In English, the two terms are translated the same – Russians.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p.6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 38.

<sup>16</sup> Valerij Tishkov, *Russkij Mir: Smysly i Strategii* [Russian World: Meanings and Strategies], in <https://mdn.ru/articles/v-a-tishkov-russkij-mir-smysly-i-strategii> (Accessed on 23.01.2023).

Ideas about the existence of a 'Russia' that does not end with the borders of the Russian Federation were expressed in the early 1990s by Boris Mezhuev, Gleb Pavlovsky, Vadim Tsymbursky and Mikhail Gefter,<sup>17</sup> with their attention directed towards the former Soviet states, especially Ukraine and Belarus. In particular, the philosopher and researcher Gefter argued that the 'Russian question' is of primary importance for the Russian state and that it "has nothing to do with nationality". He proposed the term 'Russian countries', which he characterised as a world in itself that could in no way fit into the Western civilisation. Gefter promoted the idea that the Russian Federation should be reformed into so-called 'Russian countries', which would include both the territories that are currently part of the Russian Federation, for example, 'Russian Caucasus' or 'Russian Siberia', and the former Soviet states. In Gefter's view, the regionalisation of the Russian Federation could be used as a platform to reintegrate territories lost to Moscow following the break-up of the Soviet Union.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, some Slavophile ideas of the Russian intelligentsia began taking political shape. One of the first and most visible political initiatives in this direction was the Congress of Russian Communities (Russian: Конгресс русских общин), founded in 1992. The organisation aimed to unite Russians everywhere in a single state. With a nationalist discourse, the Congress even ran in the 1995 elections but failed to cross the 5% electoral threshold.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the movement managed to bring nationalist and even imperialist narratives back into the political discourse in Moscow, and the founder of the Congress, Dmitry Rogozin, has remained active in Russian public life to this day.

Around the same time, the Russian Orthodox Church became involved in promoting Slavophile imperialist ideas. In 1993, the World Russian People's Council (Russian: Всемирный Русский Народный Собор), led by the Russian Patriarch, was created under the aegis of the Church. From the year of its founding to the present day, the organisation has been involved in numerous social, civic and humanitarian projects. It is omnipresent, even at secular events that range

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<sup>17</sup> Svetlana Alejnikova, *"Russkij mir": belorusskij vzgljad. Monografiia* ['Russian world': Belarusian view. Monograph], Minsk, RIVSh, 2017, p. 6, [https://istmat.org/files/uploads/58775/russkiy\\_mir\\_tekst.pdf](https://istmat.org/files/uploads/58775/russkiy_mir_tekst.pdf) (Accessed on 13.02.2023).

<sup>18</sup> *Gefter i Pavlovskij, 1993 god – o budushhem russkih i Rossii* [Gefter and Pavlovsky, 1993 - about the future of Russians and Russia], 2013, in <http://ttolk.ru/?p=19129> (Accessed on 17.01.2023).

<sup>19</sup> Alan Ingram, *'A Nation Split into Fragments': The Congress of Russian Communities and Russian Nationalist Ideology*, in "Europe-Asia Studies", Vol. 51, 1999, no. 4, p. 687, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668139998859> (Accessed on 01.02.2023).

from school graduation ceremonies to international economic forums in Russia.<sup>20</sup> It is important to emphasise that, from its founding to the present day, this project has focused its attention not only on the inhabitants of the Russian Federation, as the organisation's charter suggests: "For many centuries Russians have lived on the territory of a unitary state, united by common statehood and common spiritual values. However, since 1991, Russians have become a divided people. During this period, the initiative to unite all Russians, regardless of their country of residence and political views, was taken by the Russian Orthodox Church."<sup>21</sup> In addition, Russian officials have constantly reinforced this matter. For example, President Putin stated at the 2018 Council Congress that the organisation plays an essential role in the social life of Russia and the 'Russian World', primarily due to its involvement in educating people in the spirit of "patriotic and civic values."<sup>22</sup>

## STAGE II. GENESIS OF THE 'RUSSIAN WORLD'

A significant step towards the 'Russian World' concept was taken in 1999 with the adoption of the *Law on Policy towards Countrymen Abroad*, an attempt by the Russian Federation to preserve its influence among Russians abroad. The law was enacted after intense debate in the State Duma, where nationalistic and exaggerated justifications were used. For example, MP Nasima Stolyarov, who introduced the bill, claimed that Russians in former Soviet states were subject to "harsh discrimination, formalised at the level of state policy."<sup>23</sup> Despite infatuated statements, the law did not reference concrete policies by which Russia could support its compatriots abroad,<sup>24</sup> but it became fundamental to Russian foreign policy. This law contains the first official definition of 'compatriots abroad' and elements later incorporated into the 'Russian World' concept. Thus, for the Kremlin, compatriots abroad were and continue to be primarily Russian

<sup>20</sup> Marlene Laruelle, *Russia as an Anti-Liberal European Civilisation*, in P. Kolstø, H. Blakkisrud (Eds.), *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000-2015*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 292.

<sup>21</sup> *O VRNS* [About VRNS], in <https://vrns.ru/o-vrns/> (Accessed on 18.01.2023).

<sup>22</sup> *Zasedanie Vsemirnogo Russkogo Narodnogo Sobora* [Congress of the World Russian People's Council], 2018, in <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59013> (Accessed on 20.01.2023).

<sup>23</sup> Alla Amelina, *Kto zhe oni, "sootechestvenniki za rubezhom"?* [Who are they, 'compatriots abroad?'], 2018, in [https://rapsinews.ru/legislation\\_publication/20180607/282914322.html](https://rapsinews.ru/legislation_publication/20180607/282914322.html) (Accessed on 22.01.2023).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*.



Federation citizens living abroad.<sup>25</sup> In addition to them, compatriots were also persons and their descendants living abroad but who belonged to nations that had lived on the territory of Russia and maintained cultural, spiritual and other ties with it. People whose ancestors lived in Russia are also considered nationals, including citizens of former Soviet states, holders of USSR citizenship and Russian emigrants.<sup>26</sup>

The late 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium were essential in the crystallisation of the 'Russian World' concept, a process that involved an intellectual circle centred by Mikhail Gefer. Philosopher and Professor Pyotr Shchedrovitsky, Gefer's disciple, along with two other intellectuals, Sergei Gradirovsky and Efim Ostrovsky, were the first to use the term. In a 2000 paper considered fundamental to the 'Russian World' concept, Shchedrovitskiy highlighted Russia's need to adapt to the new geopolitical configuration that had emerged after the fall of the Soviet Union. He noted that the previous ten years (1990-2000) should make Russians examine "the processes that have taken place in the CIS countries" and how the Russians in former Soviet states can use their right to self-determination. Without directly using the term globalisation, which had also encompassed the post-Soviet world, Piotr Shchedrovitskiy, analysing economic relations, pointed out that such processes "go beyond the borders of states, and the national boundaries of states lose their economic meaning."<sup>27</sup> The author emphasised that the time of national states had passed, and the future belonged to strategic alliances, complex cooperation organisations and diasporas. Shchedrovitskiy concludes that Russia will either create a new development model (including CIS states) or become one of the puppets of the 'global powers'. In his view, one potential answer is the 'Russian World' concept. Pyotr Shchedrovitsky believes that the 'Russian World' was born and formed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is "a network of large and small communities that think and speak Russian", with about half of the population of the 'Russian World' living in the Russian Federation. Therefore, based on the concept (humanistic because it is language/culture based), Russia could enlarge its economic and political

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<sup>25</sup> *Federal'nyj zakon ot 24.05.1999 No. 99-FZ O gosudarstvennoj politike Rossijskoj Federacii v otnoshenii sootchestvennikov za rubezhom* [Federal Law No. 99-FZ of May 24, 1999 On the State Policy of the Russian Federation towards Compatriots Abroad], Art. 1 (2), <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/13875/page/1> (Accessed on 11.02.2023).

<sup>26</sup> *Federal'nyj zakon ot 24.05.1999 No. 99-FZ...*, Art. 1 (3).

<sup>27</sup> Pyotr Shchedrovitsky, *Russkij mir i transnacional'noe russkoe* [Russian World and Transnational Russian], 2006, in <https://gtmarket.ru/library/articles/2508> (Accessed on 10.02.2023).

borders.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, in the beginning, the Russian language was the primary element of the 'Russian World', with the Russian Federation at its core. At this point, the 'Russian World' was seen as including the former Soviet states with a significant focus on the Russian diaspora.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the term 'Russian World' entered Russian political discourse thanks to the new President, Vladimir Putin. He began using the term shortly after he was elected to office. For example, at the World Congress of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad 2001, Putin declared, "Since ancient times, the 'Russian World' has extended beyond the borders of Russia and even beyond the borders of ethnic Russians". He also said that identifying as Russian is "a matter of personal choice. A matter of spiritual self-identification,"<sup>29</sup> rather than a matter of citizenship. However, in the following years, the 'Russian World' remained at the level of declarations, with no legislative steps taken to institutionalise the concept.

### STAGE III. POLITICAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 'RUSSIAN WORLD' IDEA

The Kremlin launched the 'Russian World' political concept only on 21 June 2007 when Vladimir Putin signed the presidential decree on the establishment of the 'Russkiy Mir' Foundation.<sup>30</sup> The organisation was placed under the management of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education of Russia, and its executive management was entrusted to a board of members directly appointed by the President. Officially, the purpose of creating the Russkiy mir Foundation was "to popularise the Russian language" – considered part of Russia's heritage and an essential element of Russian and world culture – and "to support Russian language study programmes abroad". At the same time, according to the "ideology" of the Russkiy Mir Foundation, the 'Russian World' is "a global project" through which Russia acquires "a new identity" and new possibilities for "effective cooperation with the rest of the world". The 'Russian World' would include not

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>29</sup> Alexander Gronsky, *The Russian World in a Quest for Meaning. Slavic Countries in the Post-Soviet Space*, in "Russia in Global Affairs", 2017, No. 3 (July/September), <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/the-russian-world-in-a-quest-for-meaning/>

<sup>30</sup> *Ukaz Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federacii ot 21.06.2007g. No. 796 O sozdanii fonda "Russkij mir"* [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of June 21, 2007 No. 796 On the establishment of the Russkiy Mir Foundation], <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/25689> (Accessed on 08.02.2023).

only *Russians* and *Rossiyane*, compatriots living abroad, emigrants and their descendants but also “foreign citizens who speak Russian” and all those who “are sincerely interested in Russia.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, it is possible to conclude that both the concept proposed by Shchedrovitskiy and the one promoted by the Kremlin regard the Russian language as essential to the ‘Russian World’, with the Russian Federation at its core. At the same time, the target audience became the whole diaspora comprised of Russian citizens, ethnic Russians and people who self-identify as such, unlike the focus on the CIS state diaspora proposed by Shchedrovitskiy.

In the following period, the ideological boundaries of the ‘Russian World’ began to expand, and the Russian Orthodox Church was at the forefront of this process. In 2009, Kiril himself, Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, declared that, in the Church's understanding, the core of the ‘Russian World’ is Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, the three states being part of ‘Holy Russia’. Furthermore, Kiril argued that, from the Church's point of view, the ‘Russian World’ is not based on the principle of ethnicity but on the principle of “acceptance of the Russian spirit and traditions” by various peoples, citing as an example the Republic of Moldova, which he considered part of the ‘Russian World’. Kiril also mentioned that the Russian Church is “the most multinational Orthodox community in the world” and that it is seeking to “develop” this aspect.<sup>32</sup> Academician Valeri Tishkov, a prominent researcher of the ‘Russian World’, underlined the same thing. He stated that the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in strengthening the ‘Russian World’ was “immense”, pointing out that for a long time (from the Bolshevik Revolution to the break-up of the USSR), hundreds of thousands of Russians all over the world “were cut off” from their homeland and had to “feed spiritually” from the foreign Church. Therefore, after 1991, the Russian Orthodox Church made considerable efforts to strengthen these religious communities’ links with the Russian Church and, thus, with Russia.<sup>33</sup> In this regard, the Russian Orthodox Church contributed significantly to expanding the scope of the ‘Russian World’ concept by signing the Canonical Agreement between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian

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<sup>31</sup> *O fonde* [About the Foundation], in <https://ruskiymir.ru/fund/> (Accessed on 15.01.2023).

<sup>32</sup> Patriarh Kirill, *Russkij mir i nashi cennosti* [Russian world and our values], in Vjacheslav Nikonov (Ed.), *Smysly i cennosti Russkogo mira. Sbornik statej i materialov kruglyh stolov, organizovannyh fondom "Russkij mir"*, Moskva, Fond "Russkij mir", 2010, p. 29–30, <https://ruskiymir.ru/events/docs/Смыслы и ценности Русского мира 2010.pdf> (Accessed on 17.01.2023).

<sup>33</sup> Valerij Tishkov, *op. cit.*

Orthodox Church outside Russia based in New York, in 2007. This agreement aims to strengthen Russians' national identity abroad. Accordingly, with the signing of this act, all dioceses, monasteries and other Church-related facilities of the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia came under the canonical subordination of the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>34</sup>

The institutionalisation of the 'Russian World' concept has led to changes in the Kremlin's view of Russian (*russkih*) self-definition. The shift is visible in the 2010 amendments to the Law on Policy towards Compatriots Abroad. According to the new Law, citizenship is the primary evidence of Russian nationality.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, the Kremlin will regard as a compatriot living abroad any person who declares to be Russian who engages in professional or public activities related to Russian interests, such as the preservation of the Russian language or the languages of the Russian Federation, promotion of the Russian culture, contribution to the development of relations between Russia and the state of residence.<sup>36</sup> Among the noteworthy aspects of the Law relevant to this research, is that Russia guarantees support to Russian nationals in the establishment of associations (cultural, religious, etc.) and media sources,<sup>37</sup> as well as support to existing cultural institutions (theatres, libraries, etc.) that preserve Russian identity and values.<sup>38</sup> The Kremlin is committed to minimising the number of non-citizens abroad.<sup>39</sup> According to the same law, discrimination against Russians living abroad can influence the Russian Federation's policy towards that state.<sup>40</sup>

In the following years, the Kremlin took steps to popularise Russian culture and thus the 'Russian World' concept abroad. Hence, the Russkiy Mir Foundation created a network of branches in almost all world countries, which are active mainly in higher education institutions. In addition, the Foundation assumed patronage of religious, cultural, commercial, media and educational organisations outside Russia, whose official aim was to popularise the Russian language and culture abroad and to support the Russian diaspora.<sup>41</sup> The Foundation's work

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<sup>34</sup> *Akt o kanonicheskom obshchenii* [Act of Canonical Communication], 2007, in <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/155920.html> (Accessed on 19.01.2023).

<sup>35</sup> *Federal'nyj zakon ot 24.05.1999 No. 99-FZ...*, Art. 3 (1).

<sup>36</sup> *Federal'nyj zakon ot 24.05.1999 No. 99-FZ...*, Art. 3 (2).

<sup>37</sup> *Federal'nyj zakon ot 24.05.1999 No. 99-FZ...*, Art. 4.

<sup>38</sup> *Federal'nyj zakon ot 24.05.1999 No. 99-FZ...*, Art. 17 (4).

<sup>39</sup> *Federal'nyj zakon ot 24.05.1999 No. 99-FZ...*, Art. 11 (2).

<sup>40</sup> *Federal'nyj zakon ot 24.05.1999 No. 99-FZ...*, Art. 14 (4).

<sup>41</sup> *Russkie centry* [Russian centres], in <https://russkiymir.ru/rucenter/> (Accessed on 26.01.2023).

corresponds to the foreign policy programme developed by the Russian Government in 2014 (and updated in 2021). The programme charges the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture to undertake a series of wide-ranging actions abroad. Essentially, it aims to expand the network of Russian science and culture centres abroad,<sup>42</sup> promote the Russian language,<sup>43</sup> establish Russian-language schools<sup>44</sup> to disseminate Russian scientific and cultural achievements,<sup>45</sup> cultivate cooperation in various fields (such as culture, science, media, economy, and education) with NGOs and government structures of other countries<sup>46</sup> to create and monitor policies promoting Russia's image.<sup>47</sup>

In this regard, the visibility of the 'Russian World' concept has increased significantly, including internationally, since 2014, with the Kremlin's aggression against Ukraine. In the immediate aftermath, 'Russian World' became a frequently used term in political and media discourse in Russia. Thus, various Russian officials' statements have become important sources for tracing the evolution of the 'Russian World' concept. In particular, Vladimir Putin stood out as the leading political promoter of the concept. In this regard, in his speech on the annexation of Crimea to the Russian Federation in the spring of 2014, Putin compared the Russian Federation's annexation of Crimea to the unification of Germany in 1989, supported by both Western European states and the USSR. Furthermore, the Russian President expressed his firm belief that European nations, especially the Germans, would support "the aspirations of the Russian World and historic Russia towards the restoration of unity".<sup>48</sup> President Putin's statement during the televised political event "Direct Line with Vladimir Putin" in April 2014 is noteworthy. When asked what the Russian people mean to him, Putin did not use

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<sup>42</sup> *Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva Rossijskoj Federacii ot 15.04.2014 No. 325-10 (vypiska) Ob utverzhdenii gosudarstvennoj programmy Rossijskoj Federacii "Vneshnepoliticheskaja dejatel'nost'"* [Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of April 15, 2014 No. 325-10 (extract) On approval of the state program of the Russian Federation "Foreign policy activity"], Art. 3(1), in <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201404240006> (Accessed on 12.02.2023).

<sup>43</sup> *Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva Rossijskoj Federacii ot 15.04.2014 No. 325-10...*, Art. 3(3).

<sup>44</sup> *Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva Rossijskoj Federacii ot 15.04.2014 No. 325-10...*, Art. 3.

<sup>45</sup> *Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva Rossijskoj Federacii ot 15.04.2014 No. 325-10...*, Art. 3(2).

<sup>46</sup> *Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva Rossijskoj Federacii ot 15.04.2014 No. 325-10...* Art. 3(5).

<sup>47</sup> *Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva Rossijskoj Federacii ot 15.04.2014 No. 325-10...* Art. 3(9).

<sup>48</sup> Vladimir Putin, *Obrashhenie Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federacii* [Message from the President of the Russian Federation], 2014, in <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603> (Accessed on 28.01.2023).

the phrase 'Russian people' but "person of the Russian world", citing the characteristics that justify co-opting a person into the great community of the 'Russian World'. Putin stated that, in his view, representatives of the Russian world are united by language, values, shared history, a "cultural code", and a genetic code formed over time. Besides, the most significant difference between the "person of the Russian world" and the Western one is due to the system of moral norms. Most of the answer was devoted to the comparison between the West and the 'Russian World'. He insisted that the West is materialistic and lacks values, while the "person of the Russian World" keeps to the traditional family, does not crave material values, is ready anytime to die for the homeland and has a "big soul"<sup>49</sup> (a reference to spiritual/traditional values).

Putin was even more explicit at the meeting of ambassadors and permanent representatives of the Russian Federation, which took place several months later. In his speech, the Russian President spoke of 'Russian people' being in danger in Ukraine, saying that by 'Russian people' he meant not only Russian citizens or ethnic Russians but also "Russian speakers and people who identify themselves as part of the so-called extended Russian World, without necessarily being ethnic Russians". He noted that Russia would continue "to vigorously defend the rights of Russians and compatriots living abroad, using the full arsenal of instruments available: from political and economical to humanitarian operations and the right to self-defence, provided for by international law".<sup>50</sup> Coincidentally or not, Putin's speech subsequently focused on presenting the "failure" of the unipolar world, the expansion of NATO to Russia's borders, the imposition by "some states" of its civilizational models. According to Putin, Russia's response is to promote the Eurasian economic and political project, the core of which is Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan,<sup>51</sup> considered part of the 'Russian World'. Thus, the 'Russian World' is a civilizational project that coexists with the Eurasian project. The two are not mutually exclusive but complement each other, demonstrating one of Russia's ambitions to be a bridge between Europe and Asia. The aim of both projects is the same: to destabilize the unipolar international system and position Russia as one of the power centres of the modern world.

Another speech relevant to the topic was delivered at the Russian World

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<sup>49</sup> *Prjamaja linija s Vladimirom Putinyom.*

<sup>50</sup> *Soveshchanie poslov i postojannyh predstavitelej Rossii* [Meeting of Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives of Russia], 2014, in <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46131> (Accessed on 21.01.2023).

<sup>51</sup> *Prjamaja linija s Vladimirom Putinyom.*

Congress 2016 by Magomedislam Magomedov, Deputy Head of the Apparatus of the President of the Russian Federation. He specified that "unity through diversity is fundamental for the «Russian World», which is meant to preserve the features of all peoples and ethnicities [that are part of it], where the Russian language has a primary role as an instrument of interethnic cooperation".<sup>52</sup> These statements confirm that for the Kremlin, the 'Russian World' is not strictly about ethnicity, let alone citizenship, as the Russian language is considered the central element of this concept. It is symbolic that the inaugural speech delivered on behalf of the President of the Russian Federation at the most important meeting of the 'Russian World' was entrusted to a non-Slav official born in Dagestan and a follower of the Islamic religion.

Putin's mention of the 'Russian World' alongside the Eurasian Union and the symbolism of Magomedov's speech are not surprising. Ideas of unity between the 'Russian World' and the Eurasian project are circulating in modern Russia. In this context, the well-known philosopher Alexandr Dugin's view deserves special mention. Orthodoxy and Slavism, in his opinion, are only parts of a larger project that Moscow should promote, namely the Eurasian Union. Dugin believes that the fundamental idea of Eurasianism is that the Slavs and Turkic peoples should create a joint strategic project capable of confronting the Western and Asian states.<sup>53</sup> By 'Slavs', Dugin does not only mean Russians or inhabitants of the Russian Federation. In his opinion, "Ukrainians are a West-Russian ethnic group", naturally oriented towards Russians (whom he calls the 'Velikorus'), who are the centre of gravity for all East Slavs (and thus also Belarusians) and the creators of a "strong Slavic and Orthodox state".<sup>54</sup>

Major shifts in the Kremlin's vision of the 'Russian World' may be seen in Vladimir Putin's extensive July 2021 article. Previously, only the Russian Federation was the core of the 'Russian World', but the Kremlin leader revealed a new vision in this article. The core of the 'Russian World', named "historic and spiritual space", is made up of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine because the 'Velikorus' (Russian), the 'Malorus' (Ukrainians) and the Belarusians allegedly are three

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<sup>52</sup> *Magomedislam Magomedov prinjal uchastie v jubilejnoj Assamblee Russkogo mira* [Magomedislam Magomedov took part in the anniversary Assembly of the Russian World], 2016, in <http://kremlin.ru/events/administration/53208> (Accessed on 21.01.2023).

<sup>53</sup> Aleksandr Dugin, *EvrAzijskij revansh Rossii* [Russia's Eurasian revenge], Moskva, Algoritm, 2014, p. 44.

<sup>54</sup> Aleksandr Dugin, *Ukraina: moja vojna. Geopoliticheskij dnevnik* [Ukraine: my war. Geopolitical diary], Moskva, Tsentrpoligraf, 2015, p. 63.

branches of the “great Russian nation”.<sup>55</sup> Putin was trying to convey the idea that Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians are the same people who have been divided by external enemies on the principle of “divide et impera”. At the same time, the Russian President is convinced that Ukrainians and Belarusians have become separate peoples because of the Soviet Union, which established the policy of a “triplet nation” at the state level in exchange for the concept of the Great Russian People. Putin disputes not only the ethnic identity of Ukrainians and Belarusians but also their culture, languages (which he calls Russian language dialects) and statehood. “Modern Ukraine is the creation of the Soviet era,” Putin argues, making an inventory of the territories he considers to have been Soviet and which were given to Ukraine by “historical Russia” (Northern and Southern Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, Eastern Ukraine, Snake Island, Crimea). Finally, Putin notes with regret that, in 1991, the inhabitants of the USSR, following its fall, were separated from their historical homeland (Russia). Regarding the Ukrainians, he suggests that if people want to consider themselves a separate nation, this decision must be respected. However, there is a big *but*: “Leave with what you came with”, says Putin, referring to the territories of Ukraine in 1922, when it became part of the USSR. At the same time, it is also worth noting that Putin stated that Moscow would not give up on Ukrainians and considers the country’s elite a threat, considering that it forced its own (geopolitical) vision on the population.<sup>56</sup> Summing up the Russian President’s approaches, Putin wanted to send the message that Moscow does not give up on Ukraine and will never accept the existence of an ‘anti-Russian’ Ukraine, believing that Ukrainians have been manipulated and are tyrannically ruled by Western-controlled elites. This conclusion has been confirmed by Russia’s waging a full-scale war against Ukraine, starting on 24 February 2022.

The war against Ukraine has lasted much longer than the few days or weeks Moscow had planned for the ‘special military operation’. The quasi-isolation of the Russian Federation internationally, which Putin did not expect, and the ‘selfishness’ of the powers (China, India, etc.) on whose support the Kremlin counted, have led the Russian leadership to update and adapt to the new international context a new foreign policy concept.<sup>57</sup> The new version of the policy

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<sup>55</sup> Vladimir Putin, *Ob istoricheskoy edinstve russkikh i ukraincev* [About the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians], 2021, in <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181> (Accessed on 10.02.2023).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>57</sup> The previous version of the document was adapted in 2016.



was adopted on 31 March 2023, and it became the first document of its kind that intensively featured the 'Russian World' concept. Therefore, after 16 years, the 'Russian World' concept has finally anchored into Russian foreign policy.

The document states that the Russian Federation has brought together "the Russian people and other peoples who make up the cultural-civilizational community of the 'Russian World'".<sup>58</sup> It is significant, therefore, that the Kremlin has replaced the collocation 'Russian nation' (used until now) with 'Russian World'. This confirms the multi-ethnic character of the 'Russian World' project, where the "people of the Russian World" are not the people of the "great Russian nation", but where the Russian people (*russkie*) continue to play a major role. At the same time, in Moscow's view, cultivating "good-neighbourly relations and uniting potentials in various areas" with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and other neighbouring states is "the most important goal for the security, stability, territorial unity and socio-economic development" of the Russian Federation. Russia would be linked to these states by "the centuries-old tradition of common statehood, deep interdependence in different areas, common language<sup>59</sup> and close cultures".<sup>60</sup> Last but not least, the Kremlin has set out to form a "single humanitarian space" between the Russian Federation and the CIS states<sup>61</sup> and to promote Russian as a "language of inter-ethnic communication" primarily in the CIS.<sup>62</sup>

Article 46 of the Foreign Policy Concept is a further section that refers to the "Russian World." Again, this reference was made in the context of Moscow's need to cultivate and develop relations with its compatriots living abroad, which, as previously mentioned, together with the Russian language, are edifying elements of the 'Russian World' concept. According to the document, Moscow must support its diaspora since "the Russian Federation is the core of the civilizational community of the 'Russian World'".<sup>63</sup> First of all, this definition confirms the ideas that have been circulating in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union that the 'Russian World' extends beyond the borders of the Russian Federation. Secondly,

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<sup>58</sup> *Koncepcija vneshnej politiki Rossijskoj Federacii 2023* [The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2023] Art. 4, <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/udpjZePcMAyLXOGGAgmVHQDIoFCN2Ae.pdf> (Accessed on 02.02.2023).

<sup>59</sup> Only Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan are official Russian-speaking nations among the former Soviet Union states.

<sup>60</sup> *Koncepcija vneshnej politiki Rossijskoj Federacii*, Art. 49.

<sup>61</sup> *Koncepcija vneshnej politiki Rossijskoj Federacii*, Art. 43 (5).

<sup>62</sup> *Koncepcija vneshnej politiki Rossijskoj Federacii*, Art. 43 (2).

<sup>63</sup> *Koncepcija vneshnej politiki Rossijskoj Federacii*, Art. 46.

the quoted passage is the first 'demarcation' of the boundaries of the 'Russian World' in a programmatic document.

## CONCLUSIONS

The term 'Russian World' is several centuries old, but its current interpretation differs from the historical one. The modern 'Russian World' concept originated in the 1990s as a response to the Russian Federation's need to update its ideological platform. Three factors directly caused this need. Firstly, the collapse of the USSR left many ethnic Russians outside the borders of the Russian Federation, as well as people who felt closer to Russia than to their new homeland because of certain factors (linguistic, political, economic, and cultural). Secondly, the Kremlin desires to maintain its influence in the CIS and the countries of the former communist bloc. Thirdly, like most of the world's states, Russia has assumed the protection of its compatriots living abroad but did not have any legislative instruments or ideological justification.

Thus, the Russian intelligentsia's notion of a 'Russia' existing beyond the borders of the Russian Federation has permeated post-Soviet Russian politics and materialised in the 'Russian World' concept launched in 2007. Later, in 2023, the 'Russian World' was mentioned for the first time in Russia's Foreign Policy Concept. Although the 'Russian World' has not received a clear definition and, in the last decade, has demonstrated its dynamic character, the three components of the concept have remained unchanged from the beginning to the present day. These three elements are the Russian language, the Russian-speaking culture (Russian or Soviet) and the affinity towards Russia (which includes people who oppose the current Kremlin regime).<sup>64</sup> The 'Russian World' has two dimensions: a) factual – it exists, and consists of those who are Russians or militant pro-Russians; b) ideological – it is used as a tool in Russia's foreign policy to put pressure on states where ethnic Russian communities exist and, internationally, to try to increase the Kremlin's influence by connecting its support for Russians living abroad with European (and other) policies to protect minorities and defend human rights.

A closer look at this concept also revealed that, unlike Tsarist pan-Slavism or socialist internationalism, it is based on the Russian element, which replaces the Slavic or Soviet one. At the same time, the Russian language is seen as the foundation of the 'Russian World' and its primary catalyst.

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<sup>64</sup> Valerij Tishkov, *op. cit.*

Under these circumstances, it may seem that the 'Russian World' is a local concept limited to the confines of the Russian language. In reality, however, the 'Russian World' is intended to be a global concept since an essential feature is that it is addressed not only to Russian citizens or ethnic Russians but also to all people who feel part of the 'Russian World'. Thus, the 'Russian World' does not have linguistic, cultural or geographical boundaries, but ideological ones, since the emphasis is on self-determination as a 'Russian' or 'person of the Russian World'.

The orientation of the concept towards Slavic and former Soviet states shows, firstly, that it is these regions that Russia claims as its sphere of influence, and secondly (given Russia's strategy of exploiting vulnerabilities), that these states are considered the most vulnerable and susceptible to Russian influence. To promote the 'Russian World' concept, the Kremlin has created a network of organisations whose aim is to support and promote Russian culture, particularly through the concept's main instrument, the Russian language.

In conclusion, the launch and promotion of the 'Russian World' concept at the highest levels by Russian politicians indicate that it is part of Russia's overall objective to reshape the spheres of influence created by the collapse of the USSR and the socialist bloc and, consequently, to create a multipolar world in which Russia is a global leader. In this sense, the 'Russian World' as a foreign policy tool serves to promote the Kremlin's vision of the Russian Federation as a distinct civilisation that cannot be integrated into the West.

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