

ifa ECP Monitor Country Report

# Russian Federation

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## 1. External cultural policy objectives in geopolitical context

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, external cultural policy in Russia took a backseat to more pressing political and economic concerns for nearly a decade. However, after the presidential election in 2000, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented a concept for cultural relations with other countries for the first time. In the years since, ECP has become increasingly important for Russian power projection in both its “near abroad” and throughout the world.

The Russian Federation draws on several important strengths for its global influence. Russia is the world’s 11th largest economy and 9th largest country by population. Despite its relatively small economy (roughly the size of Spain’s), Russia’s physical size and investment in military equipment make it a geopolitical powerhouse. Its 2019 hard power ranking was second only to the United States, unchanged from 2015. Diplomatically it is also strong, placing 5th in 2019. However, its soft power is regarded far more poorly, placing 30th according to the 2019 Soft Power 30 Index (Portland, 2019). Despite this low ranking, Russia has made extensive efforts to boost its presence in external cultural policy in recent years.

**Table 1: Geopolitical position of Russia**

	2019	2015
Hard power rank	2 <sup>nd</sup> (2021)	2 <sup>nd</sup>
World trade rank (\$ million)	17 <sup>th</sup> / 875,671	18 <sup>th</sup> / 674,823
Soft power rank	30 <sup>th</sup> / 48.64	27 <sup>th</sup> / 46.58 (2016)
Diplomacy rank	5 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup> (2016)

Sources: Global Firepower Index, World Bank, Portland/USC, Lowy Institute

Although Russia conducts ECP activities all over the world—reaching a total of at least 144 countries—it focuses primarily on post-Soviet states in Russia’s neighbourhood, where about 16 million Russian-speaking people live (Bälz & Maaß, 2015, p. 400). Additionally, Russia is also active in cultural policy in the European Union, especially in France and Germany. The country’s external cultural policy activities are funded with at least €660 million from the central government, which includes 200 million for core ECP activities and 460 million for foreign broadcasting.

**Table 2: Economy of Russia**

		2019	2015
Population	Number /rank	144.37 million / 9 <sup>th</sup>	144.09 million
GDP	Rank/number	11 <sup>th</sup> / \$1.7 trillion	13 <sup>th</sup>
GDP per capita	Rank/number	62 <sup>nd</sup> / \$11,585	-
Cultural economy <sup>1</sup>	As share of GDP	0.11	0.11
Education economy	As share of GDP	0.75	0.73
R&D economy	As share of GDP	0.61	0.77
Media economy	As share of GDP	0.09	0.1

Sources: Rosskazna, World Bank

Russia devotes a relatively small share of its economy toward culture, education, media, and research & development, with no category surpassing 1% of GDP. As is the case in many other countries, the Russian government contributes much more to R&D and education than culture or media. Compared to large Western European ECP players like France or Germany, however, its contributions across the board are far lower.

**Table 3: Government spending on ECP fields as a % of total outlays**

	2019	2015
Culture <sup>2</sup>	0.67	0.58
Education	4.54	3.91
R & D	3.70	4.07
Media	0.57	0.53

Source: Russian Federal Treasury (Rosskazna)

With the re-emergence of ECP as a core Russian foreign policy strategy around the turn of the century, a central idea was to use the Russian language and high culture to strengthen Russia's reputation abroad and to preserve its influence in the post-Soviet countries (Bälz & Maaß, 2015, p. 397). Today, this focus is evident, as Russia has more Russkiy Mir offices in the former Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) than in the rest of Asia combined.

Russia further expanded its soft power strategies under Putin's second term. Rather than stress a particular worldview, many of Russia's efforts consist of countering hegemonic Western ideas, establishing a "polycentric" world order, and offering alternative narratives about political events. Russian-speaking population groups abroad continue to be the main target group of Russian cultural and educational policy. The regional focus of cultural and educational policy is thus clearly identifiable in former Soviet states and Eastern Europe.

<sup>1</sup> Federal expenditure on culture and cinema, as percentage of GDP.

<sup>2</sup> Federal expenditures on culture and cinema (total) % all expenditures.

## 2. External cultural policy: an overview

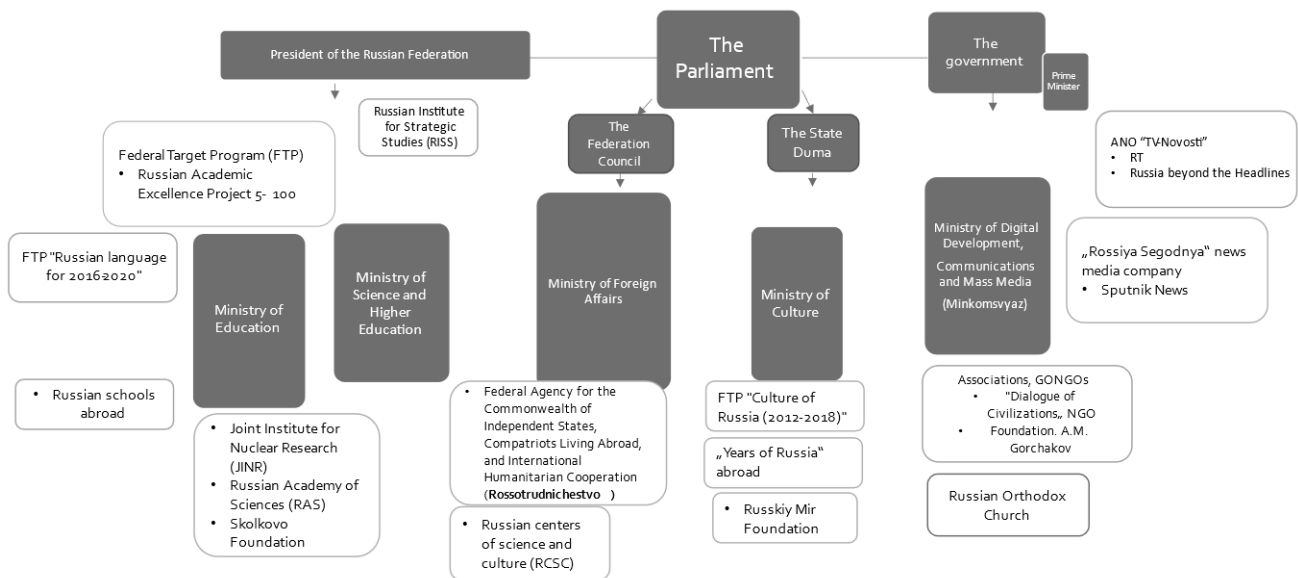
In Russia, most soft power initiatives—including foreign cultural and educational programs—are planned and implemented by the state. While many levels of government are involved in Russia’s ECP approach, most programs are centralized under the direction of the President of the Russian Federation, who establishes the principles and priorities of foreign cultural and educational policy.

**Table 4: Key ECP Statistics for Russia**

	2019
Number of countries with ECP activities	at least 144
Total number of institutions abroad	about 560
Total number of FTE staff engaged in ECP activities	at least 1,700
Financial scale of all ECP activities	-
Government financial support (€ million)	at least 650 <sup>3</sup>
Comparative ECP ranking	medium

The main executive institutions such as the Rossotrudnichestvo promotion agency, the Russkiy Mir Foundation, and the news agency Rossiya Segodnya were established by presidential decrees (Fedorova & Kochelyaeva, 2013, p. 8). These institutions operate under the supervision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Culture. However, other ministries such as the Ministry of Telecommunications and Mass Media and the Ministry of Education and Science are also involved in initiatives abroad. In addition, cities and regional administrations organize cultural projects and exchange programs (Sergunin & Karabeshkin, 2015, p. 355).

<sup>3</sup> Total ECP estimation is based on federal budget allocations to selected programs under the “Foreign Policy Activity (Внешнеполитическая деятельность)” (estimate of at least €200 million) and the item “Russia’s Participation in International Information Exchange” (€465 million). The total expenditure on Foreign Policy activity for 2019 and 2015 amounted to €1.65 billion and €1.9 billion respectively, Roskazna (2020).

**Figure 1: Institutional map of Russian ECP**

The Russian Ministry of Culture is responsible for culture, art and the protection of Russia’s cultural heritage. Its responsibilities include administering archives, libraries and museum exhibitions, as well as the control of the export and import of cultural goods. Tourism is also part of the ministry (Smits, 2014, p. 10). One focal point is the implementation of the state support programs *Kultura Rossii* (“Culture of Russia”). Together with the Foreign Ministry, it also influences the objectives of the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation.

### 3. Fields of ECP

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs bears the main responsibility for setting priorities and directly implementing Russia’s external cultural policy. It coordinates cooperation agreements with other countries, monitors the fulfilment of international cultural obligations and coordinates the activities of other state bodies and organizations (Fedorova & Kochelyaeva, 2013, p. 11). Russian embassies and consulates are only marginally involved in the implementation of international programs. This task is performed by the *Rossotrudnichestvo* promotion agency and the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation (Smits, 2014, p. 10). The divisions between the main ECP categories (culture, language, education, science) are far from clear in the case of Russia. Many of the actors, in particular the promotion agency *Rossotrudnichestvo* and the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation, are active in a variety of areas. Therefore, many actors will be discussed in several sections.

### 3.1. Culture and the arts

**Table 5: Statistics on culture and the arts in Russia**

<i>Russkiy Mir Foundation &amp; Rossotrudnichestvo</i>	2019	2015
Number of countries present	Russkiy Mir centers: 52 Russkiy Mir cabinets: 62 Rossotrudnichestvo: 80	Russkiy Mir centers: 46 Russkiy Mir cabinets: 57 Rossotrudnichestvo: 79
Number of institutes and branches	Russkiy Mir centers: 116 Russkiy Mir cabinets: 134 Rossotrudnichestvo: 97	Russkiy Mir centers: 106 Russkiy Mir cabinets: 140 -
Number of FTE staff	-	Rossotrudnichestvo: ca. 600 <sup>(2016)</sup>  Russkiy Mir: ca. 80 <sup>(2016)</sup>
Budget (€ million)	2.5	2.4
Government financial support (€ million)	Ministry of culture (Foreign relations programs): 2.5 Rossotrudnichestvo: 64.8 Russkiy Mir: 6.5	Ministry of culture (Foreign relations programs): 2.39 Rossotrudnichestvo: 66.6 Russkiy Mir: 6.35

Russia has three major players in the fields of arts and culture abroad: Rossotrudnichestvo, Russkiy Mir, and the Russia Centers, which it operates. Rossotrudnichestvo has the largest footprint abroad, with presence in over 80 countries and about 600 employees around the world. Although Russkiy Mir covers only 52 countries, it has the greatest number of total institutes, with 116 around the world. Moreover, Russian ECP is growing: all three institutions covered more countries in 2019 than they did in 2015.

Rossotrudnichestvo's goals include (1) integration of the CIS countries; (2) promotion of Russian culture; (3) strengthening the position of the Russian language; (4) cooperation and exchanges in higher education; (5) promotion of the Russian economy, science and technology abroad; (6) support of Russian compatriots abroad; and (7) preservation of historical monuments (Rossotrudnichestvo, 2015). It also organizes bilateral cultural years such as the "UK-Russia Year of Language and Literature 2016". In total, Rossotrudnichestvo operates in over 80 countries across four continents, with 97 locations in total (Rossotrudnichestvo, 2020). Its total budget amounts to over €66 million.

Russkiy Mir, which is modelled after institutions like the British Council and Goethe Institute, has an annual budget of around €11.3 million from public funds and private donations for the maintenance of around 100 Russian Centers and the support of other organizations, such as Russian language libraries (Lutsevych, 2016, p. 14). The most common locations for Russian Centers are Europe (52), Asia (25), the United States (7), CIS countries (27), and Russia itself (5). In addition to Russkiy Mir's language activities (discussed in the following

section), part of its role is also to share news items and publish and fund research to support research on Russia and the Russian language. Protecting “traditional Christian values” against a “moral crisis in the West” are an integral part of this concept and are increasingly coming to the fore in the work of the foundation (Morozov, 2017; McCrum & Mrachek, 2019). Its aim is not only to preserve Russia’s cultural and linguistic heritage, but also to protect its “spiritual” heritage. To this end, the foundation increasingly cooperates with the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Federal Kultura Rossii program, another cultural player, was first implemented in 2001 and was extended after the first program phase from 2012 to 2018. The aim of the program is to “strengthen the influence of Russian culture on the world cultural process, strengthen world cultural relations, and use the experience of foreign states for the development of Russian culture” (Bälz & Maaß, 2015, p. 404). In Russia itself, the program is designed to contribute to the modernization of the cultural sector, attract new investment and encourage young talent. The program also has social objectives: various ethnic groups are to grow closer together through cultural exchange and set the project’s “moral priorities” for the younger generations (Presidential Library, 2012). Russian cultural years abroad, which have recently taken place in Germany, the Netherlands and Great Britain, among others, are also supported by the program.

### 3.2. Language

**Table 6: Key language promotion statistics on Russia**

	2019	2015
Number of countries present	RCSC (Russian Centers of Science and Culture): 58	RCSC: 54
Number of institutes & branches	RCSC: 66 Pushkin Institute: 35	-
Number of students enrolled		
In class	RCSC: 18,189 <sup>(2018)</sup> Pushkin Institute: 1.1 million <sup>(2017)</sup>	RCSC: 17,309 -
Online reach	- RCSC: 18,189 <sup>(2018)</sup>	pushkininstitute.ru 450,000 <sup>(2016)</sup> RCSC: 17,309
Number of candidates for Russian language qualifications	n/a	n/a
Number of language teachers	Pushkin Institute: ca. 2,000 <sup>4</sup>	Pushkin Institute: 2,597 trainees

<sup>4</sup> The number of foreign teachers of the Russian language who enrolled in professional training.

	2019	2015
	Russian schools abroad: 101 <sup>(2016/17)</sup>	Russian language teachers worldwide: 160,000
Government financial support (€ million)	<sup>(2017)</sup> “FTP Russian language” expenses affiliated with Rossotrudnichestvo: 4.3  <sup>(2016-2020)</sup> Promotion of the Russian language: 113 <sup>5</sup>	<sup>(2015)</sup> “FTP Russian language” expenses affiliated with Rossotrudnichestvo: 1.3

In addition to its cultural activities, Rossotrudnichestvo is also responsible for the implementation of various government language programs, reaching over 18,000 students in 2019. For example, Rossotrudnichestvo, as part of the Federal Target Program “Russian Language” (2011-2015), provided teaching material to over 7,000 schools to support Russian language teaching (Smits, 2014, p. 10). The organization operates 60 Russian language courses at Russian Science Centers in 58 countries (Arefiev, 2016). The language institutes are most concentrated in Western Europe (21.5%), Eastern Europe and the Balkans (19.7%), the Middle East and North Africa (17.1%), Asia (16.6%), and CIS countries (11.5%) (Arefiev, 2017).

The Foundation Russkiy Mir was established in July 2007—the official “Year of the Russian Language”—by a decree of President Putin to promote the Russian language and culture worldwide (Smits, 2014, p. 11). Following the example of the Chinese Confucius Institutes, the Foundation supports Russian centers in cooperation with foreign universities, libraries and other educational institutions. Equipped with extensive libraries, the centers not only offer language courses, but also serve as information and event locations. The program is active in over 65 countries and has between 80-120 employees (British Council, 2018). Additionally, the Foundation supports external projects that meet its objectives, such as the translation of Russian-language authors (Van Herpen, 2016, p. 38).

The federal support program Russkiy jazyk (“Russian Language”) have been implemented since 2006 in order to strengthen the Russian language at home and abroad. The trigger was the feared loss of importance of the Russian language. Although Russian was still one of the most widely spoken languages in the world in the mid-2000s, the number of Russian-speaking people declined steadily. International cooperation of the Pushkin Institute, which offers Russian courses for foreign students in Moscow, is also to be expanded further. Events such as festivals, education and book fairs and competitions should also continue to contribute to the prestige of the Russian language and education abroad (Russkiy Mir, 2015).

The Pushkin State Russian Language Institute, first established in 1966, is based in Moscow and offers training for both Russian foreign language instructors and students of the Russian language. It offers summer and term-length courses at highly subsidized rates of roughly €350 per month (Pushkin, 2020). In total, there are at least 250,000 Russian teachers in the world, including over 100,000 in Russia (Arefiev, 2017).

<sup>5</sup>Within the framework of the whole Federal Target Program “Russian language for 2016-2020.” Arefiev, A. L. (2017).



### 3.3. Primary and secondary education

**Table 7: Key statistics on foreign primary and secondary education of Russia**

	2019	2015
Number of countries	88 <sup>(2018)</sup>	78 <sup>(2014/15)</sup>
Number of schools	-	116
Number of students	21,000 (incl. 8,700 Russian schoolchildren in 86 Embassy schools) <sup>(2017/2018)</sup>	24,300 (incl. 8,600 Russian schoolchildren in 84 Embassy schools) <sup>(2014/15)</sup>
Number of staff / teachers	-	214 <sup>(2014/15)</sup>
Government financial support (€ million)	n/a	n/a

In addition to the previously-existing network of Russian schools abroad maintained by the Russia MFA for diplomats, in 2015 President Putin announced plans to support Russian-language education internationally. Citing the fact that over 17 million Russians lived abroad, he stressed that “the problem of children of Russians abroad receiving an education in Russian has become increasingly acute” and that education abroad should be considered “one of the main directions of the state policy.” Furthermore, he stressed that Russian schools abroad constitute one of the “strategic foreign policy interests of the Russian Federation” (Office of the President of Russia, 2015). In terms of the execution of this agenda, the three policy pillars are: 1) information support, 2) methodological support, and 3) material and technical support.

The Support System for Russian Schools(<https://russchools.org/>) assists with these activities, providing teacher training, educational resources, synchronizing the regulatory framework for Russian education abroad, and coordinating between Russian schools. In 2019, Russian schools abroad existed in 88 countries, up from 78 when Putin announced his agenda in 2015. Over 20,000 students study at Russian schools abroad (Russian Schools Abroad, 2020).

### 3.4. Tertiary education and science

**Table 8: Key statistics on tertiary education and science in Russia**

	2019	2015
Number of countries	TNE: 25	TNE: 25
Number of universities/colleges abroad	43	54 <sup>(2014/15)</sup>
Numbers of students		
Number of foreign students <sup>6</sup>	262,416 <sup>(2018)</sup>	226,431
Number of students at trans-national higher education (TNE)	42,159 <sup>(2017/18)</sup>	46,993 <sup>(2014/15)</sup>
Number of government scholarships awarded	12,310 (quota 15,000) <sup>7</sup>	10,300
Number of staff / teachers	n/a	n/a
Government financial support (€ million)	<sup>(2018-2024)</sup> National Education Project / "Export education" - 1,483 <sup>8</sup> <sup>(2019)</sup> "Export education" 6.4	-
<b>Joint Institute for Nuclear Research (JINR)</b>		
Number of countries	18 members, 68 partner countries	-
Number of researchers / staff	5,176	4,801
Number scientists in exchange programs	1,812 (incoming) 3,229 (outgoing)	-
Budget (€ million)	289.7 <sup>9</sup>	168.7
Government financial support (€ million)	National project "Science" - "Development of scientific and production cooperation": 64	-

<sup>6</sup> Data based on Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students | UNESCO UIS. (2020). Retrieved 2 September 2020, from <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>.

<sup>7</sup> The government scholarship quota is allocated to 179 states. Annually the Russian Government grants 15 000 'state-funded spots' for foreign students at Russian universities.

<sup>8</sup> "National project "Education"." Retrieved 10 Nov 2020, from <https://edu.gov.ru/national-project/>.

<sup>9</sup> Income of the JINR budget is formed from contributions of the Member States. In 2016, Russia's dedicated contribution for the years 2016–2018 was 4.7 billion rubles or around €60 million. JINR (2017).

Since the early 1990s and increasingly since the beginning of the 21st century, the internationalization of the Russian higher education system has been regarded as an important engine for the modernization and restructuring of the system. In 2012, President Putin declared: “We should multiply our presence in the educational and cultural landscape of the world, especially in countries where part of the population speaks or understands Russian” (Sergunin & Karabeshkin, 2015, p. 356). In this spirit, the Russian government aims to massively increase the competitiveness of Russian universities and place them in international rankings. As a way to promote this, Rossotrudnichestvo manages the “www.russia.study” website, which awards up to 15,000 scholarships annually to foreign students at 400 Russian universities. Another example is the Russian Excellence Project 5-100, which was launched in 2013 with the goal of placing 5 Russian universities in the global 100 rankings.<sup>10</sup> This plan has been far from successful, however. Despite 60 billion roubles (approximately €650 million) being spent across 21 institutions, few Russian universities have prominent international profiles, with none placing in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2020 (THE, 2020).

In addition to attempts to internationalize its own universities, Russian institutions of higher education also conduct activities abroad. In 2018/2019, 43 Russian universities provided educational services abroad in a total of 25 countries. These activities are heavily concentrated in CIS countries, with 89.6% of foreign nations hailing from these countries (Arefiev, 2019).

With over 334,489 international students in 2017/18, Russia was one of the most sought-after destination countries for higher education in the world (UNESCO, 2020). Many Russian universities, such as the Lomonosov University in Moscow or Saint Petersburg State University, are particularly popular with students from post-Soviet countries. The most common countries of origin are Kazakhstan, Belarus and Turkmenistan.

### 3.5. Foreign media

**Table 9: Statistics on Russian foreign media**

	2019	2015
<b>TV: RT</b>		
Number of countries broadcasted to	over 100	-
Number of languages	4 (6 online)	-
Number of channels	8	-
Audience / weekly (million)	100 <sup>11</sup>	-

<sup>10</sup> A total of 21 universities are part of the 5-100 project, including the Far Eastern Federal University, the National Research University - Higher School of Economics and Saint-Petersburg Electrotechnical University.

<sup>11</sup> A total weekly audience of 100 million viewers in 47 of the 100+ countries where RT broadcasts are available, according to a 2018 IPSOS survey. RT content is available to 700 million viewers worldwide, RT (2020).

	2019	2015
Digital audience (million)	Over 10 billion views on all YouTube accounts RT.com: over 175 million <sup>12</sup>	-
Government financial support (€ million)	305.1 <sup>13</sup>	309,8
<b>Radio</b>		
<b>Radio Sputnik</b>		
Number of countries broadcasted to	18	over 20
Number of languages	15 (Internet broadcasting: 2)	-
Audience	185 <sup>14</sup>	-
<b>Sputnik News<sup>15</sup></b>		
Number of countries broadcasted to	34	-
Number of languages	31	-
Audience	more than 66 million visits per month	-
<b>Total</b>		
Government financial support (€ million)	456 <sup>16</sup> Rossiya Segodnya: 107 <sup>17</sup>	417.4 <sup>(2018)</sup> Rossiya Segodnya: 90

While the Russian President sets the guidelines for external communications, the Ministry of Telecommunications and Mass Media is responsible for the individual instruments. Both the Russian foreign broadcaster RT and the state news agency Rossiya Segodnya fall within its remit. The Ministry is also responsible for controlling the Internet and the press. Inserts in foreign newspapers and the use of new media are also subordinated to the Ministry (Ministry of Telecom and Mass Communications, 2016).

One of the best-known foreign media is the RT television channel, which is often described as the most important element of Russia's soft power strategy. The station was founded in 2005 as Russia Today and reorganized in 2009 as RT. It broadcasts 24-hour news channels in English, Spanish and Arabic, RT America from Washington, RT UK from London and two

<sup>12</sup> The monthly traffic of the RT.com group sites according to SimilarWeb for August 2020, RT (2020).

<sup>13</sup> 2019 federal subsidies to "ANO TV-Novosti", the legal entity behind RT, Roskazna (2020).

<sup>14</sup> Radio Sputnik estimated reach, FAPMC (2020).

<sup>15</sup> Sputnik shares content via a newswire service, website and radio.

<sup>16</sup> Total 2019 federal budget allocations to item "Russia's Participation in International Information Exchange", Roskazna (2020).

<sup>17</sup> Rossiya Segodnya is a news agency owned and operated by the Russian government. It established Sputnik News in 2014.

documentary channels in Russian and English. Online platforms are also offered in English, Russian, French and German. According to its own figures, the station reaches over 100 million viewers, up from 70 million in 2016 (RT, 2018). RT calls itself the “the top non-Anglo-Saxon TV news network in terms of traffic”, with over 150 million visits per month in August 2020 (RT, 2020). Between 2005 and 2013, the channel’s budget increased tenfold from €22 million to over €220 million (Smits, 2014, p. 9). In 2019 federal subsidies to “ANO TV-Novosti”, the legal entity behind RT, amounted to €305.1 million (Roskazna, 2020). A key objective is to counter the narratives of Western media and undermine confidence in the American and European political systems. Despite this aim, television channels such as CNN or the BBC are regarded as role models: RT’s music, moderators and informational videos are very similar to their Western counterparts.

Sputnik News was founded in 2014 as an online news agency and radio station by Rossiya Segodnya. According to its own figures, 130 editorial offices in 34 countries produce 800 broadcasting hours per day, in 32 languages. The editorial offices in Washington, Cairo, Beijing and Montevideo operate 24-hour news programming. Sputnik News is financed by the Kremlin with approximately €100 million annually (Godzimirsk and Østevik, 2018). The Kremlin’s influence on the news page has been repeatedly criticized abroad. In March 2016, for example, the Latvian Sputnik website was banned by the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on charges of propaganda (DRWN, 2016).

Russia Beyond the Headlines, founded by the Russian government in 1990, publishes newspaper supplements in international newspapers. The aim of this medium is to “contribute to a better understanding of Russia in the world” (Russia Beyond the Headlines, 2020). The content appears once a month, for example in The Daily Telegraph in Great Britain, the Global Times in China and Le Figaro in France. It is active in a total of 22 countries (Missiroli et al., 2016).

**Table 10: Statistics on Russian new media**

	2019	2015
Social networks following	RUPTLY: over 32 million YouTube views <sup>(2020)</sup>  RT: over 10 billion views on YouTube <sup>(2020)</sup>	-
Audience / unique visitors monthly (million)	RT: 150 Russkiy Mir.ru: 1,5 <sup>18</sup> Rossotrudnichestvo: 890,000 <sup>19</sup>	Russkiy Mir.ru: 1,2 RBTH: 3.5 <sup>(2017)</sup>

Further, Russia has been an innovator in the use of social media in foreign affairs. The use of “trolls” abroad is viewed as particularly influential and threatening from a Western perspective. According to reports, up to 400 Russians work in the Internet Research Agency (IRA), a so-called “troll factory” in St. Petersburg (Chen, 2015). The IRA achieved worldwide notoriety for its efforts to affect the 2016 US Presidential election in favor of Donald Trump and

<sup>18</sup> The total number of unique visitors to the portal Russkiy Mir in year 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Total number of website users and accounts in social networks of the central office and representative offices.

was widely discussed in the so-called ‘Mueller Report’ detailing Russian attempts to sway the vote (Mueller, 2019).

Like other countries, its foreign broadcasters use social media and the Internet extensively. RT.com had over 123 million visits in September 2020, with 16 million YouTube subscribers and 3 million Twitter followers. Russkiy Mir has over 1.5 million monthly visitors, while Rosotrudnichestvo has just under a million. RUPTLY, a subsidiary of RT that produces video content, has over 32 million YouTube views. As a whole, it is clear that Russia has aptly used new technologies to make up for other lagging ECP capacities, even finding inventive ways to leverage the internet to pursue broader foreign policy goals.

## 4. Challenges and future outlook

By using external cultural policy, Russia seeks to expand its sphere of influence through language and cultural programs and an active media strategy. This strategy is particularly pronounced in its neighborhood, where it attempts to counter pre-existing narratives and undermine the stability of democratic societies through targeted political persuasion, often deepening social divisions (Tafuro, 2014, p. 6). The target groups are therefore clearly defined: Instead of convincing critical population groups, the Kremlin focuses on mobilizing people who already share Russia’s interests through their origin or political convictions.

Russia propagates a political model that deliberately contradicts Western liberal-democratic values. For example, a 2013 Russian law punishes content viewed as endorsing homosexuality (labelled “gay propaganda” by the government), a move that has been widely criticized by both activists in Russia and abroad (Human Rights Watch, 2018). When the European Court of Human Rights classified the law as homophobic in the summer of 2017 (Hans, 2017), the Russian government referred to child protection and Christian Orthodox values. The concept of “compatriots” is also used specifically to justify power projection. Russia’s efforts to define Russian-speaking people in post-Soviet states as “Russian minorities” are seen in these countries as a threat to national sovereignty. For example, the Baltic governments accuse the Kremlin of building Russia-friendly networks to influence their political systems (Sergunin & Karabeshkin, 2015, p. 357).

The future of Russian external cultural policy therefore looks very different depending on where you stand. Although anti-Russian sentiment and narratives are becoming more pronounced and widespread in the West, pro-Russian attitudes are common in the country’s “near abroad.” While Russia has to contend with a faltering economy, an ageing population, and some hostile neighbors, it still has immense sway in surrounding areas (Foy, 2020). Russia is therefore likely to continue to extend its cultural influence in CIS states especially, even as Western powers grow warier of it and resist its ECP efforts in their own countries.

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