

Russia's Public Diplomacy in Central Asia and the Caucasus: The Role of the Universities

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Abstract

The article discusses outreach practices of Russian universities in former Soviet republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus as a part of Russia's public diplomacy effort. Perceiving the competitive environment of international education in the Commonwealth of Independent States in terms of geopolitical rivalry, the Russian government encourages state-owned universities to recruit more students and establish partnerships in this strategic region. As a result, focusing on Central Asia and the Caucasus for international student recruitment, Russian higher educational institutions not only pursue higher reputation and tuition revenues, but also perform as public diplomacy actors, supplementing and sometimes substituting the activities of official institutions.

Keywords

public diplomacy; higher education; international education; Russia; Central Asia; Caucasus

Introduction

Many scholars associate the rise of Russian public diplomacy in the 2000s with emergence of new media and engagement of the world's leading public relations agencies into the promotion of a positive image of Russia and its leaders. The most common examples of Russia's 'charm offensive' are the establishment of the RT (previously Russia Today) TV channel (2005), contracts with Ketchum, Inc., or President Dmitry Medvedev's blogging initiatives. However, the 're-branding Russia' campaign has shown mixed results, and the absence of both institutionalization and long-term strategic vision made Russia's new public diplomacy expensive and essentially ineffective.¹ Such a performance made Russia redesign its public diplomacy apparatus in 2000-2011, when the government established *Russkiy Mir* Foundation (2007), state agency *Rossotrudnichestvo* (Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation, under the jurisdiction of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, est. 2008), Gorchakov Foundation for Public Diplomacy (2010), and Russian International Affairs Council (2011). All these

* Research for this article was supported by the Russian International Affairs Council within the 'Global Science' academic writing project.

¹ K. Avgerinos. 'Russia's Public Diplomacy Effort: What the Kremlin is Doing and Why it's Not Working'. *Journal of Public and International Affairs* Vol. 20 (Spring 2009), pp. 115-132; A. Dolinsky. 'Prakticheskie voprosy optimizatsii rossiyskoy publichnoy diplomatii'. *Fond Edinstvo vo Imya Rossii*, 2009, available online at <http://www.fondedin.ru/dok/dolinskiy.pdf>; Y. Osipova. 'Selective Processing: A Strategic Challenge for Public Diplomacy An Alternative Approach to Russian Public Diplomacy in the United States'. *gnovis*, Georgetown University's peer-reviewed journal of Communication, Culture and Technology (CCT), Vol. XII Issue II (Spring 2012), available online at <http://gnovisjournal.org/2012/04/26/selective-processing-a-strategic-challenge-for-public-diplomacy-an-alternative-approach-to-russian-public-diplomacy-in-the-united-states/>; G. Simons. 'Attempting to Re-brand the Branded: Russia's International Image in the 21st Century'. *Russian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 4, Nos. 3/4 (Summer/Fall 2011), pp. 322-350.

institutions provide networks of Russia's information and cultural influence abroad, reproducing the best practices from the Soviet past and adapting to modern international experience.

Russia's public diplomacy now contains the three dimensions as proposed by Nye.² First, it mobilizes media for daily communication with foreign public, often operating with classical propaganda technologies. Second, it launches ambitious (albeit sporadic) strategic nation-branding projects (e.g. the Sochi Winter Olympics of 2014 and the FIFA 2018 World Cup). But the 'third dimension' of Russia's public diplomacy often remains in the shadow of the first two. Like other prominent public diplomacy actors in the world, Russia promotes systematic long-term networking and engagement of foreign publics, with primary focus on higher education for international students, now primarily from the CIS countries. Along with media, Russian language studies and scholarship programmes play an important role in Russia's soft power strategy in the post-Soviet region.

While Russia's public diplomacy aimed at the Baltic states, or Ukraine mostly relies on manipulative methods rooted in the Cold War era³, the use of these technologies is not so prominent in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Instead, working with its CIS partners, the Kremlin uses a wider range of much 'softer' tools like educational exchanges and scholarship programmes: a fact that many observers tend to omit.

The Russian Federation cannot lead its public diplomacy campaigns in Central Asia and the Caucasus in the same aggressive style as it does in the West, or the European 'near abroad' such as Ukraine. Fearing the accusations of imperialistic behavior from its Eurasian allies, and dealing with populations that still share close cultural values and political habits, Russia is maintaining its political influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus by placing public diplomacy, including education exchanges and scholarship programmes, in the context of development assistance and economic integration. The countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, especially in Central Asia, now represent the biggest and closest transboundary market for Russian universities, due to geographic proximity, economic interdependence and the persistent presence of the Russian language as a medium of communication.³ Besides, the Russian government perceives the competitive environment of international education in the post-Soviet countries in terms of geopolitical rivalry and securitization, and therefore encourages state-owned universities to recruit students and establish partnerships in this strategic region to oppose competitors like the US, EU member states, China, or Turkey.

This contribution focuses on why and how Russian universities are becoming involved in governmental public diplomacy in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus. The universities in Russia need to enroll more students from abroad to increase revenue, and raise their public status by diversification of their campuses. The discussion here refers primarily to state – i.e. public – institutions, as the level of involvement of private higher education institutions (HEIs) in public diplomacy is low. The vast majority, or 95,8 % of all international students in Russia in full-time degree and Diploma programmes study at state universities. Almost all recipients of the governmental scholarships (the key public diplomacy tool in this respect) are also enrolled in state HEIs.⁴ Promotion of higher education programmes with Russian as the primary language of instruction, and international student recruitment in the former Soviet Union is the area where the interests of the Russian government and those of the

² J. Nye. 'Public Diplomacy and Soft Power'. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 616 (March 2008), pp. 94-108.

³ S. Peyrouse. *The Russian Minority in Central Asia: Migration, Politics, and Language*. Kennan Institute. Occasional Paper # 297, 2008, p.15-16. For official data of the Russian language speakers outside Russia see: 'Russkiy yazyk v mire'. Doklad ministerstva inostrannykh del Rossiyskoi Federatsii; Moscow, 2003, available online at http://archive.mid.ru/Brp_4.nsf/arh/B6BE784B3E2ABD1343256DF8003AC21C

⁴ A. Arefyev and A. Sheregui. Education of Foreign Citizens in the Higher Educational institutions of the Russian Federation: Statistical collection. Issue 11. Moscow: Ministry of Education and Sciences of the Russian Federation. 2014, pp. 10-11

HEIs overlap. The practitioners' perspective, presented in this article, provides a more complete picture of the Russia's public diplomacy practices in the CIS.

The research is mostly based on the in-depth analysis of Russian and international statistics on international student flows to the Russian HEIs from countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus, namely the data collected by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation in 2008-2014 (Table 1) and country reports on global flow of tertiary level students by UNESCO Institute of Statistics (Table 2).⁵

Table 1. Number of international students* from the Commonwealth of Independent States and other countries of origin in the Russian universities.

Country or region of students' origin, CIS	Academic year 2008/2009	Academic year 2009/2010	Academic year 2010/2011	Academic year 2011/2012	Academic year 2012/2013	Academic year 2013/2014
Abkhazia	568	677	811	848	924	995
Armenia	1870	1890	1964	2257	2058	2639
Azerbaijan	2807	3295	4166	4353	4934	5479
Belarus	3541	3838	4229	4387	4361	4695
Georgia	1169	932	903	894	936	977
Kazakhstan	13720	14303	16616	18862	23656	27524
Kyrgyzstan	1388	1510	2050	2536	2627	3591
Moldova (incl. Transnistria)	1530	1742	2543	2851	2668	3398
South Ossetia	168	346	466	460	569	620
Tajikistan	2226	2640	3556	4804	5660	6561
Turkmenistan	2315	3768	5297	7967	10954	12114
Ukraine	4231	4059	4919	4644	4737	6029
Uzbekistan	3710	3277	3466	4455	5605	6288
Total CIS	39243	42277	50986	59318	69689	80910
Other world						
Baltic states	1216	1397	1522	1558	1558	1933
Eastern Europe	3249	2264	2182	2148	2259	2805
Northern Europe	825	906	1000	669	771	1117
Western Europe	4742	4761	4765	4764	5078	5398
Asia - Pacific	41313	38565	39178	37306	39162	41722
Middle East and North Africa	7233	6810	7266	7609	8288	8876
Africa (Sub-Saharan)	7047	7511	7856	8092	8379	9319
Latin America	1732	1550	1685	1957	2135	2337
North America and Oceania	1965	2043	2290	2117	2259	1794
Total other world	69322	65807	67744	66220	69889	75301
Total number of international students in Russia	108565	108084	118730	125538	139578	156211

*Data includes full-time students only

Source: A. Arefyev and A. Sheregui. *Education of Foreign Citizens in the Higher Educational institutions of the Russian Federation: Statistical collection*. Moscow: Ministry of Education and Sciences of the Russian Federation. Vol. 8-12 (2011-2015).

Table 2. Top 10 study abroad destinations for students from Central Asia and the Caucasus (2012).

#	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan
1.	Russia (3,602)	Russia (10,530)	Kazakhstan (6,639)	Russia (35,106)	Russia (3,215)	Russia (6,458)	Ukraine (14,053)	Russia (10,211)
2.	France	Ukraine	Canada	Kyrgyzstan	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Russia	Kazakhstan

⁵ The numbers in the UNESCO database can significantly surpass the indicators in the Russian documents, due to the fact that the Russian universities report only on full-time students, and do not include ones on distant learning or part-time mode.

	(824)	(7,599)	(2,655)	(4,357)	(963)	(885)	(10,128)	(5,588)
3.	Ukraine (604)	Turkey (6,989)	Germany (1,852)	USA (1,884)	Germany (494)	Kazakhstan (476)	Belarus (8,153)	Ukraine (2,072)
4.	Germany (418)	Georgia (860)	Ukraine (1,517)	UK (1,725)	Saudi Arabia (361)	Ukraine (422)	Turkey (5,887)	Kyrgyzstan (1,219)
5.	USA (330)	UK (638)	Armenia (1,256)	Czech Rep. (1,174)	USA (250)	Saudi Arabia (385)	Kazakhstan (1,090)	Germany (789)
6.	Greece (214)	Germany (580)	Russia (1,143)	Malaysia (1,089)	Tajikistan (162)	Turkey (364)	Kyrgyzstan (369)	USA (426)
7.	UK (145)	US (371)	Australia (580)	Germany (695)	Egypt (109)	USA (299)	Azerbaijan (177)	South Korea (411)
8.	Italy (119)	Belarus (293)	USA (436)	Poland (401)	France (89)	Egypt (215)	USA (170)	Malaysia (379)
10.	Spain (95)	France (216)	France (304)	UAE (377)	Czech Rep. (87)	Belarus (145)	Tajikistan (160)	Turkey (251)

Source: ‘Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students’. UNESCO Institute for Statistics, available online at <http://www.uis.unesco.org/education/pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx>

Addressing political texts, including legislation on the Russian compatriots, speeches and claims by the Russian leaders and members of the government, as well as interviews and articles by *Rossotrudnichestvo* officials, along with conceptual documents on foreign policy and national security, becomes a must to illustrate the growing interdependence between higher education, which is generally thought in terms of domestic affairs, and foreign policy. This is especially the case with the most recent version of the “Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation” (2015), which labels higher education export and support of the Russian language use and studies in the CIS as national security priorities until 2020.⁶

The research is also supplemented by in-person interviews conducted among Russian international education administrators from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Arkhangelsk, Barnaul, Kazan, Krasnoyarsk, Novosibirsk, Pskov, Tomsk, Tyumen, Vladivostok, and Yoshkar-Ola during practical interaction from 2012 to 2015, including the author’s working visits to international education fairs and university presentations in Almaty, Astana, Baku, Tashkent, and Yerevan. Discussions and interviews with the staff of the Russian Centers for Science and Culture and representatives of associations of Russian compatriots in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan also gave a lot of valuable information to estimate the scale and efficiency of the Russian public diplomacy by receiving a feedback from both practicing diplomats and target groups. Some important information on perception of Russian public diplomacy by foreign audience came from academic colleagues from Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and the German-Kazakh University in Almaty, Nazarbaev University in Astana, Qafqaz University in Baku, and Armenian State University in Yerevan. Finally, interviews with students coming from republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus (with exception of Georgia) now studying at Kazan Federal University, Mari State University and Volga State University of Technology in Yoshkar-Ola were very useful, too.

⁶ *Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii ot 31 dekabrya 2015 goda № 683 “O strategii natsionalnoi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii”*. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. 31 December 2015, available online at <http://www.rg.ru/2015/12/31/nac-bezopasnost-site-dok.html>. See also: *Seminar-soveshanie nauchnoi obschestvennosti po problemam nauchno-tekhnicheskogo i obrazovatel'nogo sotrudnichestva*. People’s Friendship University of Russia (RUDN): Moscow, 1-3 December 2015, available online at <http://conf.rudn.ru/vice-rector-2015/tezis>

The geographic scope of this article includes the republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia (the latter including Abkhazia and South Ossetia, recognized as independent states by Russia in 2008) in the South Caucasus; Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in Central Asia.

Juxtaposing Public Diplomacy and International Education

For the purposes of this article, international education is defined as “the informal, nonformal, and formal educational relationships among peoples of various nation-states”, without focusing on global issues transcending national boundaries, otherwise necessary for a more complete definition.⁷ International students constitute foreign nationals who left their country of origin and moved to another country for the purpose of study. This definition is borrowed from the glossary adopted by the OECD, which also defines international students as students who are not permanent or usual residents of their country of study or alternatively as students who obtained their prior education in a different country.⁸

International educational exchanges play a crucial role in public diplomacy. As academic discipline, international education reviews exchanges as worthy goals in and of themselves, beyond politics and ideologies; however, educational and cultural endeavors are integral part of public diplomacy, and also components of propaganda.⁹

The effectiveness of international education as a tool of public diplomacy is difficult to measure. Educational exchanges will be effective only when they function in coordination with foreign policies that promote international cooperation. Because of the ‘human factor’ exchanges are particularly vulnerable in an antagonistic political context. Yet in the right circumstances they can achieve significant changes in attitude.¹⁰ Inclusion of educational exchanges into public diplomacy guidelines (for the United States, by 1961 Fulbright-Hays Act and 1979 Foreign Relations Authorization Act) marked the government interest for international education as a foreign policy tool, or “long-range educational and cultural policies”.¹¹

The correlation between international education, public diplomacy, and (especially) propaganda is trickier. For the US, the confusion around international education seen as propaganda may historically stem from close contacts between diplomats from the State Department and USIA. Some cultural programmes were transferred from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs to USIA (commonly seen as a propaganda unit), and in 1978 the Bureau merged with USIA. However, in Fulbright-funded and other US cultural exchange programmes “close linkages with information or “propaganda” aims of USIA were to be avoided”.¹² The ‘uncomfortable question’ of connection between international education and propaganda is still shadowing the discussion on international education policies, and Russia’s contemporary efforts in particular.

Discussing Russia’s public diplomacy is a challenging task. First, defining the terminology is an issue. So far, there is no consensus on the term ‘public diplomacy’ within Russian domestic community of international relations theorists and practitioners. While there

⁷ G. Gutek. *American Education in a Global Society: Internationalizing Teacher Education* (White Plains, N.Y., Longman, 1993), p. 33.

⁸ *Education at a Glance 2012: OECD Indicators*, p. 371.

⁹ B. Lindsay. ‘Integrating International Education and Public Diplomacy: Creative Partnership or Ingenious Propaganda?’ *Comparative Education Review*, 33 (November 1989), pp. 423-36, p. 427.

¹⁰ G. Scott-Smith. ‘Exchange Programs and Public Diplomacy’. In *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, Snow, N. and Taylor, P. (eds) (New York and London: Routledge Publishers, 2009), p. 55.

¹¹ B. Lindsay. ‘Integrating International Education and Public Diplomacy’, p. 432.

¹² B. Lindsay. ‘Integrating International Education and Public Diplomacy’, p. 429.

are some conventional interpretations that give credentials to the US origins of 'public diplomacy' cliché, quite commonly, Russian literature intentionally refers to *narodnaya diplomatiya* or *obschestvennaya diplomatiya* instead of *publichnaya diplomatiya* (transfer from English 'public diplomacy') in attempt to avoid foreign loanwords¹³. However, the trick does not work, because Russian substitutes linguistically frame 'public' either as non-governmental organizations, or societies and communities, thus limiting applications of public diplomacy to areas like people-to-people, or NGO diplomacy, or paradiplomacy¹⁴. Furthermore, the concept of *gumanitarnoe sotrudnichestvo* ('humanitarian cooperation') often appears in the literature and official documents, referring to activities that involve developing cultural ties, creating cross-civilizational dialogue, civil society support and assistance to compatriots living abroad.¹⁵

The other major relevant concept in this discussion is soft power, which has become widespread in Russian literature. However, many Russian authors perceive Nye's concept with excessive suspiciousness¹⁶. The predominantly Realist paradigm of Russian domestic discourse places both soft power and public diplomacy in the context of geopolitical rivalry, with the West, and the US in particular. Therefore, direct references to Nye's works sometimes find their way into President Vladimir Putin's speeches:

The notion of 'soft power' is being used increasingly often. This implies a matrix of tools and methods to reach foreign policy goals without the use of arms but by exerting information and other levers of influence. Regrettably, these methods are being used all too frequently to develop and provoke extremist, separatist and nationalistic attitudes, to manipulate the public and to conduct direct interference in the domestic policy of sovereign countries. There must be a

¹³ Trenin D. *Mir bezuslovny: Evro-Atlantica XXI veka kak soobshchestvo bezopasnosti* (Unconditional Peace: The 21st Century Euro-Atlantic as a Security Community (Moscow: Moscow Carnegie Center – ROSSPEN, 2013), p. 240, available online at http://carnegieendowment.org/files/Trenin_Book_euro2013.pdf. See also: *Obschestvennaya diplomatiya: problemy i puti ikh resheniya*. Council of the Federation: Parliamentary hearings. 25 May 2010, available online at <http://council.gov.ru/media/files/41d4536b6213918eb9ee.doc>

¹⁴ Y. Osipova. 'New Russian Public Diplomacy: Conceptualization, Practice and Limitations'. Presented at the 2012 ISA Annual Convention, San Diego, California, USA (April 1-4, 2012), available online at <http://files.isanet.org/ConferenceArchive/d8f26c6d8298478ea6920dfaf0f3aed2.pdf>; S. Saari. 'Russia's Post-Orange revolution Strategies', p. 54; Simons, G. (2011). 'Attempting to Re-brand the Branded: Russia's International Image in the 21st Century'. *Russian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 4, Nos. 3/4 (Summer/Fall): 322-350; T. Zonova. 'Humanitarian Cooperation between Russia and the European Union as a Soft Power Instrument'. Russian International Affairs Council, 4 June 2013, available online at http://russiancouncil.ru/en/inner/?id_4=1916#top-content

¹⁵ T. Zonova. 'Public diplomacy and its actors'. Russian International Affairs Council, 28 August 2012, available online at http://russiancouncil.ru/en/inner/?id_4=718#top-content See also: Y. Osipova. "Russification of „Soft Power: Transformation of a Concept. *Exchange Journal of Public Diplomacy*. Vol. 5: Fall 2014, pp. 55-76, P. 66-67, available online at https://www.academia.edu/9638758/Russification_of_Soft_Power_Transformation_of_a_Concept Y. Osipova. 'New Russian Public Diplomacy: Conceptualization, Practice and Limitations'. Presented at the 2012 ISA Annual Convention, San Diego, California, USA (April 1-4, 2012), available online at <http://files.isanet.org/ConferenceArchive/d8f26c6d8298478ea6920dfaf0f3aed2.pdf>; S. Saari. 'Russia's Post-Orange revolution Strategies', p. 54; Simons, G. (2011). 'Attempting to Re-brand the Branded: Russia's International Image in the 21st Century'. *Russian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 4, Nos. 3/4 (Summer/Fall): 322-350; T. Zonova. 'Humanitarian Cooperation between Russia and the European Union as a Soft Power Instrument'. Russian International Affairs Council, 4 June 2013, available online at http://russiancouncil.ru/en/inner/?id_4=1916#top-content

¹⁶ A. Naumov. 'Myagkaya sila' i 'umnaya sila'. *Strategiya Rossii*, №1 (145), January 2016, pp. 57-64, available online at <http://sr.fondedin.ru/Publik.pdf> See also: O. Karpovich, O. Manoilo, A. Naumov. 'Protivodeistvie tekhnologiyam tsvetnykh revolyutsiy v molodezhnoy srede'. Moscow 2015, available online at http://www.candidate.pg.er.ru/sites/default/files/download/protivodeystvie_tehnologiyam_cvetnyh_revolyciy_v_molodezhnoy_srede_0.pdf

clear division between freedom of speech and normal political activity, on the one hand, and illegal instruments of 'soft power', on the other.¹⁷

Another distinctive feature of the Russian texts is that there are no prejudices against mixing public diplomacy, soft power, and propaganda. Quite often these three terms are used as synonymous in the same context, especially in political speeches.¹⁸ This circumstance may puzzle Western readers and give grounds for general assessments of the new Russia's public diplomacy as revitalization of Soviet propaganda. Such assumptions are partially true, as historically the term 'propaganda' in Russian did not carry strictly negative connotation, and referred to any means and tools of public communication and persuasion, not necessarily manipulative or deliberately deceitful. The derivative verb *propagandirovat'* (to propagandize) is also very characteristic for the Russian texts on public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and soft power, meaning 'to promote' or 'to advocate for'. Linguistic and cultural aspects of terminology are important, as they reflect the society's attitudes on the public diplomacy phenomenon, and eventually have an impact on international education practices.

International Education in Global Political Context: The Russian Prospective

The Cold War race for international students might be the best illustration of complementarities between international education and public diplomacy. Both East and West considered higher education as a key tool for finding allies and combating rival ideologies. Soon after World War II, US cultural relations programmes including educational exchanges began to be organized and designed in accordance with the national security interest.¹⁹

The US public diplomacy flexibly combined short-term exchanges for current and prospective foreign leaders such as International Visitor Leadership Program and Eisenhower Fellowships, and scholarship opportunities for full-length degree studies for international students (e.g. Fulbright Program), and was quite persistent and successful over the years. Soviet Union practiced the approach similar to the one of the USA, attracting thousands of students from socialist-oriented developing countries under the slogans of communism and anti-imperialist solidarity. Even overloaded with Marxist propaganda, the Soviet model of international student recruitment was able to compete with the West, making the USSR the third most popular study destination in the world by the end of the 1980s (after the United States and France).²⁰

The end of the Cold War and the fall of communism in the late 1980s marked the new turn in the global race for international students. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in

¹⁷ Vladimir Putin. 'Russia and the Changing World'. *Valdai Club* (February 27, 2012), available online at <http://valdaiclub.com/politics/39300.html>

¹⁸ For a prominent example see: Transcript of Remarks by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the Opening of the International Public Forum 'The Role of People's Diplomacy in the Development of International Humanitarian Cooperation', Moscow, 16 December 2010, available online at http://www.mid.ru/press_service/minister_speeches/-/asset_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/224806?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_7OvQR5KJWVmR&_101_INSTANCE_7OvQR5KJWVmR_languageId=en_GB. At the official level, the term '*obschestvennaya diplomatiya*' was (and still is) in wide use, for example: '*Obschestvennaya diplomatiya: problemy i puti ikh resheniya*'. Council of the Federation: Parliamentary hearings. 25 May 2010, available online at <http://council.gov.ru/media/files/41d4536b6213918eb9ee.doc>

¹⁹ Bo Liping. 'Educational Exchange and Cultural Diplomacy in the Cold War'. *Journal of American Studies*. 1999. No. 33, pp. 393-415, p. 393.

²⁰ N. Tsvetkova. 'International Education during the Cold War: Soviet Social Transformation and American Social Reproduction'. *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 52, no. 2 (May 2008), pp. 199-217, p. 213-214. See also: R. King, A. Findlay and J. Ahrens. *International student mobility literature review*. Report to HEFCE, and co-funded by the British Council, UK National Agency for Erasmus, 2010, p.10.

1991, non-communist Russia abandoned its ambitions for global educational leadership. Russia ceased large scale assistance programmes in developing countries and pro-communist parties and movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America that the USSR had led for decades. Drastic domestic social and economic changes in the 1990s had a negative impact on Russia's international image. If in 1990 the total number of foreign students in Soviet universities reached its peak of 126,500, most of them studying in the RSFSR (Russia).²¹ Just in a year, this number dropped to 89,400, and then, by 1996, even lower to 59,600.²²

It took Russia several years to recover from transitional shock of market economy reforms and political instability. The stream of incoming international students started to grow slowly from the mid-1990s, allowing Russia to return to the top ten countries leading in international education. So, in the years 2009-2010 Russia was ranked seventh among the world's top international education destinations, behind the USA, UK, Germany, France, Australia and Canada, and slightly ahead of Japan.²³ The United States still leads the pack, with 974,926 international students enrolled at US institutions of higher education in the academic year 2014/2015, leaving competitors far behind.²⁴

The geopolitical changes in the last two decades had a serious impact on the structure of international student body on Russian campuses. Students from the former Soviet republics in Russia instantly became foreign nationals. Neither these students, nor the international services at Russian universities were ready for such radical changes. By inertia, Russian universities did not practice outreach recruiting in the former Soviet republics for many years. The advantages of going to Russia to study in the 1990s were doubtful; the Russian universities did not need advertise their programmes to former Soviet citizens, because the educational systems were quite the same. The new state borders brought new political, economic and legal obstacles for the academic mobility in traditional, previously domestic routes within the Soviet Union (e.g. between South-West Russia and the Ukraine, the Urals and Kazakhstan, etc). The only group of 'international' students that showed increased presence in Russian universities in the 1990s were ethnic Russian migrants (actually, people of various ethnicities but mainly Russian speakers) from the former Soviet republics. Of more than eight million ethnic Russian migrants from the former USSR between 1990 and 2003, half came from the five Central Asian republics – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – which were home to more than one third of this Russian 'diaspora'.²⁵ The constitutional right to free higher education – on a competitive basis – was (and still is) a strong incentive for migrants from the former Soviet republics to obtain citizenship through naturalization in the Russian Federation. As a rule, ethnic Russian migrant students sooner or later achieved Russian citizenship this way, thus losing their status of 'foreigners' (and distorting data on international student enrollment).

Ethnic Russian students from the new independent states were generally regarded as 'Russian compatriots' (or *sootchestvenniki*), although, in Russia's case, a compatriot is "any citizen of the former Soviet Union, even if he or she, or their forebears never lived in the RSFSR (now the Russian Federation)", a meaningful note in the Federal Law of 1999 on compatriots abroad.²⁶ Article 17 of this Law described the measures to support compatriots in defence of their

²¹ Foreign students in Russia: 1950-1990. *Education in Russia* website, available online at <http://en.education.mon.gov.ru/articles/24/>

²² A. Arefyev. *Inostrannye studenty v rossiyskikh vuzakh. Doklad na Tretyem Vsemirnom Forume vypusnikov sovetskikh i rossiyskikh vuzov* (Moskva, noyabr 2012 goda), available online at http://img.russia.edu.ru/Arefyev_A/ForumAlumni2012.pdf, p. 1.

²³ *Education at a Glance 2012*, p. 364.

²⁴ *Open Doors 2015 'Fast Facts'*. New York: Institute of International Education, 2015, available online at <http://www.iie.org/~media/Files/Corporate/Open-Doors/Fast-Facts/Fast-Facts-2015.pdf?la=en>

²⁵ S. Peyrouse. *The Russian Minority in Central Asia*, p. 1.

²⁶ A. Zhuravsky and O. Vyhovanets. 'Compatriots: Back to the Homeland'. *Russian International Affairs Council*, 31 May 2013. Available at: http://russiancouncil.ru/en/inner/?id_4=1908#4, accessed 16 January 2015.

rights the field of culture, language, religion and education. Foreign nationals who could prove their status of compatriots might claim for equal rights of admissions with Russian citizens, including enrollment in tuition free programmes.

By the legislation on compatriots, the Russian Federation has undertaken obligations to negotiate recognition of educational documents, qualifications and academic degrees between CIS member states: a practice that started with signing agreements with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 1998. In 2004, eleven CIS countries (except Turkmenistan) concluded a detailed Agreement on mutual recognition of equivalence of educational documents on secondary (complete) general education, primary vocational education and secondary vocational (special) education.²⁷ By 2009, the system of agreements on recognition of educational documents (at least, on the level of high school graduation certificates) interconnected all CIS countries.

While more prominent universities in Moscow and St. Petersburg, as well as in some regional centers like Belgorod, Krasnodar, or Voronezh have long traditions of educating foreign nationals, sometimes dating back to the early 1950s, many smaller provincial HEIs started to enroll their first international students only in the 2000s, recruiting people of Central Asian or South Caucasian origin.²⁸ Furthermore, since the late 1990s, the share of CIS citizens as part of the total international student body in Russian universities has slowly but constantly grown, and constituted 51,9% in the academic year 2013/2014: twice bigger than 26,6 % from the Asia–Pacific region, the biggest international student ‘supplier’ in the world (over 2/3 of which came from China, Vietnam, and India).²⁹

Russia’s return to the regional geopolitics in Central Asia and the Caucasus in the mid-2000s implied not only competition for natural resources like oil and gas, or shaping new economic and military alliances, but also attempts to strengthen the positions of the Russian language and education there. Russia’s motivation in the post-Soviet politics was actually much deeper than economic integration or assistance development. As Yelena Osipova pinpoints, the desire to re-establish, reinforce and build upon already existing and deeply held historical ties with the former Soviet republics is inevitably interrelated with the primary focus of the Russian foreign policy on the CIS.³⁰ Moreover, President Putin in his Annual Address to the Federal Assembly in 2005 stated that Russia should continue its “civilizing mission” on the Eurasian continent.³¹

Later in 2010, President Dmitry Medvedev stressed that Russia can capitalize on the existing bond with the former Soviet republics and emphasis on further CIS integration to achieve its objectives in foreign policy, and public diplomacy in particular.³² By the late 2000s, as the post-Soviet space became the main priority area for the Kremlin’s foreign policy, most cultural and educational programmes were concentrated in this region.

²⁷ *Soglasenie o vzaimnom priznanii i ekvivalentnosti dokumentov o srednem (obschem) obrazovanii, nachalnom professionalnom i srednem professionalnom obrazovanii. Astana, 15 sentyabrya 2004 goda*, available online at <http://www.russianenic.ru/int/agreements/eq2.html>

²⁸ Author's personal interviews with international student recruiters from Barnaul, Pskov, Yoshkar-Ola.

²⁹ A. Arefyev and A. Sheregui. *Education of Foreign Citizens in the Higher Educational institutions of the Russian Federation: Statistical collection*. Issue 12, 2015. Moscow: Ministry of Education and Sciences of the Russian Federation, p. 27.

³⁰ Y. Osipova. ‘New Russian Public Diplomacy’, p. 16.

³¹ V. Putin. ‘Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation’. Kremlin, 25 April 2005, available online at http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2005/04/25/1223_type63372type63374type82634_87049.shtml

³² Y. Osipova. ‘New Russian Public Diplomacy’, p. 16; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2010). ‘Speech by Dmitry Medvedev, President of the Russian Federation, at the Meeting with Russian Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives to International Organisations’. Moscow, 12 July 2010. Official site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, available online at http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/FB6F773B31E6DF0EC3257760003F759

Inspired by the geopolitical thinking, the Kremlin perceived underrepresentation of Russia's higher education and the progressive decrease of the use of the Russian language in the former Soviet republics as a threat to Russia's national security interests. Russia's weakening cultural influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus was thus considered as a result of effective public diplomacy of some rival foreign nations, to which Russia had to respond. According to *Russkiy Mir* Foundation website, the US, European, Turkish or Chinese academic exchange programmes and educational establishments undermine Russia's traditional academic and cultural hegemony in the 'near abroad'.³³ With the course of time, securitization of the use of the Russian language in the CIS, along with the global reputation of the Russian higher education became obvious when they appeared in the "Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation" signed by the President Vladimir Putin on the eve of 2016. The document labels the necessity to increase "export of Russian high quality education", first of all, to the member states of the CIS, and to raise the attractiveness of the Russian language as a medium of training on global level, among national security priorities until 2020.³⁴

International Education Actors in Central Asia and the South Caucasus

Indeed, the 1990s were the time when many international education actors came to Central Asia and the Caucasus to explore the new market with total population of more than 82 million. Apart from transborder academic mobility between the countries of the region, some major international student flows go to Belarus, and, especially, Ukraine. These two countries, which occurred to be in a similar economic and demographic situation as Russia, started active marketing in Central Asia and the Caucasus offering affordable study programmes with Russian as a language of instruction, thus becoming most serious competitors to the Russian universities (see Table 2).³⁵

After the collapse of the Soviet Union Turkey expanded its educational programmes and Turkish language studies in the former USSR under the motto of 'brotherhood of Turkic nations' (Azeri, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and Uzbeks). Conversion from Cyrillic to Latin alphabet in post-Soviet Azerbaijan and many countries of Central Asia was one of the visible signs of independence and return to the pan-Turkic solidarity. Since 1991, with governmental or private funds, Turkey has founded a number of joint higher education institutions in the region, such as Qafqaz University in Baku, or the International Atatürk-Alatoo University in Bishkek.

The United States were also paying much attention to the development of educational exchanges within their public diplomacy for the newly-independent states. Apart from various US Department of State programmes (Fulbright, Freedom Support Act, IREX UGRAD, etc), numerous American Corners and *EducationUSA* advising centers started to provide guidance on admission to American universities and colleges in every country of Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Another issue that Russian HEIs faced in the region was the decreased popularity of the Russian language in Central Asia and the Caucasus, as well as the increased popularity of English. Knowledge of English opens possibilities for work in international businesses, NGOs with foreign ties, or for employment in the 'far abroad'; the jobs often offering significantly higher salaries than other available options. A good command of English is also needed for some

³³ M. Starchak. 'Rossiyskoe obrazovanie na russkom yazyke kak factor vliyaniya Rossii v Tsentralnoy Azii: chto proiskhodit i chto delat'. *Russkiy Mir* Foundation (16 February 2009), available online at <http://www.russkiymir.ru/russkiymir/ru/analytics/article/news0003.html>

³⁴ Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii ot 31 dekabrya 2015 goda № 683 "O strategii natsionalnoi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii". *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. 31 December 2015, available online at <http://www.rg.ru/2015/12/31/nac-bezopasnost-site-dok.html>

³⁵ In Belarus, Russian is one of the two official languages, and a dominant language of higher education. In Ukraine, Russian is the language of instruction "on choice" in higher education. See: "Why study in Ukraine?" Ukrainian International Education Council, available online at <http://uiec.org/en/education-in-ukraine/why-study-in-ukraine>

of the best educational opportunities inside Central Asia, such as the American University of Central Asia (Bishkek), the newly established Nazarbayev University (Astana), and the three campuses of the Aga Khan supported University of Central Asia (Khorog in Tajikistan, Naryn in Kyrgyzstan and Tekeli in Kazakhstan). In Kazakhstan, the government has set the goal for 20% of the country's population to have a mastery of English by 2020.³⁶

In Azerbaijan, many newly founded private universities follow the organizational model of Western, primarily US and European universities and colleges. These schools were pioneering English as the language of instruction, and designed Bachelor's, Master's and doctoral degree programmes in affiliation with American or British universities. For example, a private Western University in Baku partnered with Indiana University, University of Kansas, Mississippi Valley State University, University of North Alabama and Delta State University through USIA New Independent States College and University Partnership Program launched in 1998 (now defunct).³⁷ The establishment of the American University of Armenia in Yerevan in 1991 was supported by the Armenian diaspora in the West and the University of California. The US educational presence is now obvious in Bishkek based American University of Central Asia (AUCA), and International University of Kyrgyzstan (jointly with San Francisco State University), or in a private Kazakh-American university in Almaty. American influence was also strong in the post-Soviet Georgia, especially during the two subsequent presidential terms of Mikheil Saakashvili (himself an alumnus of Columbia Law School) between 2004 and 2013.

Other minor international education players in the Central Asia and the Caucasus are the United Kingdom (Kazakh-British Technical University in Almaty, Westminster International University in Tashkent), Germany with its network of DAAD country offices and some joint academic institutions (like German-Kazakh University in Almaty), France with the French University in Armenia in Yerevan, other EU member states. China sponsors the network of the Confucius Institute centers throughout the region.³⁸ Other East Asian actors are also active, including Malaysia as prospective study abroad destination for people from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, Singapore with the branch of the Management Development Institute or South Korean Inha University in Tashkent. Besides, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have quite a lot of their nationals studying in the Middle East: Saudi Arabia and Egypt (Table 2).

The emergence of these new international players in Central Asia and the Caucasus put an end to the monopoly of national educational systems, which retained quite a few elements from the old Soviet system, and was therefore tied with the Russian academic tradition. Hence, the Russian universities faced a challenge of a new diverse higher education landscape, where they had to compete not only with national universities of the new independent states, but also with academically stronger and richer schools from around the globe. The Russian language, despite significant reduction of use, remained a powerful marketing tool for the former USSR. Many national universities in Central Asia, for instance, still keep it as primary or second language of instruction, usually parallel to native-language student groups (or 'streams'). Though the Russian streams are generally a small minority in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, they are broadly viewed as superior. On the other hand, in Kazakhstan (as of 2005/2006), over 56% of all higher education students, including over 39% of ethnic Kazakhs among them, were in Russian streams.³⁹ Furthermore, throughout Central Asia, even students studying in their native-language

³⁶ W. Fierman. 'Russian in the Post-Soviet Central Asia: a Comparison with the States of the Baltic and South Caucasus'. *Europe-Asia Studies*. 2012, 64:6, pp. 1077-1100, pp. 1098-1099.

³⁷ NIS College and University Partnerships Program. United States Information Agency, Federal Register Volume 63, Number 219 (Friday, November 13, 1998) [Notices]: 63526-63528, available online at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-1998-11-13/html/98-30443.htm>

³⁸ HanBan: Confucius Institute website, available online at http://english.hanban.org/node_10971.htm

³⁹ N. Vdovina. 'Russkii yazyk v Kazakhstane', 2008, available online at <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1221754620>

streams must often use Russian-language materials. This is particularly common in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.⁴⁰

Russian Universities' Engagement in Public Diplomacy

Until the late 2000s, Russia's foreign policy guidelines had rather little to say about 'higher education export'. With little funds available as state scholarships, limited information on study opportunities, and understrengthened network of counter agents abroad, Russian universities could not adequately compete with their US, European, or Asia-Pacific counterparts. Situation started to change by 2008, when international academic cooperation was first featured in the conceptual documents on Russia's foreign policy.

The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (2008) signed by the President Dmitry Medvedev first mentioned public diplomacy among other tools of the "information support for foreign policy activities" to promote "an objective image of the Russian Federation globally" as well as the "Russian language and the Russian peoples' culture".⁴¹ The Concept of 2008 once again named the CIS Russia's foreign policy main priority area. It also contained a special notice on support of cultural and education rights of ethnic Russian communities living abroad. The Concept welcomed reintegration of national education systems of the post-Soviet states, as "reestablishment and development of the common cultural and civilization heritage".⁴²

In the same year, the Russian government expanded the scholarship programme subsidizing foreign nationals studying at Russian universities to 10,000 per academic year.⁴³ Previously, the number of scholarship recipients (or the 'quota') was fixed as 3,000 in 1995, and 7,000 in 2003 respectively.⁴⁴ To increase the share of the CIS citizens among recipients of the governmental scholarship, the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation redistributed yearly country quotas, subsidizing more incoming students from the post-Soviet states, at the expense of the rest of the world.

The distribution of international students coming to Russia on the governmental quota is a complicated process that sometimes triggers disputes in the Russian academic community, as the domestic competition for incoming students is also high: in the academic year 2013/2014, for example, more than 156 thousand foreign citizens were studying full-time in 673 Russian universities (Table 1). Although the Ministry of Education and Science adopted a clear system of online application for the scholarship, where a candidate can list the subject areas and universities of choice in priority order, the final distribution of students between regions, cities, and institutions is decided by the ministry, and highly depends on university status (federal, national research, or "general"), its position in various Russian and international educational rankings, and public reputation. Previous experience of educating foreign citizens, and availability of the department of Russian as foreign language, also count. Thus, the geographic distribution of international students throughout Russia is rather misbalanced: almost half of them stay in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The majority of the coming foreign students choose

⁴⁰ W. Fierman. 'Russian in the Post-Soviet Central Asia', p. 1085.

⁴¹ Y. Osipova. 'Selective Processing', p. 11.

⁴² 'Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii', Kremlin: 15 July 2008, available online at <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/785>

⁴³ *Postanovlenie Pravitelstva Rossiiskoi Federatsii 'O sotrudnichestve s zarubezhnymi stranami v oblasti obrazovaniya*, no. 638 from August 25, 2008, available online at <http://www.rg.ru/2008/09/03/sotrudnichestvo-dok.html>

⁴⁴ *Postanovlenie Pravitelstva Rossiiskoi Federatsii 'O razvitii sotrudnichestva s zarubezhnymi stranami*', no. 1039 28 October 28, 1995, available online at http://www.school.edu.ru/laws.asp?cat_ob_no=5954&ob_no=5821&oll.ob_no_to=
Postanovlenie Pravitelstva Rossiiskoi Federatsii 'O sotrudnichestve s zarubezhnymi stranami v oblasti obrazovaniya', no. 668, 4 November 2003, available online at <http://www.rg.ru/2003/11/11/obuchenie.html>

degree programmes in engineering (about 20,7 %), medicine (16,8 %) and economics (16,5 %). Most of international students are enrolled in the four year *Bakalavriat* (Bachelor's degree) (38,1 %) and five year Specialist Diploma programmes (27,7 %). Short term academic exchanges give 14,8 % of total number; only 7 % study in *Magistratura* (Master's degree), and postgraduate studies in *Aspirantura* and *Doktorantura* are even less demanded.⁴⁵

There were several reasons why Russian universities consider the CIS countries as their priority transboundary market. First, the post-Soviet states are geographically and culturally closer to Russia; the Russian language still serves a means of communication with local public, not to mention multiple communities of ethnic Russians living abroad. Second, during the two decades of independence countries like Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have reached a sufficient level of economic stability, and the new middle class young can afford to study abroad – and many choose Russia – again, because of the language of instruction, geographic proximity, and affordability of the tuition. Third, the Russian universities have to become more ‘foreigner-friendly’ and internationally open because of the changing demographic situation within the country. The decline in birth rates in Russia in the early 1990s turned into significant decrease of high school graduates by the mid-2000s, so the universities have to ‘fight’ for every applicant. At the same time, Central Asia with its high birth rates, gradually became home to the most mobile student population, and has experienced a steady rise in the number of students studying abroad: from 67,300 in 2003 to 156,600 in 2012. According to UNESCO observations, these figures suggest that domestic tertiary enrolment has not kept pace with the growing demand for higher education.⁴⁶

Another major factor was the ongoing higher education reform, which put many Russian universities, especially small and medium-sized, at the brink of collapse. The project of creation of nine Federal universities “on the basis of optimizing regional educational structures” meant merger of the weaker actors by huge new entities.⁴⁷ A new quality assurance policy by the Ministry of Education and Science also implied yearly monitoring of international cooperation development, including rates of international student enrolment. Trying to keep getting federal funding and sustain their domestic and international reputation, the universities explore new markets for prospective foreign students. Under these circumstances, attraction of students from the former USSR, many of whom are Russian speakers, might look the best possible solution.

The growth of federal subsidies to enroll CIS citizens implied the necessity of serious structural changes in the marketing policies for Russia's higher education. The creation of the *Rossotrudnichestvo* in September 2008 provided a linkage between foreign policy and universities, as this new public diplomacy institution under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was obliged to promote Russian higher education worldwide, thus making Russian universities more capable of self-promotion abroad. Thus, after 2008, the task of international student recruitment was to be shared by the universities themselves, the Ministry of Education and Science (distributing the country quotas for the government scholarships), and *Rossotrudnichestvo*, which had to communicate with foreign public directly to recruit prospective students.

The offices of *Rossotrudnichestvo* abroad could amend country quotas, as in many developing countries (in Asia or Africa) the demand for Russian tertiary education always exceeds supply, while in developed countries (e.g. in Europe or North America) public interest

⁴⁵ A. Arefyev and A. Sheregui. *Education of Foreign Citizens in the Higher Educational institutions of the Russian Federation: Statistical collection*. Issue 12, 2015. Moscow: Ministry of Education and Sciences of the Russian Federation, p. 10-11, 65.

⁴⁶ ‘Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students’. UNESCO Institute for Statistics, available online at <http://www.uis.unesco.org/education/pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx>

⁴⁷ ‘Creation of new universities in federal districts’. Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, 2009, available online at <http://eng.mon.gov.ru/pro/pnpo/fed>

toward Russian degree programmes is somewhat sporadic. With limited human and material resources, the new agency had to collaborate with universities, offering technical and organizational support in their marketing campaigns beyond Russia. In turn, state universities were advised to recruit prospective students from the countries of primary geopolitical importance. In other words, universities had to follow governmental foreign policy guidelines.

Rossotrudnichestvo has inherited a network of Russian Centers of Science and Culture (RSSC) from the Soviet times, most of which were small cultural offices or libraries operating at Russian diplomatic missions abroad.⁴⁸ In 2009-2011, *Rossotrudnichestvo* started to modernize existing RSSC, while many brand new Russian Centers were open predominantly in CIS countries. Farit Mukhametshin, the first director of *Rossotrudnichestvo* (and former Russian Ambassador to Uzbekistan), once said that the RSSC must represent “Russia’s face abroad”.⁴⁹ He also emphasized, that the Russian government should increase the funding of Russian Centers, thus creating a viable competitor to the British Council of the UK, the *Goethe-Institut* of Germany, the Cervantes Institute of Spain, *Alliance française* of France and Confucius Institute of China.⁵⁰

From the very beginning of their operation in Central Asia and the Caucasus, the RSSC became the main advertising sites for Russia's higher education, and acted as local counter agents for many Russian HEIs. This collaboration was a win-win process: *Rossotrudnichestvo* tried to reach more prospective international students (first of all, the Russian compatriots), while the universities were authorized to select the applicants, and used governmental resources to position themselves in CIS educational markets.

After the launch of a new round of governmental scholarship programme in 2008, *Rossotrudnichestvo* developed several main formats of cooperation with Russian universities. First, the RSSC serve as places for direct and exclusive communication with foreign public during the outreach presentations of Russian universities. Such events can be held once or twice a year, and sometimes turn into vivid marketing campaigns with wide media coverage. For example, the ‘Russian Higher Education Week’ in Tashkent (February 2013) encouraged eight Russian universities to present their programmes in Uzbekistan, without any registration fees and other expenses inevitably incurred in commercial educational expos. The very similar event in Tajikistan, Russian Higher Education Fair ‘Dushanbe-2014’ hosted 19 Russian universities, along with local Russian HEI: the branch of Lomonosov’s Moscow State University and Russian (Slavonic) University in Dushanbe.⁵¹ The RSSC also operate as information points (or ‘kiosks’), where universities send their promotion materials for further dissemination among prospective students.

Second, many local offices of *Rossotrudnichestvo* arrange joint expositions of Russian universities within periodic international educational exhibitions, fairs, and festivals (like ‘Education and Career’, ‘Education Abroad’, or ‘World of Education’, etc.). If some rich universities prefer to perform on their own, many smaller schools can only afford to represent themselves under the brand of *Rossotrudnichestvo*, participating in fairs for free, or at discounted rates, and thus accessing the countries where they otherwise could hardly appear.

Third, the *Rossotrudnichestvo* facilitates contacts between universities and local pro-Russian NGOs, mainly Russian cultural societies, foundations, centers and clubs working under

⁴⁸ For the list of the Russian Centers for Science and Culture see: Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, available online at <http://www.mid.ru/nsite-sv.nsf/mnsdoc/08.03.025>

⁴⁹ Interview with Farit Mukhametshin: “*Rosiyskie centry nauki i kultury dolzhny stat’ litsom RF za rubezhom*”. Vesti.Ru, 11 August 2009, available online at <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=308779&cid=7>

⁵⁰ E. Evgenyev. “*Na ocheredi London, Tegeran, Singapur*”. Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 28 December 2011, available online at <http://www.rg.ru/2011/12/27/mukhametshin-poln.html>

⁵¹ “*V Dushanbe otkrylas’ Tretya Mezhdunarodnaya vystavka-yarmarka ‘Rossiyskoe obrazovane. Dushanbe-2014’*”, *Rossotrudnichestvo* website, 26 March 2014, available online at <http://tjk.rs.gov.ru/node/3851>

the umbrella of the Russian embassies, or supported by the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation. Formally, the numbers of such structures may look quite impressive; however, Konstantin Kosachev (the director of *Rossotrudnichestvo* in 2012-2015) had to admit that the ‘army’ of more than 5,000 pro-Russian non-governmental organizations worldwide, including 859 international ones, sometimes operates less effectively than “several U.S. or European foundations”.⁵² Despite their disputable efficiency, in many cases NGOs are the only possible channel of legal communication with local public.

Fourth, the Russian diplomatic missions assist some universities in establishing their branches in the region. For instance, Lomonosov Moscow State University opened its branches in Astana in 2000, Tashkent in 2006, Baku in 2008, and Dushanbe in 2009. Gubkin Russian State University of Oil and Gas used to have a branch in Ashgabat in 2008-2012, and still operates a branch in Tashkent opened in 2007. A noteworthy feature is a network of joint Slavonic Universities, which operate on the basis of bilateral intergovernmental agreements under the joint jurisdiction of the Russian Federation and the host country. Russian-Armenian (Slavonic) University in Yerevan, Russian-Tajik (Slavonic) University in Dushanbe, and Kyrgyz-Russian (Slavonic) University in Bishkek offer study programmes in Russian, based on the Russian learning standards. As Fierman notes, all Russian-language higher educational institutions in Central Asia “enjoy superior reputations”.⁵³ Altogether, by 2015 more than 25 Russian HEIs, primarily branches of state universities operated in Central Asia and the Caucasus (with exception of Turkmenistan) (see Table 3). This number used to be much higher at the expense of private HEIs, many of which provided mostly part-time and distant learning programmes, and sometimes had no premises, teaching and research equipment, or even worked without necessary licenses. Several branches of Russian universities abroad, both public and private, were closed by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation in 2005-2009 for “serious violations” of educational legislation. The most active cleansing took place in Azerbaijan where national Ministry of Education in 2006 closed 17 “illegally operating” branches of foreign universities (15 Russian and 2 Ukrainian).⁵⁴ Moreover, in 2014 the Russian Minister of Education and Science Dmitry Livanov promised to disband the “low quality” branches of the Russian universities abroad, stressing their negative impact on the reputation of the Russian higher education, and Russia’s international image.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, such higher education establishments still make Russia’s presence in the CIS visible and interactive.

Table 3. List of Russian higher educational institutions in Central Asia and Caucasus (2015).

Armenia	
1.	Armenian Institute of Tourism – a branch of the Russian International Academy for Tourism
2.	Yerevan branch of the Moscow International Academy of Business
3.	Yerevan branch of the Russian State University of Tourism and Service
4.	Russian-Armenian (Slavonic) University
5.	Yerevan branch of the Moscow State University of Economics, Statistics and Informatics
6.	Yerevan branch of the Moscow New Law Institute
7.	Yerevan branch of the Russian State Vocational Pedagogical University
8.	Yerevan branch of St. Petersburg Institute of Foreign Economic Relations, Economics and Law
Azerbaijan	
1.	Baku branch of the Lomonosov Moscow State University

⁵² K. Kosachev. ‘Rossotrudnichestvo kak instrument ‘myagkoy sily’’. *Federalnyi Spravochnik*. Vol. 26, 2012, pp. 185-194, p. 187.

⁵³ W. Fierman. ‘Russian in the Post-Soviet Central Asia’, p. 1085.

⁵⁴ ‘Spisok nezakonno deistvuyuschikh v Azerbajiane VUZov’. Day.az news, 12 May 2006, available online at <http://news.day.az/society/48515.html>

⁵⁵ ‘Dmitry Livanov: Filialy vuzov RF, dayuschikh nekachestvennoe obrazovanie, zakroyut’. RIA Novosti: Moscow, 16 July 2014, available online at: <http://ria.ru/abitura/20140716/1016172695.html>

2. Baku branch of I.M. Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University (est. September 2015)
Kazakhstan
1. Astana branch of the Lomonosov Moscow State University
3. Almaty branch of the Academy of Labor and Social Relations
4. Ust-Kamenogorsk branch of the Moscow State University of Economics, Statistics and Informatics
5. Kostanay branch of the Chelyabinsk State University
6. Almaty branch of the St. Petersburg Humanitarian University of Trade Unions
7. Baykonur branch of the Moscow Aviation Institute "Voskhod"
Kyrgyzstan
1. Kyrgyz-Russian Slavonic University named after B.N. Yeltsin
2. Branch of Russian State Social University in Osh
3. Bishkek branch of International Slavic University
4. Bishkek branch of Moscow Institute of Business and Law
5. Karakol Branch of Moscow Institute of Business and Law
Tajikistan
1. Dushanbe branch of the Lomonosov Moscow State University
2. Dushanbe branch of the National University of Science and Technology "MISIS"
3. Dushanbe branch of the National Research University "MPEI"
Turkmenistan
1. Ashgabat branch of the Gubkin Russian State Oil and Gas University (closed)
Uzbekistan
1. Tashkent branch of the Lomonosov Moscow State University
2. Tashkent branch of the Gubkin Russian State Oil and Gas University
3. Tashkent branch of the Plekhanov Russian University of Economics

Source: 'Education in Russia for Foreigners. CIS Branches of the Russian Higher Educational Institutions', available online at <http://en.russia.edu.ru/zvuz/1067/> (checked)

The future of Russia's public diplomacy in Central Asia and the Caucasus will certainly imply extension of higher education initiatives and launch of new exchange programmes based on international practices. For instance, in 2008 the Shanghai Cooperation Organization established its own university, actually a networking mobility scheme including 82 HEIs in Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.⁵⁶ Conceptually the SCO University is modeled after the well-known Erasmus mobility programme in Europe. Promoting the advantages of the Eurasian integration, the *Rossotrudnichestvo* is now stressing the need to introduce "new approaches" toward Russia's public diplomacy, addressing the 'thinking class' in the target countries with explanations of the advantages of the Customs Union, and then the newly formed Eurasian Economic Community. Along with this, Russia is also keeping the ambitious task to extend the global network of the Russian Centers on 100 countries, continue to support pro-Russian NGOs, and promote the Russian language studies and cultural diplomacy initiatives.⁵⁷ From 2012, the Russian universities have been authorized to sign bilateral cooperation agreements with the *Rossotrudnichestvo*, and work out joint action plans of their outreach activities based on the RSSC⁵⁸.

Of special note is attention that *Rossotrudnichestvo*, along with the Ministry of Education and Science and Ministry of Foreign Affairs are paying to restore the ties with numerous alumni of the Soviet and Russian universities worldwide. The government supported several initiatives on creating associations, arranging international get-together forums, group visits of foreign graduates to their home universities in Russia, and attracting successful alumni to various outreach activities in their home countries. The Alumni Association of Soviet/Russian

⁵⁶ See SCO University website at <http://uni-sco.com/>

⁵⁷ K. Kosachev. 'Rossotrudnichestvo', pp. 188-189.

⁵⁸ *Otbor inostrannykh grazhdan na obuchenie v vuzakh Rossii*. Rossotrudnichestvo official website, 11 April 2014, available online at: <http://rs.gov.ru/node/877>

Academic Institutions is an ‘umbrella’ structure for 50 country associations, two of which operate in the CIS (Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan).⁵⁹

The degree of engagement of Russian universities into governmental public diplomacy, as well as the general dependence of HEIs on foreign policy guidelines, is very high. Probably, it is best illustrated by the case with the Russian sanctions against Turkey after downing of a Russian warplane over Syrian border on November 24, 2015. In a week after the incident, more than forty Russian universities quit their academic cooperation ties with Turkish partners after receiving “urgent recommendations” from the Ministry of Education and Science.⁶⁰

Conclusion

The new politics of the international student recruitment by joint efforts of the Russian universities and the *Rossotrudnichestvo* resulted in the increased number of government-provided scholarship recipients coming primarily from the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus. By 2015, the CIS citizens constitute more than a half of all full-time international students in Russia (Table 1). Adding part-time students who visit Russia only for short (one-two weeks) assessment sessions in the end of each semester rises the share of the CIS nationals in Russian HEIs up to 68,8 %.⁶¹ In 2013 the Russian government increased the quota for foreign students at Russian institutions from 10,000 to 15,000 per year.⁶² Sponsoring additional five thousand international students will cost the Russian federal budget about 206 million rubles in 2016. In 2015 the Ministry of Education and Science proposed to increase the quota for foreign students on scholarship up to twenty thousand, with total programme budget set to grow to 4-5 billion rubles by 2019. To justify the increase, the Ministry referred to *Rossotrudnichestvo*, which received more than 16,000 applications for the Russian governmental scholarships for the academic year 2014/2015 from 160 countries. However, the economic difficulties faced by the country since 2014 forced the government to prorogue these ambitious plans.⁶³

For many small and medium size universities, the reorientation of international marketing onto the former Soviet republics implied the beginning of cultural diversification on their campuses. For example, Volga State University of Technology in Yoshkar-Ola (about 9,000 students) has started its international recruiting campaigns having no foreign students at all in 2008. In 2015 Volga Tech became the second popular university after Kazan Federal University at the first place with 341) among applicants to Russian HEIs from Uzbekistan, attracting 161 students (out of 1,581 of Uzbekistanis entering Russian universities).⁶⁴ By 2016 it hosts about 600, mainly Russian governmental scholarship recipients from Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and other CIS countries, enrolled after extensive outreach abroad⁶⁵.

⁵⁹ ‘Vsemirnaya Assotsiatsiya vypusknikov rossiyskikh (sovetskikh) vysshikh uchebnykh zavedeniy’, available online at <http://forum-vipusknikov.ru/associations/>

⁶⁰ A. Chernykh. ‘Turtsiyu otchislili iz vuzov’. *Kommersant*, 2 december 2015, available online at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2867368>

⁶¹ A. Arefyev. *Tendentsii v obuchenii inostrannykh studentov v Rossii. Seminar-soveshanie v RUDN: Moscow*, 1-3 December 2015, available online at <http://conf.rudn.ru/conf/vice-rector-2015/data/Arefiev.pdf>

⁶² *Postanovlenie Pravitelstva Rossiiskoi Federatsii ‘Ob ustanovlenii kvoty na obrazovanie inostrannykh grazhdan I lits bez grazhdanstva v Rossiiskoi Federatsii’*, no. 891, 8 October 2013, available online at <http://government.ru/media/files/41d49508643d1f64e871.pdf>

⁶³ A. Chernykh, E. Kiseleva. ‘Rossiya naraschivaet import studentov dlya prodvizheniya svoikh interesov v mire’. *Kommersant*, 24 April 2015, available online at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2715149>

⁶⁴ ‘V 2015 godu vuzy RF uvelichili priem studentov iz Uzbekistana na 32 %’. *REGNUM news*, 30 december 2015, available online at <http://regnum.ru/news/society/2046724.html>

⁶⁵ Volga Tech enrolls 586 international students”. Volga State University of Technology website. 12 January 2016, available online at <http://en.volgatech.net/international-cooperation/international-students-data-2016/>

Russia's political class considers national higher education, along with the use of the Russian language, as a valuable resource of the nation's influence in changing political context of the world as a whole, and Eurasia in particular. Claiming a great power status, Russia does not only try to prove its diplomatic or military capabilities, but also endeavors to project its soft power on neighboring nations, perceiving and using educational exchanges as a valuable tool of public diplomacy. No wonder that Russian diplomats and international educators often address foreign publics together.

Thus, coping with Central Asia and the Caucasus, Russian universities do not only work for their own economic interest and reputation, but also perform as public diplomacy institutions, supplementing and substituting for the activities of official institutions. Such interdependence between educational and diplomatic entities constructs a distinct style of international education practices of Russian universities, and Russia's public diplomacy in the region.

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