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Public diplomacy as a trend of contemporary Russian policy

One of the most popular definitions of public diplomacy belongs to the former director of USIA American diplomat, Gifford Malone. According to him it is a direct communication with foreign people with the aim of affecting their thinking and ultimately that of their governments.

Even though the term is not new, it became popular recently. The reasons are all well-known changes that affected the world in the end of the previous century: the rise of globalization, the end of Cold War, technological progress etc. According to J. Nye all of these have changed the nature of power. Under new conditions states can no longer rely exclusively or even mostly on hard power, military and economic capabilities, since the soft power – power of attraction – becomes more and more important. This is the reason for the rise of interest in public diplomacy. To influence public opinion of foreign audience is a way to ensure that the image of a chosen country is attractive enough abroad.

The world did not hear much about Russian public diplomacy or Russian soft power until recently. A ranking Portland Soft Power 30 has included Russia in its list only in 2016. Indeed, due to the fall of the USSR, the institutions responsible for the conduct of public diplomacy either ceased to exist or were abandoned. The situation was aggravated by the economic and financial crisis Russia lived through during the 1990s. Public diplomacy has much in common with the PR campaigns and advertisement, which do require sufficient financing.

The policy aimed at the revival of Russian public diplomacy became evident around 2006. The particular period was marked by the economic growth in Russia.

In 2006 Russia paid off all its debts and thus acquired capability to pursue more active foreign policy. One year later the well-known speech of Vladimir Putin took place at the Munich Security Conference, which was considered as an open declaration of Russia's intent to be a global power, with global responsibility, independent foreign policy aimed at the safeguarding of national interests.

During the same period of time the public diplomacy institutions have started to emerge in Russia. In 2005 the channel Russia Today was launched by non-profit organization "TV-news", a subsidiary company of state information agency. In 2007 the president's decree founded Russkiy Mir Foundation, an NGO whose purpose is to promote Russian language, education and culture abroad.

The year 2008 has brought a new impulse to the Russian policy of public diplomacy development. After the conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia, many experts have noticed that Russia had failed in the informational field, since it was unable to properly reach foreign audiences and to broadcast its point of view on the events. This affected negatively the image of Russia abroad. That is why in 2008 a re-branding of Russia Today took place, which turned it into RT. Channel has also acquired a slogan, that speaks volumes: "Question more". It reflects the change in the RT's strategy. Before 2008 the main aim was to tell the world about Russia. After re-branding though the agency focused on telling the world about global events and issues as well as on broadcasting to foreign audiences Russia's point of view

In addition, in 2008 the previously existing state public diplomacy institution was replaced by the new one - Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo). It is a federal executive body under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The main novelty of this institution lies in the field of targeted audience and its prioritization. Rossotrudnichestvo focuses on compatriots living abroad and the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, where a significant amount of compatriots resides. This

constitutes a new approach to promotion of the objective image of Russia abroad. Because of the deeply-rooted negative perceptions and stereotypes about Russia and Russia government, foreign society is unlikely to be receptive to the activities of Rossotrudnichestvo since it is a state institution, representing in a certain way Russian government. However, compatriots who do miss their Motherland are highly likely to react positively to various humanitarian initiatives. Thus, they can become a partner to the Agency, broadcasting its messages to those foreign citizens who surround them.

Aside from the described reformatations, the presence of public diplomacy in Russian policy continued to be reflected in the establishment of new NGO-s: Gorchakov Foundation for the support of public diplomacy in 2010 and the Foundation for the support for the compatriots living abroad and protection of their rights in 2012. In 2014 the News agency and Radio Sputnik was launched, which is a successor of the Voice of Russia (the first in the world international broadcaster, 1929). Sputnik is a part of the state news agency Rossiya Segodnya.

To sum up, it is evident that nowadays a public diplomacy became a trend in Russian policy. Russian authorities have established new institutions and reformed the old ones. Even more, since 2013 the term “soft power”, directly connected with the notion of public diplomacy, was introduced in the strategic document of the state, namely the Concept of Foreign Policy of Russia. In addition, today Russia uses the public diplomacy methods more and more actively. Rossotrudnichestvo continuously opens new branches abroad (98 offices in 81 countries), the number of Russkiy Mir’s partners multiplies (131 Russian Centers in 47 countries, 117 Cabinets of Russkiy Mir in 54 countries), the audiences of RT (100 million viewers from 47 countries per week) and Sputnik (total number of visits of website sputniknews.com – 75 million) widen, and the number of cooperation agreements, projects and programs grows.

One of the good examples of positive results of of the overviewed changes in Russian policy would be the situation in Greece related to the 9th of May.

Traditionally Greeks do not celebrate the end of the Second World War, they have their own public holiday -28 of October “Ohi day”, the day of a “no” – which is a “no” said by Greek government to Axis powers before occupation. Nevertheless, during the past years Rossotrudnichestvo has managed to organize celebrations of the 9th of May in Greece. In 2015 it took place in two Greek cities only, in 2018 – in eleven. The amount of people participating in Athens increased from 200 in 2015 to more than 4 000 in 2018 according to the Greek police estimations. Not only soviet emigrants took part in the event but local Greeks as well.

The extent of celebrations is also worth mentioning. As for the capital, the transmission of Russian military parade and the concert took place in the National Gardens very close to the Parliament. Every year since 2015 the advisor of the prime-minister of Greece Dimitris Velanis participated in event. In 2016 he remembered stories his father told him about Soviet soldiers who ran from captivity and joined Greek resistance. In 2017 he called to pay the respects to “those who liberated Warsaw, Prague, Belgrade and Berlin” and condemned the glorification of Nazi’s collaborators in certain EU states. In 2018 he stated that the Movement of Immortal regiment symbolizes the combat against the falsification of history, adding that “27 million of heroes cannot accept that instead of liberators they were they are being called occupants”. In addition, every year Greek military Orchestra joins celebration.

The celebration of Victory Day in Greece has triple function. First, it consolidated compatriots living there, encourages them to become a partner of Russia in the field of public diplomacy. Second, it urges Greeks to take into consideration the Russia’s role in the WWII, in the victory over fascism, which affects Russia’s image positively. Third, this policy cultivates in the Greek public opinion the feeling of commonality and empathy towards Russia. The resistance is a cherished page of modern Greek history. So the ideas of “We, Greeks, fought fascists” and “Russia fought fascists” transforms into “We fought together”. Such narrative helps to make Russia more likable in the eyes of, in this case, Greek

society. This, in turn, makes Greeks more receptive to the broadcasting of Russia's point of view on global issues and events. So, this case study shows how public diplomacy, a trend of modern Russian policy, can effectively work. Of course, there is a room for improvement, but it is evident that Russian public diplomacy has a good potential and what is more important it is no longer a forgotten field of Russian policy, but a distinctive trend that is being constantly developed.