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Claiming the diaspora: Russia's compatriot policy and its reception by Estonian-Russian population

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Abstract

Nearly a decade ago Russia took a turn from declarative compatriot protection discourse to a more programmatic approach consolidating large Russophone [1] populations abroad and connecting them more with Russia by employing the newly emerged concept of *Russkiy Mir* as a unifying factor for Russophones around the world. Most academic debates have since focused on analyzing *Russkiy Mir* as Russia's soft power tool. This article looks at Russia's compatriot policy from the perspective of the claimed compatriot populations themselves. It is a single empirical in-depth case study of Russia's compatriot policy and its reception by the Russian-speaking community in Estonia. The focus is on Russia's claims on the Russophone population of Estonia and the reactions and perceptions of Russia's ambitions by the Estonian-Russians themselves.

Keywords: compatriots, Russian diaspora, diasporisation, integration in Estonia, identity of Russian-speakers

Introduction

Following Russia's annexation of Crimea and military intervention in Eastern Ukraine in 2014 dozens of journalists have ventured to Narva, the easternmost town of Estonia, with one question on their mind: "Is Narva next?" As one article in The Diplomat Publisher put it,

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three weeks after the referendum in Crimea, "Estonia would be the perfect battlefield for Russia and Putin to continue the war they began with Georgia in 2008" (*The Diplomat*, 2014). An EU border town 150 km from St. Petersburg with an overwhelmingly Russian-speaking population, Narva has become a focal point of discussion for political analysts and journalists over the real intentions of Russia's foreign policy and of its compatriot policy, which is seen as one of its main working tools.

Academic debates have generally focused on the dynamics of Russian-Baltic relations after the collapse of the USSR, looking more deeply into energy and trade interdependence and regional and international security issues (Muižnieks 2006; Šleivyte 2010; Berg & Ehin 2009). Other authors have turned their attention to the dynamics of the relations between the titular and Russophone populations in post-Soviet countries (Kolstø 1995, 1999, 2000; Smith *ed* 1996; Tishkov 1997; Laitin 1998; Zevelev 2001; Lauristin & Heidmets 2003; Korts 2009). More recently focus has shifted to analyzing Russia's compatriot policy as its preferred soft power tool (Simmonsen 2001; Bugajski 2004; Pelnens 2010; CSIS 2011; Saari 2014; Laruelle 2015a). However, little attention has been paid to the civic and cultural allegiances, territorial identification and behavioral strategies of the Russophones themselves vis-à-vis Russia. As an author of one of the few studies on the topic, Kosmarskaya (2011) concludes based on her extensive fieldwork on the perceptions and behaviors of Russophones in Central Asia vis-à-vis Russia's political approach towards them that these Russophones do not possess the 'diasporic' features ascribed to them by Russian authorities (Kosmarskaya 2011, 54). The current empirical case study of Estonian Russians aims to add nuances to the arguments put forward by Kosmarskaya.

In this article I explore two processes that form the dynamics of the relationship between Russia and the Russophone community in Estonia. One is Russia's practice of claiming the diaspora and its policies of 'diasporisation' vis-à-vis Russophones. Diasporisation in this analysis is perceived as an ethnification of transnational connections, so that communicative, social and cultural relations become organized and even institutionalized across sovereign boundaries (Denemark *et al* 2000). In this specific instance of diasporisation, Russia is the active agent that drives and guides the process. It involves the development of a political concept of compatriots (*соотечественники*), the elaboration of policy tools towards this group and the use of the ideological concept of *Russkyi Mir* (Russian World)[2] as a unifying idea for all Russophones around the world. With a set of official policy programs, policy structures and political rhetoric Russia has taken the position of being the active kin-

state (Brubaker 1996) of the Russophone population in Estonia and elsewhere in the post-Soviet space. The first part of the article examines the process of recognizing and claiming the Russophone diaspora or diasporas by Russia's state and non-state actors as well as the intended objectives of the diasporization process.

Second, the agents of Russia's compatriot policy– the social and political leaders singled out by Russia as the leaders of the compatriot movement in Estonia – will be analyzed. In the second section of the article I examine the implementation mechanisms of Russia's diaspora policies in Estonia. Since the adoption of a more structural approach to diaspora policies in early 2000s, several organizations and funding mechanisms have been established in Estonia. However, the impact of the compatriot movement on the formation of a strong and unified Russophone diaspora is questionable today.

However, equally important in determining the success of Russian diasporisation policy are the perceptions of the Russophones themselves and their attitudes and expectations towards Russia. The third part of this study pays equal attention to the civic and cultural allegiances, territorial identification and behavioral strategies of Estonian Russophones vis-à-vis Russia as the historical homeland. Although this analysis does not control for variables such as a participant's number of years residing in Estonia, gender, migratory status or level of education, which may influence allegiances, identities and behavioral strategies, the concurrence of responses provides an indication of Russophones' understandings of Russia as a historic homeland, their cultural and political identifications, and how they relate to the compatriot policy programs of the kin state. In the final section of the article I will raise some implications of Russia's compatriot policies for further integration of Estonian Russians into Estonian society.

Note on data

The empirical analysis encompasses quantitative survey data gathered in 2010, 2011 and 2015 in the form of integration monitoring studies. The data was gathered through public opinion surveys commissioned by the Estonian Ministry of Culture and conducted by various groups of social scientists. Survey samples include permanent residents of Estonia from 15 years of age and up, using a proportional random sampling method. Depending on the survey round, sample size varied between 1010 and 1400 persons. All calculations of the data from various survey rounds used in this analysis are performed by the author using the original data files. While the surveys are primarily aimed at monitoring the structural, cultural and identificational integration process in Estonia, data was also collected regarding Russophones'

cultural identity and linguistic practices, attitude towards Russia, their awareness of Russia's compatriot policy, and the factors that connect or do not connect them with Russia. In this analysis the survey data is used to delineate the civic and cultural allegiances, territorial identification and behavioral strategies of Estonian Russophones. Russophone's perceptions and attitudes to all three foci of Russia's compatriot policy - the development of close cultural, political and economic ties with Russia, including possible repatriation to Russia; maintaining the ethno-cultural and linguistic identity of Estonian-Russians; and the protection of the rights of compatriots living abroad - was tested using the survey data.

The survey data will be complemented with data gathered during qualitative fieldwork in 2015 in Tallinn and Narva, the largest Russian-speaking towns in Estonia. A total of seven in-depth interviews with informants – nominated leaders of the compatriot movement in Estonia or activists and analysts close to the movement – were conducted in Tallinn. Additionally, four focus group discussions with Russian-speaking residents of Narva and Tallinn took place between September and October of 2015. This qualitative fieldwork aimed at discerning the perceptions, imaginations and attitudes reflected in the quantitative survey data. The interview questions focused on distinguishing the Estonian Russians' understanding of their relations to Russia and their position in Russia's compatriot body, their cultural and political allegiances, and their perceptions of Russia's compatriot policy.

Russia's 'claiming' the diaspora: Russian compatriot policy ideology and practice

The collapse of the USSR that resulted in strong political and economic travails in Russia brought along an equally acute identity crisis. The moment Boris Yeltsin's Russia declared itself as a successor state of USSR, the option of having a complete break with the Soviet past and building a new identity for the nation and the state was no longer an official position. An immediate consequence of this was that the Russian nation became redefined in neo-imperialist terms and as a result the boundaries of the imagined Russian nation extended beyond the territorial sovereignty of the Russian state (Morozov 2004, 319, see also Zevelev 2008). Millions of Russians who now lived abroad in former Soviet republics became at least rhetorically included in the community that constituted the broader Russian nation. The narrative of 'Russia as a divided nation' started to emerge, first in academic discussions; later during Putin's reign it reached the level of political rhetoric and eventually policy.

However, under Yeltsin, Russia's actions with regard to the large contingent of Russian

speakers in the former Soviet republics remained limited to rhetorical reactions to the harsh social realities and in some cases deprivation of civic and political rights experienced by Russians in the often nationalizing neighbor-states. In 1994 Yeltsin signed a presidential decree 'On the Principal Directions of the Federation's State Policy Towards Compatriots Living Abroad' but did not follow this up with any practical measures. In 1997 a bill on Russia's policy towards compatriots was tabled in the Duma and immediately provoked heated debates over the definition of compatriots, the rights attributed to these people and the type of measures foreseen to guarantee them rights. When the law was finally adopted in an amended form in 1999 it included as a compromise a very broad definition of who was a compatriot. In a rather constructivist manner Article 3 stated that self-identification on the part of former citizens of the Soviet Union as compatriots of Russia would remain a matter of free choice. This definition left it open for each Russian or former citizen of the USSR residing outside of the Russian Federation to construct their own relations towards the Russian Federation and its claimed 'body' of compatriots.

However, the public and academic discourse on compatriots that preceded and followed the debates surrounding the law revolved primarily around primordial principles where it was assumed, a priori, that an identifiable body of compatriots existed and was automatically the object of special relations with its historic homeland. References to "25 million Russians living abroad" who "although became residents of foreign states, (…) remained intimately attached to their homeland" (see for example Mitrofanova 2004) indicated the approach being taken by Moscow where the body of compatriots was clearly identified. Rooted in Russia's historic academic and political tradition of ethnocentric nationalism the debate on compatriots was influenced by the ethno- and group-centered approach where ethnic boundaries between groups were taken as natural and fundamental. In this approach a person's membership in a compatriot community was not a result of individual choice, as suggested by the law, but was rather predestined by the person's ancestry (Kosmarskaya 2011, 56). The contradiction between a constructivist definition of a compatriot in the law and the ethno- and group-centered approach evoked in political rhetoric was especially visible during the first post-Soviet decade. The compatriot law carried all the hallmarks of Russia's struggle to define the borders of its nation.

With the rise of Vladimir Putin the compatriot policy attained a new significance in the country's political rhetoric. In his first annual address to the Federal Assembly in 2001, Putin stressed the priority to defend "the rights and interests of Russians abroad, our compatriots in

other countries" (Hedenskog & Larsson 2007, 33). The public rhetoric on the need to protect the rights of compatriots abroad became more visible than before and entered strategic foreign policy documents. In 2008 the protection of compatriots abroad was declared as a natural priority of Russian foreign policy in the newly adopted Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации 2008). "Discrimination and the suppression of the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of the citizens of the Russian Federation in foreign states" was included among the main threats to Russia's military security even in the military strategy (Hedenskog & Larsson 2007, 33). In parallel to these processes the concept of 'national interests' also emerged. The interchangeable usage of 'compatriot protection' and 'national interest protection' raised questions about the role compatriots might play also in *serving* 'national interest'. This left analysts puzzled about the existence of stated and unstated objectives and the dual nature of the targets of the newly prioritized compatriot policy. Furthermore, the discursive element of the policy seemed to be intended equally for domestic and foreign audiences, however carrying differentiated messages.

Compared to Yeltsin's reign, the rhetoric became more focused on claiming compatriots as an organic part of the Russian nation. From an emphasis on compatriot rights protection that more often than not supported the integration and identification of Russians with the political community of their resident country, the focus shifted to a rhetoric of consolidating and uniting the diaspora, tightening the ties with the historic homeland of Russia and supporting the repatriation of compatriots to Russia. The shift in focus was partly caused by nation-building efforts of new leadership (Morozov 2004; Zevelev 2008). Without going deeper into the debate on Russia's post-Soviet national identity formation, suffice it here to note the mutual formative relationship between the national question inside Russia and the status and belonging of Russians living abroad. In this interactive situation the narrative of 'Russia as a divided nation' moved from the political margins during 1990s to an epicenter of political correctness (Laruelle 2015a, 89; Shevel 2011, 186). Turning attention in political rhetoric to the compatriots abroad "somehow helped psychologically to offset the shock of division after the Soviet Union's collapse" (Zevelev 2008, 56).

This shift in rhetoric can be discerned in two programs of Russia's compatriot policy adopted at around the time: the repatriation program and the legitimization of the concept of *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World) (Laruelle 2015a, 89). Both programs became the central policy tools of Russia's compatriot policy after 2006. The repatriation program characterizes an

underlining idea of the concept of the 'divided nation'. The features ascribed to the diaspora in this document speak of striving for a return to and whole-hearted orientation towards the historic homeland as the basic element of identity. Additionally, the program featured a material interest to reach out to the diaspora as it clearly prioritized Russia's own economic and demographic interests where compatriots were seen as a resource to counteract negative economic and demographic developments at home (Focus Migration 2011). In line with these assumptions the State Program of Voluntary Resettlement to the Russian Federation of Compatriots Living Abroad was launched in 2007 with much flair, only to show meager results during its first year of operation. By the end of the first year, just 143 ethnic-Russian families (around 650 people) had made the move to Russia out of a planned 25,000 (RFE/RL 2007). Overburdened with bureaucratic red tape, the program was destined to be unsuccessful, until the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine inflated the repatriates' numbers.

The emergence of the concept of *Russkiy Mir* as a common civilizational space of Russia and for all Russians around the world (Chepurin 2009) signified an identity construction process that took place within Russia, which attempted to overcome the realities of a 'divided nation' and influenced diaspora policies. Aleksandr Chepurin, at the time the director of the Department for Cooperation with Compatriots Abroad of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, summed up the ideology of *Russkiy Mir* in front of a compatriots' congress in 2009 as follows:

> Today the place and role of Russia's foreign world could be summed up in the following statements: it is the most important part of the common civilizational space of Russia, that is united through Russian culture, Russian language, and similar mentality; it is an essential factor in the system of international relations, it is an intellectual, spiritual, cultural, demographical resource of Russia; it is one of the components of the development of Russia's civil society, and the integration of the country and the regions into the system of modern worldwide economic ties (Chepurin 2009).

The original ideological construct of *Russkiy Mir* was comprised of three pillars: Russian language; common historical memory that strongly focuses on Soviet victory over Nazism in WWII; and the Russian Orthodox Church. These are the identity markers that unite members of *Russkiy Mir* into one community. The Russian academic circles and Russian Orthodox Church promoted the vision of *Russkiy Mir* long before it entered political rhetoric. Taking its origins from the idea of Russia as a 'third Rome' the concept was further developed by Russian academics in the 1990s who saw the Russian language as the cornerstone of Russian civilization (Tishkov 2007). With the employment of the concept in political rhetoric by

Russia's leadership, identification with Russia's political body, the Russian state, its economy and its territory, also became an identity marker for members of the *Russkiy Mir* community. The *Russkiy Mir* concept thus came to include three types of identification with Russia: cultural (Russian language, Orthodox faith, historical memory), political (Russian state) and economic (being an economic actor in favor of Russia).

After the onset of the Ukraine-Russia crisis, the concept of a 'divided nation' and the need for consolidation of *Russkiy Mir* entered the frontline of political rhetoric and was employed in several foreign policy domains (Jurevičius 2015, 125). This has led many scholars to describe *Russkiy Mir* as Russia's soft power project (Pelnēns 2010; Saari 2014, Zhurzhenko 2014). *Russkiy Mir* remains an instrumental tool and is "deployed whenever the Kremlin needs to penalize a neighbor for its geopolitical or political loyalty" and does not in fact form the driving idea behind decisions in Russia's foreign policy (Laruelle 2015a, 95). The instrumental character is further exemplified by the degree to which its application depends on contextual circumstances (Hedenskog & Larsson 2007, 43; Laruelle 2015a, 95). The rhetoric of a 'divided nation' and consolidation of *Russkiy Mir* is highly malleable and surfaces in instances where the relationships between Russia and states with significant Russian populations become strained. Estonia, Latvia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan all have large Russian minorities, both in real numbers and as a percentage of the total population, but nevertheless, Russia has rarely if ever used the concept of *Russkiy Mir* and compatriot policy tools in the latter two countries.

While the vision for *Russkiy Mir* flourished in political rhetoric, the leaders of Russian compatriot policy knew that the people who were imagined to have historic or linguistic connections to Russia did not yet form a consolidated, powerful civilization of *Russkiy Mir* (Chepurin 2009; Baturina 2009). It takes more than just the mere ethno-demographic characteristic of speaking Russian language as a mother tongue, to constitute a strong consolidated diaspora. The consolidation of *Russkiy mir* required financial and institutional structures domestically as well as internationally. As a result, since 2010 significant political and financial resources have been invested to export the ideology of *Russkiy Mir* beyond Russia's borders by various state-sponsored institutions, such as the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation, Pushkin institutes, Moscow houses and local NGOs established by the local compatriot movements. The Annual Congress of Compatriots that is chaired by the Russian President is the main institution constituting the body of the Russian diaspora. Under the guidance of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a 'nomenclature of diaspora organizations'

(Kosmaraskaya 2011) was established where national councils were subordinated to regional councils and those in turn to the worldwide congress of Russian compatriots living abroad. These councils are non-formal bodies that unite compatriot organizations and activists in each specific country and operate as the main functional structures that coordinate the distribution of resources among compatriot organizations. However, as will be discussed later, the way in which the leaders of compatriot movements are chosen by Moscow and the legitimacy of compatriots' organizations to represent Russophones is highly contested by the members of the claimed diaspora themselves.

Thus, with the reign of Putin, the compatriot policy has gained new significance, morphing from rhetoric of pure minority rights protection to one that usurps the diaspora via a full-flown concept of *Russkiy Mir* that lies at the heart of Russia's domestic and foreign policies. The policy became focused on three main targets: the protection of the rights of compatriots living abroad; support for maintaining ethno-cultural and linguistic identity of compatriots; and development of close ties – cultural, political and economic - with the historical homeland and possible repatriation to Russia. This time around a multi-level institutional structure as well as a set of implementation programs with clear financial resources had been established. However, has Russia succeeded in consolidating and uniting the Russophone diasporas by building cultural, political and economic affiliations with their historic homeland? Has Russia succeeded in supporting the development of solid and consolidated compatriot movements abroad with strong leadership? These questions will be analyzed in the following sections based on the empirical case of Estonia.

Compatriot movement in Estonia: consolidation or marginalization?

Russia's ambitions to build a strong and consolidated diaspora community in Estonia and elsewhere abroad materialized soon after the adoption of central programs in Moscow. In Estonia, the Russian embassy, under the guidance of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, started by building the structures of the compatriot movement, establishing a financing mechanism and nominating the leaders by 2007. In parallel a noticeable shift occurred when Moscow's rhetoric of rights protection for former USSR citizens was abandoned and a new focus was placed on supporting the maintenance of Russian language, culture and identity, and building economic and political affiliation with Russia. The strategic goal of Russia's compatriot policy in Estonia became exactly that - the consolidation of Estonian-Russians

based on language and cultural identity and closely connecting the diaspora to Russia through economic and political ties.

However, administrative leaders of the compatriot policy in Moscow were aware of a gap between their political ambitions and the realities of the compatriot movements on the ground. A lack of strong leaders, limited economic and political ties with Russia, low awareness of the compatriot policy instruments and meager levels of financial support for the compatriot movement were the main challenges for building a consolidated diaspora with a strong leadership (Klenski 2015). To meet this gap, the Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots in Estonia (*Координационный совет российских соотечественников Эстонии*) was established in 2007 under whose umbrella various compatriot organizations were united. Despite the significant number of organizations that united under the Estonian council,[3] the number of persons actively participating in the movement remained low. During a 2014 congress of Russian compatriots in Estonia only 39 delegates showed up. Nominated leaders of the compatriot movement in Estonia admit that they have not succeeded in attracting a large share of the Estonian-Russian population to join their movement. Attendance numbers at various events are low, and especially problematic is the failure to attract younger generations. As the leaders themselves have acknowledged, the consolidation of diaspora has not happened "… as ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers have individualized strategies in dealing with their historic homeland,"[4] they have "got used to dealing [with their issues] on their own."[5] The younger generation has developed strong territorial and partially political identification with Estonia and "their [more positive] attitude and trust towards the Estonian state determines how they see the compatriot movement [as something not for them]."[6]

The movement was also paralyzed by a series of rivalries, favoritism and corruption scandals almost from its inception. Favoritism often resulted from Russia's administrative control over the local compatriots' activities and a lack of transparency. This prompted some compatriot activists in Estonia to criticize Russia for failing to mobilize and consolidate the Estonian-Russian population and instead developing a narrow class of 'professional Russian compatriots' that profits financially from the compatriot policy (Klenski 2015). They have also been criticized for lacking a sense of mission and a clear mandate from the diaspora itself.[7] As a result, in recent years the movement consisted of just 15-20 core people around the Coordination Council.[8] The inability of the nominated leaders to consolidate and unite the diaspora and build a strong movement brought criticism even from Russia itself. It prompted

a Russian Federation Embassy advisor in Estonia to remind the congress members in a rather angry tone "[their] task is not to distribute soft seats under one's soft butt, but to work!" (*Delfi*, May 14, 2014).

Ostracized former members have also argued that Russia's strong-handed control over the movement results in the suppression of internal processes so that voting in the coordination council must be pre-approved by Russian embassy,[9] and the autonomy of the movement is undermined by a paternalistic attitude from Moscow.[10] Leaders admit with bitterness, that the "coordination council has no influence on Russia's compatriot policy and equally on the Russian-speaking community,"[11] "nobody discusses anything with us"[12] and as a result alienation in both directions has occurred. All of this "discredits Russian compatriot movement leaders, *Russkiy Mir* and Russia itself. It marginalizes all this."[13] Hedenskog and Larsson put forward a similar argument when describing the compatriot movement in Latvia. As a result, despite significant financial support and efforts from Moscow to consolidate the diaspora by picking and naming the leaders and establishing lead compatriot organizations, Russia's efforts have not resulted in a strong united Latvian-Russian compatriot front. In some instances Russia's efforts have even caused an opposite effect by causing splits among compatriot movement (Hedenskog & Larsson 2007, 42).

It is important to note here that Russia's efforts to establish a strong compatriot movement operate in a securitized minority environment (Kymlicka 2004) where the movement and its leaders are depicted as a threat to the internal security of the Estonian state. Every annual report of the Estonian Security Police since 1990s has contained a chapter on the activities of the Russian compatriot movement, reported under the section heading 'Defense of the Constitutional Order'.[14] The names of the movement leaders along with the names of more prominent Russophone political leaders are included in the annual reports of the police as a 'warning'. Additionally, since the early 1990s Estonia's political elite has practiced a policy of co-optation of key non-Estonian leaders (Pettai and Hallik 2002) through selective citizenship and certain state integration programs. Estonia's Centre Party has emerged in the last two decades as an alternative platform that mobilizes Russian-speaking voters.[15] Despite some efforts by the Russian state to co-opt Centre Party Russophone leaders and integrate them into the compatriot movement, the leaders have remained relatively autonomous and in some instances have openly distanced themselves from the compatriot endeavor.

All of this has made counter-mobilization of the Estonian-Russian population relatively

complicated and has resulted in a marginalization of the compatriot movement in Estonia. As will be discussed in the next section, the Estonian-Russian population, including nearly 100,000 citizens of the Russian Federation has a low awareness about the compatriot movement and its leaders, their objectives and actions. Nearly a decade after its first programmatic actions Russia has not succeeded in closing the gap between its political ambitions and the realities of the compatriot movement in Estonia. However, marginalization of the compatriot movement does not translate into the complete failure of Russia's compatriot policy in Estonia. As will be discussed below, the cultural preferences, language use, including the Russian-language education system inherited from Soviet times, and consumption of Russian media opens up other opportunities for Russia to exert influence on identity formation and identification with Russia and the *Russkiy Mir* project.

Diasporisation of Russophones: views from the Estonian-Russian community

Whereas reactions from the Estonian state and society to Russia's compatriot policy and to the *Russkiy Mir* project have received attention from academic and political observers, the study of what Estonian-Russians think of Russia's ambitions to claim the diaspora have received very little notice. The reactions and perceptions of Russophone communities abroad are important signifiers of the effectiveness of the policy and the relevance of Russia's diaspora discourse as a whole. It is important to understand how the diasporas perceive, echo or oppose the underlying ideas of the compatriot policy.

In this section I will analyze the position and reactions of Estonian-Russians vis-à-vis Russia's claim on diaspora and on its compatriot policy. The process of identity formation of Russian-speakers in the former union republics after the shock of the collapse of the state they identified themselves the most with – the Soviet Union - has received considerable interest (see for example Kolstoe 1995; Laitin 1998, Lauristin & Heidmets 2003; Galdbreath 2005). This scholarship will be used as a basis for the further discussion about the process of developing allegiances and self-positioning of Estonian-Russians vis-à-vis Russia as a historic homeland. In this section the positioning and responses of Estonian-Russians to the aims and practices of Russia's compatriot policy will be analyzed. How do Estonian-Russians understand the claims made on their identity and belonging by the Russian state? How do Estonian-Russians position themselves and construct their civic and cultural allegiances vis-à-vis Russia? What are their behavioral strategies regarding Russia's claims of belonging, including potential repatriation to Russia? The survey data used in the analysis sheds some

light on the civic and cultural allegiances, territorial identification and behavioral strategies of Estonian-Russians regarding Russia.

Russia has the potential for high cultural attraction for Russian-speaking populations in the Baltics (Cheskin 2015, 73). Estonia's 2015 survey results show that the strongest connection that Estonian-Russians feel with Russia is in the area of Russian language and cultural heritage (see Table 1 in Appendix). Among all age groups more than half of the respondents and in some cases as much as 70% say Russian culture and language and cultural heritage connects them rather or very strongly with Russia. Cultural-linguistic connection with Russia was similarly strong among those who were born inside or outside of Estonia, mainly in Russia (see Table 2 in Appendix). Thus the cultural and linguistic identification with Russia remains strong among every generation.

The cultural and linguistic connection with Russia is maintained through language use in both private and public spaces, including via Russian-language education, through literature and especially through Russian media consumption. The identity of the Russian-speakers shows some signs of consolidating around these cultural preferences, notably the Russian language (Cheskin 2015, 74) and this opens up the possibility for Russia to exert a meaningful influence on identity formation of the Estonian-Russian population. These markers of Russian linguistic and cultural identity maintenance in Estonia and connectedness with Russia support Russia's political aim to support the linguistic and cultural self-identification as Russians and closer cultural ties with Russia.

At the same time the surveys testify to a strong territorial identification with Estonia among Estonian-Russians where the overwhelming majority of them identify Estonia as their only homeland. This territorial identification with Estonia is noticeably strong among younger age groups (ages 15-24 and 25-34) where between 70-80% in various survey rounds considered Estonia as their only homeland, and a negligible number identified Russia as their homeland (see Table 3 in Appendix). Territorial identification with Estonia is noticeable even among those who were born in Russia - nearly a quarter of this group considers Estonia as their only homeland and another third identify with two homelands, Estonia and Russia (see Table 3 in Appendix).

Territorial identification with Estonia is closely associated with everyday social, economic and cultural practices in the Estonian territorial space. Due to long-term residence in Estonia, Estonian-Russians identify with socio-economic structures and practices, the legal framework and everyday cultural practices of Estonia, and simultaneously disassociate

themselves from Russia:

> If you haven't lived there, it is totally difficult there … as … there is a totally different life; it is more bureaucratic, livelier, totally different (woman, 50, Narva).

While in general the Russian-speaking population has still maintained personal connections with Russia to some extent – half of them have either lived, worked or studied in Russia, or have friends or relatives there – disassociation from Russian society is especially prominent among younger people. 2015 survey results testify that the younger the person is, the less he or she has personal contacts with Russia – as many as 70.3% of young people aged 15-24 no longer have personal connections with Russia while 70.6% of older generation have strong or some personal connections. Young Estonian-Russians aged 15-34 that grew up in post-Soviet Estonia have considerably fewer personal connections with Russia when compared to the next generations of those 35 years and older (see Table 1 in Appendix).

This loss of personal relations with Russia was echoed in the group discussions with young and older Russian-speakers alike and during the interviews with the compatriot movement leaders:

> Young people have only an abstract understanding of Russia, as they have never been to Russia. They sympathize with Russia, but it is not their country. They do not reside in Russia. They have grown up in Nordic culture and everyday practices, but in Russia it is different, especially bureaucracy.[16]

As young people themselves explain, identification with everyday Estonian social and cultural practices including Estonia's higher quality of life create barriers in identifying with Russia:

> (…) don't want to move there. It will be worse there. If you want to get health service, to have a serious operation, to put your kid into kindergarten, to buy a flat, to get a mortgage (….) to open business and so on. It will be fundamentally [difficult] (man, 28, Narva).

The emigration numbers of Estonian residents to Russia illustrate the reluctance of Estonian Russians to take up the call of the historic homeland for repatriation. During the five-year period (2008-2012), 1355 persons emigrated to Russia from Estonia while a total of 4378 immigrated into Estonia from Russia, meaning that Russia is one of the few countries with whom Estonia has positive migration balance (PPA 2014). While the exact numbers of Russians who have emigrated under the state-sponsored repatriation programme are not known, they remain insignificant[17] constituting a negligible share of Estonian-Russians. Extremely low emigration numbers are a reflection of the adaptation process that Estonian-

Russians have gone through since the early 1990s that in turn has resulted in the emergence of a territorially rooted Russian Estonian population.

While the cultural identification with Russia remains strong, the political identification with Russia and its compatriot policy is less straightforward. Shared language, culture and even history alone do not signify identification with and support for Russia's political body and its projects. Russian cultural identity does not automatically produce Russian political identity, and affinity for Russia's policies requires something more (Zakem et al 2015, 12).

In the case of Estonian Russians, the overall awareness about the compatriot policy is low – as many as 65% of Estonian-Russians noted in the 2011 survey that they were not aware of the Russian compatriot policy and only 8.5% confirmed that they knew this policy very well (see Table 4 in Appendix). Low awareness in compatriot policy is paired with a negative evaluation of Russia's role in protecting the interests and rights of Estonian-Russians. In surveys a strong majority of Estonian-Russians (between 70-80% in two survey rounds), and the young generation more than the older, do not agree that Russia is the state that represents their interests or supports and helps the Estonian-Russians (see Table 1 in Appendix). Support for Russia is stronger among Estonian-Russians who were born outside Estonia, mainly in Russia. But even among them an overwhelming majority (between 58-60% in two survey rounds) did not agree that Russia represents their interest or supports them (see Table 2 in Appendix). The marginalization of the compatriot movement discussed above has influenced Estonian Russians criticism towards Russia's compatriot policy:

> We hear only about constant scandals. And that's it. But real work we do not see. In general we do not see Russia's [compatriot] work here. (man, 45, Tallinn).

However, a majority agree with the declared objectives of compatriots policy – support for the preservation of Russian culture, language and education; improving the situation of Russian-speakers; identification with Russia and support for repatriation (see Table 5 in Appendix). In interviews, Estonian-Russians declared their cultural Russianness as being 'culturally Russian compatriots', but often disassociated themselves from the political component of the policy. Russian compatriots are seen as instruments of broader Russian foreign policy aims rather than as objects of Russia's compatriot policy themselves (Zakem *et al* 2015). This dual nature of the goals is met with some distrust and perplexity among Estonian-Russians:

> Culture, this is my culture. This is all. But I am not ready to rotate in those political variations, therefore politics, no. (woman, 50, Tallinn).

> For those who speak Russian as a mother-tongue, they live nevertheless in a Russian cultural context, meaning we know this Russian classical literature, read it, films, media, all this, is understandably Russian. (…) But they tried to add to this an understanding of compatriots, not this Russian cultural context, but exactly some political. (man, 34, Narva).
>
> I was just once at the meeting of Russian citizens, and I understood, that … What culture? There was no Lermontov, Pushkin and Dostoyevsky. I mean this is the indicators of this, what this money brings to us, but (…) Firstly, the age [was] over 60, I guess. And the number [of people], thank God, sort of not large. (man, 32, Narva).

This ambiguity of Russia's compatriot policy felt by Estonian Russians results in many of them distancing themselves from the body of Russia's compatriots. Significantly, more young Estonian-Russians than their older counterparts seem to be suspicious of Russia's compatriot policy objectives as more of them agree that the aim of the policy is to keep Estonia in its sphere of influence (see table 6 in Appendix). As expressed by different respondents, young Estonian-Russians disagreed more often than older persons that they personally could be considered as Russia's compatriots. Identification as a compatriot for them is not necessarily objective stemming from their linguistic and cultural identification as Russians or even cultural identification with Russia, but rather a territorial and political self-identification with Russia:

> Compatriots are those Russians who feel that their homeland is there, abroad [in Russia] and who has decided himself/herself that he/she is compatriot. (man, 43, Narva).
>
> What does it mean compatriots? One should have been born in Russia at least, to have roots in Russia, to have some connections with Russia, social or economic, to be in Russian community. But we live here, cut off in our own little island. And Russia has nothing to do with it. (man, 32, Tallinn).

Being a compatriot is seen as having affectionate feelings towards Russia (*душой тянешься к России*), however, some distancing was evident in all discussions. Even the few discussants who identified themselves as compatriots nevertheless distanced themselves from Russia as 'their' country. As one woman from Tallinn deliberated:

> Of course, when something happens in Russia, you get worried about all those trouble, I mean. I repeat myself, although I live here since the birth, in my heart I am Russian. Deep Russian person, and even in the Olympic Games I personally was cheering for Russia, although there were also our Estonian sportsmen. In my heart I long for Russia, but I couldn't be able to live there. (woman, 57, Tallinn)

The discussion above brings out preliminary indications that as of today a gap exists between Russia's imagination of its compatriot diaspora and the allegiances, identifications, behavioral

strategies and realities of everyday existence for these people. Russia has declared as its aim to connect Russophones culturally, politically and economically with Russia. While Russians in Estonia have maintained a strong ethnic identity of Russianness and demonstrate a linguistic and cultural identification with Russia, the situation is much more problematic with regard to other processes. Due to the long-term residency in Estonia and with fewer practical and regular connections with Russia, Estonian-Russians are developing a strong territorial identification with Estonia. Identification with the body of compatriots is ambiguous due to the low resonance that Russia's compatriot policy has among Estonian Russians. The gap is most noticeable for younger generations of Estonian-Russians who more often than not distance themselves from Russia, especially politically and economically. That has prompted one of the leaders of the compatriot movement in Estonia to note with some sadness that 'young Russians stand with their backs towards Russia.'[18]

Conclusions

After years of neglect and in some instances even denunciation by the historic homeland, Russia began at the turn of the millennia to take a keen interest in its varied Russophone diaspora in the world. What initially characterized philosophical debates in academic circles over the nature of Russia as a 'divided nation' that needed to be united into a single civilizational world of *Russkiy Mir* soon became an official policy strategy integrated into Russia's foreign and compatriot policies. From 2007 onwards the Russian government proceeded with building policy programs and structures centrally as well as in the countries abroad where numerous Russophone populations resided. This active stance towards Russophones has produced numerous academic debates over the dual nature of Russia's ambitions where compatriots are seen as a tool for rather than an object of Russia's policies.

The preliminary analysis laid out here shows that the relations of Estonian-Russians vis-à-vis Russia are more complex and multidimensional than Russia's compatriot policy implies. The territorial and political connections of Estonian-Russians are rather weak and do not support Russia's ambition to develop strong connections between the diaspora and the historic homeland. Furthermore there exists a significant generational gap where younger Estonian-Russians show even weaker territorial, cultural-linguistic, political and civic loyalties towards Russia. Russia's objectives to develop a strong consolidated compatriot movement that has the capacity to mobilize the Estonian-Russians have also not materialized.

Despite the emergence of new structures the compatriot movement has undergone instead a process of marginalization.

Nevertheless, the initial signs of diasporization of Estonian-Russians are evident through rather strong transnational cultural association with Russia. After years of flux in the post-Soviet space, the identity of the Estonian-Russians shows some signs of consolidating around Russian language and the historical cultural heritage of Russia and this opens up the possibility for Russia to exert a meaningful influence on the identity formation via cultural and linguistic projects. Whether this influence will focus solely on support for the development of local Estonian-Russian identity based on Russian language but rooted in territorial, political and civic loyalties to the Estonian state remains a question to be analyzed.

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Notes

[1] Various terms have been used to define the dominantly Russian-speaking population in Russia's neighboring countries that have remained outside Russia's Federation borders after the collapse of the USSR. In this articles term 'Russophones' is used to define all nearly 25 million former USSR citizens who use Russian as their mother tongue and live in 14 former republics other than Russia. The term Estonian-Russians are used to signify Estonia's Russophone population.

[2] *Ruskkyi Mir* as a policy programme involves activities targeted not only towards Russophones abroad, but also foreigners that have an interest in Russian culture and language or that have been exposed to the Russian culture for some period of time. In the context of this article, *Russkyi Mir* is used primarily as an ideological concept that aims to incorporate into a single civilizational space Russian-speakers living outside of Russian Federation. For more on the history of the concept and its application see Laruelle 2015b.

[3] As of May 2015 there were 16 member organizations (website http://rusest.ee/novosti/sostav-ksrse-22-05-15/).

[4] Interview 2. Former member of the Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots in Estonia (interview, August 25, 2015, Tallinn).

[5] Interview 3. A person standing close to compatriot movement (interview August 25, 2015, Tallinn).

[6] Interview 5. Leader of Russian-language media in Estonia (interview August 25, 2015, Tallinn).

[7] Interview 1. Former member of Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots in Estonia (interview July 16, 2015, Tallinn).

[8] Interview 2. Former member of the Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots in Estonia (interview, August 25, 2015, Tallinn).

[9] Interview 2. Former member of the Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots in Estonia (interview, August 25, 2015, Tallinn), Interview 1. Former member of Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots in Estonia (interview July 16, 2015, Tallinn).

[10] One of the former members of the coordination council has described it as *Russia is still treating Russophone population as subordinate (подданный), as objects who are begging at the main entrance (у парадного подъезда)* (Klenski 2015).

[11] Interview 3. A person close to the compatriot movement (interview August 25, 2015, Tallinn).

[12] Interview 4. Member of the Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots in Estonia (interview August 25, 2015, Tallinn).

[13] Interview 2. Former member of the Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots in Estonia (interview, August 25, 2015, Tallinn).

[14] See for example the 2014 Annual Review of Estonian Internal Security Service, available at: https://www.kapo.ee/cms-data/_text/138/124/files/kapo-aastaraamat-2014-en.pdf (accessed October 23, 2015).

[15] According to recent Integration monitoring study (2015) as many as 40% of Russian-speakers expressed their preference to vote for the Central Party. Another 40% either could not say their preferences or refused to answer and the remaining 20% preferred some other political parties (Kallas & Kivistik 2015).

[16] Interview 4. Member of the Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots in Estonia (interview, August 25, 2015, Tallinn)

[17] Estonian National Broadcasting reported from the Repatriation programme event in Tallinn in 2015 that according to the Russian embassy a total of 15 persons had applied for repatriation assistance during the first six months of 2015 (ERR 2015).

[18] Interview 2. Former member of the Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots in Estonia (interview, August 25, 2015, Tallinn).

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Appendix: Tables and Figures

Table 1. Q: To what extent do the following aspects connect you to Russia (or to former republics of Soviet Union)? Estonian-Russian respondents by age, share (%) within the age group.

Age group		**15-24**	**25-34**	**35-49**	**50-64**	**65-74**	**Total**
N, 2015		*74*	*118*	*165*	*207*	*78*	*642*
I was born there; lived there; have relatives; have studied, worked; have friends there	Does not/rather does not connect	70.3	59.4	39.4	38.1	27.0	44.7
	Rather connects/ connects strongly	29.8	37.3	58.7	59.4	70.6	53.1
	Can't say	0.0	3.4	1.8	2.4	2.6	2.2
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Russia supports and helps people like me; represents our interest	Does not/rather does not connect	72.9	71.8	70.0	74.5	58.9	66.7
	Rather connects/ connects strongly	13.5	20.5	16.6	21.8	29.5	21.6
	Can't say	13.5	7.7	13.5	14.1	11.5	11.7
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
I'm interested in Russian culture and language, in Russia's cultural heritage	Does not/rather does not connect	44.6	21.2	24.8	16.0	11.6	21.7
	Rather connects/ connects strongly	55.4	75.5	74.0	81.7	83.4	71.9
	Can't say	0.0	3.4	1.2	2.4	5.1	2.4
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Data: Integration monitoring 2015, author's calculations.

Table 2. Q: To what extent do the following aspects connect you to Russia (or to former republics of Soviet Union)? Estonian-Russian respondents by place of birth, share (%) within the place of birth.

Place of birth		**Estonia**	**Other country**	**Total**
N, 2015		*427*	*288*	*715*
I was born there; lived there; had/have relatives; have studied, worked; have friends there	Does not/rather does not connect	57.9	20.5	42.8
	Rather connects/ connects strongly	39.5	78.1	55.1
	Can't say	2.6	1.4	2.1
	Total	100	100	100
Russia supports and helps people like me; represents our interest	Does not/rather does not connect	71.6	58.3	66.3
	Rather connects/ connects strongly	15.0	31.9	21.8
	Can't say	13.3	9.7	11.9
	Total	100	100	100
I'm interested in Russian culture and language, in Russia's cultural heritage	Does not/rather does not connect	24.3	17.5	21.5
	Rather connects/ connects strongly	73.6	79.5	75.9
	Can't say	2.1	3.1	2.5
	Total	100	100	100

Data: Integration monitoring 2015, author's calculations.

Table 3. Q: Which country do you consider as your homeland? Estonian-Russian respondents by age (share within age group) and by place of birth (share within place of birth group), 2015.

2015		N	Estonia	Russia	Other country	Estonia as well as Russia	Estonia as well as other country	Can't say	Total
Age	15-24	75	80.0	0.0	1.3	8.0	8.0	2.7	100
	25-34	118	73.7	5.9	0.0	15.3	2.5	2.5	100
	35-49	163	57.1	11.0	4.9	21.5	4.3	1.2	100
	50-64	208	51.0	14.9	9.6	21.8	3.8	2.6	100
	65-74	78	37.2	25.6	9.0	21.8	3.8	2.6	100
	Total	642	58.4	11.8	5.6	17.0	4.7	2.5	100
Place of birth	Estonia	426	79.6	2.1	0.7	12.9	2.6	2.1	100
	Abroad	288	20.5	30.6	14.2	25.7	6.6	2.4	100
	Total	714	55.7	13.6	6.2	18.1	4.2	2.2	100

Data: Integration monitoring 2015, author's calculations.

Table 4. Q: Are you informed about the Russia's compatriot programme? Non-Estonian respondents by age, place of residence and place of birth, share (%) within age, within place of residence and within place of birth.

2011		N	No	To some extent	Yes, very well	Total
Age	15-24	121	62.0	28.1	9.9	100
	25-34	146	64.4	27.4	8.2	100
	35-49	206	58.3	28.2	13.6	100
	50-64	234	68.8	26.1	5.1	100
	65-74	96	74.0	21.9	4.2	100
	Total	803	64.9	26.7	8.5	100
Residence	Harjumaa	403	56.3	33.3	10.4	100
	Ida-Virumaa	244	77.5	16.8	5.7	100
	Rest of Estonia	155	67.7	25.2	7.1	100
	Total	802	65.0	26.7	8.4	100
Place of birth	Estonia	480	67.9	24.2	65.0	100
	Abroad	322	60.6	30.4	26.7	100
	Total	802	65.0	9.0	8.4	100

Data: Integration monitoring 2011, author's calculation.

Table 5. Q: To what extent do you agree with the following opinions about the impact of the compatriot programme? Estonian-Russian respondents by age, share (%) within age group.

Age group	15-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65-74	Total
N, 2011	*42*	*44*	*82*	*66*	*21*	*255*

Policy supports the identification of all Russian-speakers with Russia	Agree	87.8	70.4	62.9	57	57.2	66.6
	Disagree	12.2	20.5	35.8	33.9	28.5	28.2
	Don't know	0	9.1	1.2	9.2	14.3	5.6
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Policy helps to support the preservation of Russian culture and education in Estonia	Agree	62.5	72.1	55.5	73.8	70	65.5
	Disagree	35	25.6	43.2	18.5	25	30.9
	Don't know	2.5	2.3	1.2	7.7	5	3.6
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Policy helps to improve the situation of Russian-speaking population	Agree	72.5	59.1	43.2	46.9	52.3	52.4
	Disagree	25	29.6	54.3	47	42.9	42.5
	Don't know	2.5	11.4	2.5	6.1	4.8	5.2
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Policy supports the repatriation of Russians to their historic homeland	Agree	59	51.2	43.8	53	35	49.2
	Disagree	41	46.5	52.5	39.4	60	46.7
	Don't know	0	2.3	3.8	7.6	5	4
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Policy expresses Russia's ambition to keep Estonia in its sphere of influence	Agree	42.5	43.2	24.7	28.8	19.1	31.3
	Disagree	57.5	45.4	72.9	65.1	66.7	63.1
	Don't know	0	11.4	2.5	6.1	14.3	5.6
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Data: Integration monitoring 2011, author's calculation.