



# **The Russian Diaspora in the Baltic States:** The Trojan Horse that never was

**SARAH COOLICAN**



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**T**he collapse of the Soviet Union was the worst geopolitical disaster of the twentieth century' (Putin, 2005); arguably an overused quote which many see as evidence of Russia's misguided Great Power disposition. It would be amiss, however, to ignore the enormous ramifications the dissolution of the Soviet Union had for the 25 million ethnic Russians who found themselves as non-titular citizens outside the borders of the newly formed Russian Federation. 'One day millions of Russians woke up without a fatherland, all they had ever known, gone. They had to learn over the radio'<sup>1</sup> and an unexpected 'beached diaspora'<sup>2</sup> was created. Today, Russia boasts the fourth largest diaspora in the world (UN, 2020), what is truly noteworthy, however, is the realised political potential of this group; its unparalleled soft power influence to further foreign policies abroad, whilst simultaneously helping to redefine national identity domestically. 11<sup>th</sup> March 1990, Lithuania became the first Eastern-Bloc state to declare its independence from the Soviet Union. Followed in quick succession by Latvia, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1990, and Estonia, 20<sup>th</sup> August 1991. What was unusual about these new countries, was their ethnic composition (Table 1). The remarkably high numbers of ethnic Russians in these three states has marked their nation-building policies, and the continued Russian diasporic presence pose great possibilities for the Kremlin to exercise its influence there.

Table 1: Percentage of ethnic Russians comprising the population of the Baltic States.

State	% of ethnic Russians			
	1989	2001	2011	2020
Estonia <sup>3</sup>	30.3	28.1	24.8	24.7
Latvia <sup>4</sup>	34.0	-	31.2	24.9
Lithuania <sup>5</sup>	6.31	5.81	5.37	4.5

David Laitin's seminal work *Identity in Formation: The Russian Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (1998) set the tone for enquiry into this population formed of a political cataclysm, conceptualising a new conglomerate identity of 'Russian-speaking populations' (RSP) as a 'diaspora without a homeland, non-titular, Russian-speaking, and soviet peoples'.<sup>6</sup> Whilst the RSP did not 'have claim to be a nationality' back then, their very existence has been ideologically transformed over the years by the Russian state to facilitate the formation of such nationalist claims. Russian 'compatriots' have been ideologically constructed and politically utilised by the Kremlin in efforts to further Russian interests abroad. What began as the RSP, became officially codified as an ethnic diaspora in the 1993 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation. Later, this 'ethnic' diaspora evolved to include more cultural elements, and ideas of 'Russian compatriots' were formed. As of 2010, to be a 'Russian Compatriot' all that is needed is ethnic ancestry to one of 185 nationalities present in the former Russian Empire, and a 'spiritual connection' to the Russian homeland.<sup>7</sup>

'Compatriots' are defined as 'transmitters of Russian culture, values, language, and intermediaries of relations between Russia and foreign countries'.<sup>8</sup> From Putin's third term in office, the ideological concept of 'Russkii Mir' (Russian World) has become an intrinsic part of Russian diasporic policies. Russkii Mir is comprised of three pillars: Russian language, historical Soviet memory, and the Russian Orthodox Church,<sup>9</sup> with this essay adding in the component of Russian culture to the analysis. Russia uses the terms compatriot and diaspora interchangeably in its official foreign policy, and so this research uses the term 'diaspora' to encompass RSP, diaspora and compatriot, for ease of conceptualisation. Here, a diaspora is understood as 'a people with a common origin, who reside, more or less on a permanent basis, outside the borders of their ethnic or religious homeland—real or symbolic',<sup>10</sup> as this incorporates the ideational, cultural and symbolic components the Russian state has ascribed to their diaspora.

The national-identity building Russia has experienced under Putin's presidency, combined with his increasing focus on regime security<sup>11</sup> has seen the use of

soft and sharp power, specifically in relation to the Russian diaspora, play an increasingly prominent role in foreign policy. Investigating Russian foreign policies in the form of hard (military), soft (culture and language) and sharp (undermining of democratic institutions) power in relation to the diaspora in the Baltic States, by comparing opinion polls from diasporic communities and official policies of the Kremlin, will aim to analyse their effectiveness.

### Why the Baltic Diaspora remain important

As noted, the Russian Diaspora in the Baltic states constitute a diaspora unique in its history and identification. Thirty years after the declaration of independence from states across Eastern Europe, renewed insight into this population is needed. The post-Soviet world has been marked by foreign policies enacted through 'states who manage policies by reaching out and engaging with their nationals abroad'<sup>12</sup>, something the Russian Federation has been at the forefront of. Thus, transforming them into a prospective foreign policy tool. Borders need to be constantly maintained and socially reproduced through 'practices and discourses which emphasize 'the other'<sup>13</sup>, and diasporic policies are useful to states wishing to create strong bonds of unity between co-ethnics and their supposedly external homeland.<sup>14</sup>

To analyse diaspora as a foreign policy tool of the homeland state, focusing on marginalisation alone is simply not sufficient. An analysis into the identity formation of that population, combined with an investigation into the engagement policies of their 'homeland' state would provide a nuanced and more valid insight into the foreign policy aspects of this relationship. 'Nationality formation requires both agents with interests to promote it and a message that resonates with a wider population'<sup>15</sup>, therefore, for an effective foreign policy tool to be created the Russian state would have to 'construct a framework that resonates' with the members of the diaspora.

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Studies concerning Estonia and Latvia are often paired together as an ideal sample, with a similar proportion of ethnic Russians in their populations and similar nationalising policies<sup>16</sup>, leaving Lithuania, with its smaller Russian population, largely ignored (Even Laitin’s work is guilty of this). Without essentialising the experiences or compatibility of these three states, their geographical location (bordering each other and Russia) makes a study comparing all three vital to understanding regional politics.

### **Russian Foreign Policy towards the Baltic States, March 2014-2019**

Although the timeframe we are analysing involves policies exclusively in Putin’s third and fourth term as president, It is important to note that this trend of utilising ethno-cultural identity in order to enact diasporic political potential began in the Yeltsin era with the ‘Yeltsin Doctrine’ on the Near abroad (enshrined in the Russian Foreign Policy Concept of 1992). Also known as ‘The Russian Monroe Doctrine’<sup>17</sup>, this acknowledged Russia’s privileged interests in Soviet successor republics. It is the Eurasionist school, however, who have been pivotal in the utilisation of ethno-cultural potential in Russian compatriots. The Eurasionist school began appearing more prominently in Russian mainstream politics during Putin’s first and second term. The 1999 Compatriot Law, more specifically Article III, allowed for each Russian or former Soviet-Citizen to construct their own relations towards the Russian Federation.<sup>18</sup> The 2010 amendment to this law, however, permitted anyone to become a citizen of Russia, if you had ancestral connections to one of 185 national groups within the Russian Empire, and a ‘spiritual link’.<sup>19</sup> This marked a shift away from a compatriot concept of minority protection rights, towards the ethno-historical concept of *Russkii Mir* which now permeates all aspects of Russian domestic and foreign policy. ‘Passportisation’<sup>20</sup>, and repatriation policies offer full citizenship to compatriots all over the globe and widens Russia’s institutional jurisdiction over the post-Soviet space. The importance of Russian-speaking ‘compatriots’



has been enshrined in the Russian Foreign Policy Concept since 2013, and the Kremlin has come to view compatriots abroad as a political, economic and social resource.

The concept of the Russian diaspora has developed throughout the years as a tool for exercising Russian influence abroad, but also as a project for nation-building at home. The term 'Compatriot' has often served as a 'discursive framing tool' in political discourse to 'justify contradictions in Russian approaches to state sovereignty to an international audience'.<sup>21</sup> As of 2019, there are over 20 federal agencies and state institutions who specifically support the Russian diaspora, receiving a combined 400 million roubles of government funding annually.<sup>22</sup> The Russkii Mir foundation, founded in 2007, now has 65 centres globally and an annual budget of around 500 million roubles, funded publicly and privately.<sup>23</sup> The structure and policies of the Putin regime has created a network of institutions specifically created to help enact the political potential of the Russian diaspora, through the means of hard, soft, and sharp power.

## Hard Power Policies

Events in Ukraine in 2014, when Russia utilised ideas of 'Russkii Mir' when pursuing military policies, left countries with a high ethnic Russian population feeling vulnerable. There is a key difference here between Ukraine and the Baltics, however; transnational alliances. Members of the

European Union and NATO since March 2004, the Baltics have been fully assimilated into the Western military bloc. The 2016 Warsaw Summit saw the NATO Enhanced Forward Presence initiative be passed by all member states, and thousands of troops from 20 alliance countries are now stationed in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, as a counter to Russian military exercises and strategic missiles at the Kaliningrad border.<sup>24</sup> Since 2015, in response to increased Russian aggression, the United States' Foreign Military Finance contribution to the Baltic states has exceeded \$250 million.<sup>25</sup> Whilst military security seems to be assured for the Baltic countries through these transnational alliances, Russia's monopoly over energy supplies can leave states vulnerable in other ways. At the time of the Crimean Crisis, 100 percent of the Baltics' gas supply was imported from Russia, a legacy of Soviet infrastructure, and Russia's use of energy coercion greatly unsettled governments.<sup>26</sup> The security fears stemming from this Russian dominance saw all three states turn to Nordic and European countries to diversify their supply. As of 2021 Estonia and Latvia import only 50% of their gas from Russia, whilst in Lithuania that number is at 37%.<sup>27</sup> The Baltic States are highly assimilated in the EU and NATO order meaning their trade is diversified and their hard-security is backed by a US-led coalition. This has removed opportunities for diplomatic coercion, a tactic favoured by the Putin regime across the continent, and has meant that hard power influence attempts over the Russian diaspora have been limited in modern times.

An opinion poll from the Levada centre found that 58% of Russians were concerned about the discrimination ethnic Russians experienced in the former Soviet Republics.<sup>28</sup> In the same survey, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia ranked second, third and fourth respectively, as the places where the rights of Russian speakers are being most violated. In a Pew Research Center survey, conducted in the Baltic States, 70% of those who self-identified as ethnic Russians in Latvia and 76% of self-identified ethnic Russians in Estonia believed Russia 'has an obligation to protect ethnic Russians living outside of its borders'.<sup>29</sup> In Latvia, 39% of adults surveyed agreed that a strong Russia is necessary to balance the West'.<sup>30</sup> In Estonia and Lithuania responses were 34% and 44% respectively. As aforementioned, however, hard power policies of coercion and intervention under the guise of R2P is not a viable tactic in the Baltic states due to their close relationship with Western powers, and their NATO membership. Article V, in some opinions, is the new mutually assured destruction and has pushed Putin to use alternative methods of influence operations.

## Soft Power Policies

There has been numerous and successful cross-border legislation passed and cultural programmes enacted between Russia and the Baltic States between 2014 and 2020. 2018 saw the ratification of a law allowing 'permits for local cross-border movement to residents' on the Latvia-Russia border.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the cross-border Cooperation

Programme of Estonia and Russia has seen bilateral cooperation on issues of border security, the environment and sustainability since 2014.<sup>32</sup> Project LT-RU also facilitates Lithuanian-Russian cooperation on issues of tourism, costal management and 'inclusive collaboration'.<sup>33</sup> Whilst cooperation on these non-hard-security issues seems to have provided some successes, there has been a sustained multilateral push from each Baltic State to cleanse themselves of any subliminal Russian soft power influence.

The Baltic states have been highly anti-Russian in their post-Soviet approach to citizenship and nation-building, which has seen Russia develop 'Russkii Mir' and soft power policies based on countering this marginalisation of diaspora. Despite this, the trend towards diasporic communities viewing the 'host-land' as 'home' has shown huge increases, with 66% of respondents from other ethnicities indicating Estonia as their homeland in 2011, increasing to 76% in 2014.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in Latvia 51% of ethnic Russians consider themselves 'Latvian Patriots'.<sup>35</sup> The Kremlin's policies of 'Russkii Mir' seem to have failed to have resounding effects on Russian diasporic communities in the Baltic states since 2014.

'The Russian nation became the biggest ethnic group in the world to be divided by borders' (Putin, 2014), and it has been a long-term task of the Kremlin to try to redefine those boundaries and reunify this fractured civilisation. Putin's leadership has been defined by consolidating regime security at home whilst simultaneously invoking a

nationalist question abroad, reaching out to compatriots and redrawing the boundaries of a symbolic Russian world. The ethnocentric nationalism which has come to the forefront of Russian politics under Putin, has seen membership of the *Russkii Mir* be defined not as a choice, but rather as a predestined ancestry.<sup>36</sup> The emergence of the concept of *Russkii Mir* as ‘a common civilizational space of Russia, for all Russians around the world’<sup>37</sup>, signified an identity construction process which sought to ‘extend the boundaries of the imagined Russian nation beyond the territorial sovereignty of the Russian state’.<sup>38</sup>

The Russian diaspora in the Baltic states do not long for a return to Russia, a homeland they have never known, but for a return to the Brezhnev era, and ‘Soviet symbols and memories provide more unifying threads than just language sharing’.<sup>39</sup> There is still a strong nostalgic pull towards a ‘better time’ amongst those who feel politically marginalised by the nationalising-states<sup>40</sup>, and this latent longing is where the danger of manipulation can be found. In Latvia, for example, 53% of ethnic Russians say the dissolution of the Soviet Union was a bad thing, compared with 20% of all other Latvians.<sup>41</sup> Soviet memories have a divisive affect across the post-Soviet space, and Soviet imagery was used to justify harsh citizenship policies and anti-Russian laws in the nationalising states. On the other hand, memories can provide a point of collective unity for a population, creating a longing for the past. Soviet nostalgia is a tried and tested tool of the modern Russian state, with many resounding successes in foreign policy.

In Estonia, 70.6% of those over 50 within the Russian diaspora say they were born in Russia/Soviet Union, have lived, worked, or studied there, but only 29.5% feel that Russia supports people like them.<sup>42</sup> Whilst 83.4% feels strongly connected to Russian language and culture, only 11.8% viewed Russia as their homeland. In the newest generation, of 15–25-year-olds, 70.3% feel unconnected to Russia, and 72.9% feel Russia does not support them. Even though 55.4% of this age group say they are interested in Russian language and culture, 0% say they considered Russia as their homeland, and only 8% said

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Estonia and Russia combined constituted their homeland. Similar trends have been found in Lithuania, where only 27% of the Russian diaspora felt their ancestry was relevant to their current lives<sup>43</sup>, and in Latvia 51% of ethnic Russians surveyed felt Latvia was their homeland.<sup>44</sup> Public opinion would seem to demonstrate a feeling among the Russian diaspora of distance from Russia, whilst many do take an interest in Russian culture and language, the strong proportion of the population who do not view Russia as their homeland or even see Russia as ‘supporting people like them’, shows a clear failure of Russian Mir policies to resonate with the diaspora in these locations.

### **The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC)**

In Putin’s Russia, the ROC has assumed a ‘pseudo-state church’ status, with a reference to the ‘significance of Orthodoxy in the development of Russian history’ being inserted into the preamble of the Russian Constitution in 2013.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the 2020 constitutional amendments, enshrined Russia’s ‘Faith in God’ and has seen the church become one of the most ardent peddlers of nationalist and anti-European discourse in domestic politics.

Equating religion with the nation-state and ethnicity, creates loyalty and political support from members of that ethnic and national group. Even Russians living outside of the Russian nation-state should be loyal as they are ethnically bound to its membership. ‘Ethnodoxy’, the ethnicization of religion<sup>46</sup>, was evoked in the 2014 Crimean Crisis, and has remained at the forefront of Russian diasporic engagement policies ever since. This has been most effective in Orthodox countries, who are more likely to see Russia as a regional protector, and Orthodox Christians across the region who look toward Russian religious leadership.<sup>47</sup> Estonia and Latvia are non-affiliated countries where only 27.6% and 19.7% identify as Eastern Orthodox.<sup>48</sup> Lithuania is a predominantly Catholic nation (77%), and only 4.1% identify as Eastern Orthodox.<sup>49</sup>

The Pew Research centre found the percentage of Russian diaspora who agreed that 'there is a conflict between our country's traditional values and those of the West' were 23% in Estonia, 37% in Latvia and 45% in Lithuania.<sup>50</sup> Orthodox minorities in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are much more likely than their countries' general populations to say a strong Russia is necessary. In Estonia and Latvia, where wariness of Russia as a military threat is relatively high, Orthodox Christians and ethnic Russians are considerably less likely than others to view Russia that way. Whilst orthodox identification and participation has been declining across the globe, the influence of the Orthodox church among ethnic Russians and diaspora is an undeniable tool. Among ethnic Russians in the non-orthodox societies of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, 41%, 44% and 37%, respectively, believed Russia had a duty to protect ethnic Russians outside of its borders. What is of interest here, however, is how this feeling of unity with Russia among religious communities, has not translated into collective action or any kind of pro-Russian movements. One possible answer is that 'affiliation does not imply active participation'<sup>51</sup> and although many Orthodox Russian diaspora feel a connection to the ROC, this often extends no further than personal feeling.

The cosmopolitan and multicultural societies of the Baltic States is a testament to their post-Soviet development. A flourishing civil society which is more open to things like same-sex marriages (which is legal in Estonia), counters the overarching influence

of the ROC and its highly conservative values. European Union membership does not just mean freedom of movement and a single market economy, it is an ideology of European values which promotes liberal societies and a value for democracy.<sup>52</sup> The dominance of the ROC over daily society cannot be felt in the Baltic states as it can in Russia, even amongst the Russian diaspora, and so their ability or even desire to mobilise any more than going to church (which Russians are not), is lacking. The Russian diaspora in the Baltic states have inherently questioned the belief that there is an 'unalterable bond between cultures, peoples, identities and specific locations'.<sup>53</sup>

## Sharp Power Policies

Sharp power has emerged as a preferred tool of the Kremlin in its influence efforts abroad. This relatively new phenomena of 'sapping the integrity out of democratic institutions' through hacking and misinformation<sup>54</sup>, came to international attention in the 2016 United States Presidential election and the 2016 UK Brexit vote.<sup>55</sup> This is no new phenomenon, however, for the Baltic states, who have over the years experienced the effects of cyber-attacks, information warfare and sharp power from the Kremlin. In 2007 the Estonian government decided to move a Soviet Bronze Soldier monument from the centre of Tallinn to a military cemetery outside of the centre. This decision led to four days of rioting in Tallinn by the Russian minority, and saw the Estonian government fall victim to a cyber-attack which penetrated financial and

government computer systems and lasted for three-weeks. The government, however, was already prepared for such cyberwarfare, being among the first countries to create a Computer Emergency Response Team to manage security incidents in 2006.

Since 2008, The NATO Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence has been headquartered in Tallinn. Similarly, The National Cyber Security Centre in Kaunas, Lithuania and Constitution Protection Bureau in Riga, Latvia both perform similar functions pertaining to resilience against sharp power. Lithuanian 'Elves' constitute a volunteer group of civilians who tackle online Russian misinformation, and fines or suspends media deemed to have a bias. As of 2014, NATO's Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence has been Headquartered in Riga, which specialises in combating sharp power. Martin Helme, Estonia's Finance Minister called for a government investigation into Russian money laundering from EU-sanctioned companies through Danske Bank in 2019. Echoing, Latvian claims that Russian businesses bypass European sanctions by laundering money through Baltic banks.<sup>56</sup> Years of Russian illegal activity has prompted these states to become more financially and cyber secure, and the Baltics have become highly resilient to cyber-attacks and sharp power as they remain some of the most technologically advanced nations.

The potentially unifying communication base of the diaspora in the Baltic states 'has always been the Russian language.

Russian state news is broadcast in these countries, and viewership has been seen to 'weaken diasporic local civic loyalty' and consolidate 'their identities around Russia'.<sup>57</sup> 92% of the Russian diaspora in Estonia watch a Russian-state media channel every day, with 89% also watching a local media channel daily and 49% regularly following at least one Western channel. In Latvia, the answers from the Russian diaspora were 97%, 54% and 10% respectively.<sup>58</sup> In Lithuania, 81.8% of the Russian diaspora watch Russian news daily, but with only two Russian language news shows being broadcast on LTV and TV3 (Lithuanian state channels), there are concerns that this is 'likely to shift the Russian-speaking audience from local information sources to Russian-language sources outside Lithuania'.<sup>59</sup> In July 2020 The Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission banned the transmission of RT on Lithuanian television after continued reports of Kremlin backed disinformation campaigns and due to the head, Dmitri Kiselev, being personally under EU sanctions.<sup>60</sup> In each of these countries there is a government run Russian-language channel which provides news and other programmes and has come to act as a counter to Russian encroachment. Multiple news sources and freedom of information is a different experience for the Russian Diaspora from their Russian citizen counterparts and has led them to develop a 'double consciousness' when it comes to media consumption, searching for multiple-news sources and media outlets. The double consciousness forming amongst the Russian diaspora grants the possibility of multiple

identities, which is not compatible with the Russian State's concept of ethno-cultural *Russkii Mir* and 'ethnodoxo' loyalties.

Sharp power in the electronic age presents a great deal of threat to democratic institutions. Free flowing information and uncensored ideas means 'sources of information and communication, can build new collective memories and even new senses of persecution'.<sup>61</sup> The enunciation of identities through diasporic public spheres like online forums, 'has created social communities that question the continued salience of the nation-state'.<sup>62</sup> The Russian diaspora in the Baltic states have created an individualised and situational conception of their identity, and therefore Russian propaganda and sharp power is less effective as the assumptions upon which it is based, that ethnic Russians are inherently loyal to Russia and therefore to the Kremlin, is not accepted by the entire diaspora

### **Why the diaspora in the Baltic states are not receptive to Russian influence**

This paper has sought to examine the Kremlin's use of hard, soft, and sharp power in its influence attempts on the Russian diaspora in the Baltic states. What it has uncovered, however, is that the Russian diaspora here has not accepted the '*Russkii Mir*' concept as promoted by the Kremlin, and hard and sharp power policies are equally as unlikely to produce results. Firstly, hard

power policies towards EU or NATO states are not a viable option. To somehow violate the territorial sovereignty of these member states, who in turn would invoke Article V, is almost inconceivable. Putin may be an authoritarian leader who fails to respect the autonomy of the post-Soviet space, but he is not a belligerent military dictator who will lead Russia into mindless combat and denounce all diplomatic channels. This, combined with the Baltic States' active removal of dependency on Russia for gas and energy, has led to very few options for Russia to exercise coercive influence in this region.

The strands where Russia remains in pole position to assert its dominance is through soft power and the *Russkii Mir* concept of identity, The Russian Orthodox church, and through the use of sharp power. Although the Russian diaspora in the Baltic states have been marginalised, actively discriminated against<sup>63</sup>, and seem a ripe target for propaganda, they remain 'autonomy seeking citizens' who do not accept Russian-state news blindly, without question or alternative opinion. Numerous authors have reported how lived experiences in the Baltic states are far 'less ethnicised and rigidly demarked than the rhetoric suggests'<sup>64</sup>, and the marginalisation of the diaspora remains mostly political, and not an everyday experience of discrimination. The Russian diaspora in the Baltic States live in countries who have developed strong transnational connections, benefited from globalisation, and have created a robust infrastructure against Russian influence and sharp power. All of which the Russian

diaspora directly benefit from, for example, freedom of movement across Europe, and more access to diverse news sources.

This interesting and unique diaspora remains ethnically-Russian by self-identification with an appreciation of Russian language and culture, but with Estonian/Latvian/Lithuanian civic identity. This study has reached similar conclusions to that of Laitin's work in 1998. The Russian diaspora in the Baltic states have shown ties of cultural association with Russia, and there are links which make this population susceptible to Russian influence. What has changed, however, is their lived experience, which has meant an identity with 'nationalist claims' has not emerged. As the Soviet generation becomes a distant memory, the younger generation do not feel the same 'Soviet nostalgia' and yearning for the Brezhnev era. As they learn about Russia's past through textbooks and see the social realities of their democratic societies many 'young Russians now stand with their backs towards Russia'.<sup>65</sup>

This does not mean, however, that there is no risk of future influence from the Kremlin, and these Baltic countries have a lot they could learn from one another. There are only 3,400 non-titular citizens residing in Lithuania, 0.1% of the population<sup>66</sup>, in contrast to Estonia and Latvia whose non-titular citizens constitute 6.8% and 10.4% of the population.<sup>67</sup> Nationalising

Lithuania used citizenship laws to try to draw in outsiders and encourage social cohesion, Estonia and Latvia chose a different path, however, and sought to keep the Russian diaspora as outsiders. To remove the lure of *Russkii Mir* romantic nationalism, citizenship programmes should be actively funded and encouraged, through a sustained push to get Russian speakers to learn the national language, knowledge of which has proven to increase civic identity and promote political participation.<sup>68</sup>

Similarly, Estonia provides the most Government funded Russian-language media channels, which has helped with the autonomy seeking practices of the Russian diaspora<sup>69</sup>, this should be emulated by Lithuania, who currently has only one hour of Russian language news per-day, and instead focuses efforts on blocking Kremlin-backed disinformation outlets. Finally, culture and language will always be important aspects of identity, and the key to keeping Russian influence at bay in the Baltics, is to separate 'Russia' from 'Russianness'. As Baltic policies have marginalised Russian language and culture, there needs to be an understanding that these things can be culturally appreciated by the diaspora and does not come hand in hand with an appreciation of 'Russia'-today and Kremlin policies. After all, how can a diaspora yearn for a homeland they have never known? ■



## Notes

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# The Russian Diaspora in the Baltic States:

## The Trojan Horse that never was

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Thirty years ago this month, the world shook as one of the only two Superpowers unexpectedly collapsed, creating enormous ramifications for the 25 million ethnic Russians who found themselves as non-titular citizens outside the borders of the newly formed Russian Federation. This 'beached diaspora' has been left marginalised and treated with fear, by the Baltic States in their nation-building policies and has left many to think of this community as 'ripe' for Russian influence. This Strategic Update will analyse Russian soft power policies and the development of 'Russkii Mir' as a tool for utilising this diaspora to further its foreign policy. Tools, which have been seemingly unaffected to a community of autonomy seeking citizens.



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