

Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe (Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej)

Publication details, including instructions for authors:
<http://www.iesw.lublin.pl/rocznik/index.php>

ISSN 1732-1395

Russian-speaker NGOs in the Baltic States

Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik^a

^a Institute of East-Central Europe (IESW)

Published online: 4 Dec 2017

To cite this article: A. Kuczyńska-Zonik, 'Russian-speaker NGOs in the Baltic States', *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2017, pp. 165-183.

Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe (Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej) is a quarterly, published in Polish and in English, listed in the European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH), Central and Eastern European Online Library (CEEOL) and IC Journal Master List (Index Copernicus International). In the most recent Ministry of Science and Higher Education ranking of journals published on the Polish market the Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe received one of the highest scores, i.e. 14 points.

Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik

Russian-speaker NGOs in the Baltic States*

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to explore the issue of Russian-speaker non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the Baltic states that are engaged in the promotion of Russian culture and language as well as in the representation of Russian-speakers' rights. As many surveys and much research concerning the Russian-speaking diaspora in the Baltic states have been conducted, it is important to indicate the characteristics of these NGOs as an essential factor of articulating the diaspora's interests. In the empirical analysis, the author will use quantitative and qualitative measures of these organizations' form, structure, activities, and members. As a result, it is argued that these NGOs in the Baltic states are moderately successful. While it is an opportunity for the Russian-speaking diaspora to mediate between society, the state authorities and the international community, these NGOs have influenced the consolidation of the Russian-speaking population in the Baltic states only to a small extent. Additionally, under some circumstances, these NGOs can be considered to comprise a Russian soft power tool of influence in the Baltic states.

Keywords: non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Russian-speaking community, the Baltic states, Russia

Introduction

In Soviet times, social networks were often centered on formal organizations (for example, trade unions and work collectives). Those networks disappeared along with the dissolution or reorganization of Soviet enterprises.¹ Since the 1990s, civil activism in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia has improved considerably. In the three countries, there

* The paper is a part of project: *Russian-speaking minorities' attitudes to the idea of "Русский Мир" in the Baltic States* (DN/MOB/121/IV/2015) financing by the Polish Ministry of Science and High Education.

1 E. Poppe and L. Hagendoorn, 'Types of Identification among Russians in the "Near Abroad"', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 53, no. 1, 2001, pp. 57-71, DOI: 10.1080/09668130123914.

are about 28,000, 20,000 and 30,000 NGOs registered, respectively.² The legal environment generally supports civic activism in the Baltic states and cooperation with NGOs at various levels. In 2015, civil society representatives prepared amendments to the Law on Association and Foundation in Latvia to dismantle organizations that intend to create instability in the state. The legislation aims to prevent Russian propaganda. Since independence, NGOs working on behalf of Russian speakers in the Baltic states have been rapidly growing as well. Many organizations, especially those formed at the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s, resulted from the marginalization of Russian-speaking communities by the national authorities. Several of these Russian-speaker NGOs dealt with issues related to the Russian language, citizenship and ethnic discrimination. Their activities originated from opposition to national politics, rather than expressed civic awareness among Russian-speaking individuals. Numerous organizations are concentrated in big cities and regions inhabited by the Russian-speaking population, including Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipeda and Visaginas (Lithuania), Riga, Rezekne, Daugavpils and Jelgava (Latvia), as well as Tallinn, Narva and Kohtla-Järve (Estonia).

This paper aims to contribute to the debate about Baltic states NGOs engaged in the promotion of Russian culture and language as well as ensuring the rights of Russian-speakers. These Russian-speaker NGOs are organizations composed of various ethnic groups, including Russians, Ukrainians and Belarussians, for whom the Russian language is their mother tongue. Since many surveys and much research concerning the Russian-speaking diaspora in the Baltic states have been conducted, studies about the role of civic mobilization of ethnic minorities are less enumerated. For example, Natalija Kasatkina and Tadas Leončikas explored the role of ethnic organizations as an important indicator of social adaptation and integration.³ Further, Monika Frejute-Rakauskienė analyzed these NGOs as a determinant of the

- 2 USAID, *2015 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, 2015, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1861/Europe_Eurasia_CSOSIRreport_2015_Update8-29-16.pdf [2017-08-18].
- 3 N. Kasatkina and T. Leončikas, *Lietuvos etninių grupių adaptacija: kontekstas ir eiga* [Adaptation of ethnic groups in Lithuania: Context and process], Vilnius: Socialinių tyrimų institutas, Eugrimas, 2003.

consolidation of the Russian-speaking community in Lithuania.⁴ Very recently, Sigita Struberga discussed the role of the Russian-speaking sector in the development of the social exclusion phenomena in Latvia.⁵ Therefore, it is important to indicate the characteristics of these NGOs focused on Russian speakers as an essential factor of articulating the diaspora's interests. Additionally, when taking into account the regional and international dynamics since Russia's annexation of Crimea, it is important to note the changes that have taken place within the non-governmental sector itself, as well as the changes in the state authorities' perception of this diaspora in the Baltic states.

The intention of the paper is to answer the questions whether these NGOs influence community-building among Russian speakers in the Baltic states, to what extent the Russian-speaking diaspora expresses its interests at local and transnational levels, and, probably the most controversial, do these NGOs represent the interests of the Russian-speaking diaspora itself or its kin state. In the empirical analysis, the paper utilizes quantitative and qualitative research methods related to the organizations' form, structure, activities and members. The data collection process included 20 in-depth interviews with NGO participants, as well as media analysis research conducted in 2016-2017. NGO leaders and group members were residents of the capitals of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia (Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn). The research specified public ethnic organizations whose objectives are related to culture, language, religion, education, social status, economy and protection of Russian-speaking diaspora rights and interests. This study does not include political parties, although some NGOs act in the field of law and politics. Among them are mainly organizations whose main line of activity is related to the local (cities, districts, regions) and national (state) environment, but a few are active on the transnational level as well. The media analysis included NGO

4 M. Фрејуте-Ракаускене [M. Frėjūtė-Rakauskienė], 'Неправительственные организации русских Литвы: основные социальные характеристики' [Main Social Characteristics of Non-governmental Organisations of Lithuania's Russians], *Etniškumo studijos* [Ethnic Studies], Special issue: *Русские в Балтийском регионе: меньшинство и государство* [Russians in the Baltic region: the minority and the state], vol. 2, 2007, pp. 93-115.

5 S. Struberga, 'Non-governmental Organisations: Source for Inclusion or exclusion?', in: Ž. Ozoliņa (ed), *Societal Security. Inclusion-Exclusion Dilemma. A portrait of the Russian-speaking community in Latvia*, Zinātne, 2016, pp. 95-123.

websites and Russian-speaking newspapers—*Obzor*, *Litovskij Kurier* and *Express Nedelia* (Lithuania), *Vesti segonia* and *Subbota* (Latvia), and *Postimees* and *Severnoe poberezhe*, (Estonia)—printed and published online in 2016-2017.

It is argued that these NGOs in the Baltic states are moderately successful. While they represent an opportunity for the Russian-speaking diaspora to mediate between society, the state authorities and international communities, these NGOs have influenced a consolidation of the Russian-speaking population in the Baltic states only to a small extent. A high number of them cannot be considered of good quality in the non-governmental sector of the Russian-speaking community. These NGOs also do not serve as an indicator of the Russian-speaking diaspora's civil actions, since most of them are local and a very few individuals take part in them. Additionally, in some circumstances, these NGOs can be analyzed collectively as a soft power tool of Russian influence in the Baltic states.

1. Characteristics of Russian-speaker NGOs

These NGOs vary in their specifics, since the Russian-speaking community in the region is rather heterogeneous and divided. While Vladislav Volkov categorized four types of these NGOs—1. culture and education; 2. law and information assistance; 3. increasing role of national language; and, 4. social life of the Russian-speaking diaspora⁶—five total types of these NGOs in the Baltic states are suggested here: 1. culture (history, religion, tradition); 2. education (language); 3. social assistance, 4. business, 5. human rights and political ideas.

Russian-speakers view themselves as a community and respect Russian culture. As a result, most have set themselves the task of preserving and developing Russian culture in the Baltic states as their principal duty. Although Russian-speakers consider Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia their motherland, they may feel an attachment to Rus-

6 V. Volkov, "The Russian Community" as a Means of Self-identification of Russians in Latvia', *Proceedings of the Institute for European Studies Tallinn University of Technology*, no. 6, 2009, pp. 104-123.

sia on a cultural level and continue to “think in Russian.”⁷ As several researchers have suggested,⁸ the Russian-speaking diaspora seek to consolidate and manifest their ethnic and cultural distinctiveness. Members of NGOs oriented towards this then focus on the promotion of Russian values, language, literature and theatre, the development of spiritual culture, organization of exhibitions, competitions, festivals, seminars and conferences, summer trips for children, and smaller events like poetry evenings. Moreover, they publish and distribute books in Russian and support pupils and teachers financially. History is particularly a focus of the process of strengthening or constructing the collective identity of these diaspora groups. Its representatives commemorate annual historical events, with particular emphasis on the 9th of May, when the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany is celebrated, and they build monuments of historical personalities to emphasize the diaspora’s cultural ties to their kin state. The increasing popularity of the extremely sentimental procession of the “Immortal Regiment” to honor the fallen of the Great Patriotic War, in which thousands of Russian-speakers carry pictures of their relatives, can be another good example of this. In Riga, the celebration of Victory Day organized by the 9May association,⁹ attracts tens of thousands of Russian-speaking people each year.

While culture, education and the defense of traditional values remain the main area of these NGOs’ activity, the importance of organizations that represent the economic interests of Russian-speakers is increasing. Those organizations seek Baltic-Russian economic cooperation and assist Russian-speaking entrepreneurs in the Baltic states.

7 A. Матулионис [A. Matulionis] and М. Фреюте-Ракаускаене [M. Frėjutė-Rakauskienė], ‘Идентичность русской этнической группы и ее выражение в Литве и Латвии. Сравнительный аспект’ [Identity of the Russian ethnic group and its expression in Lithuania and Latvia. Comparative aspect], *Мир России. Социология. Этнология* [The Russian world: Sociology. Ethnology], Москва [Moscow]: Национальный исследовательский университет [National Research University], vol. 23, no. 1, 2014, pp. 107-109; P. Goble, ‘Ethnic Russians In Baltic Countries “Love Russia but Don’t Consider It Their Home”’, *The Interpreter*, 30 December 2014, <http://www.interpretermag.com/ethnic-russians-in-baltic-countries-love-russia-but-dont-consider-it-their-home/> [2017-08-17].

8 М. Фреюте-Ракаускаене [Frėjutė-Rakauskienė], op.cit., p. 107; K. Kallas, ‘Claiming the diaspora: Russia’s compatriot policy and its reception by Estonian-Russian population’, *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2016, pp. 1-25.

9 For more, see: 9may.lv.

There also are politically and ideologically active NGOs fighting for the civil rights of Russian-speaking non-citizens, as well as anti-Nazi supporters. In Latvia and Estonia in particular, these NGOs assist Russian-speakers to become full citizens of their respective countries. They represent the Russian-speaking diaspora from the Baltic states in conferences and through agendas in the framework of Russia's compatriot policy. Members of those NGOs are called human-rights activists or "anti-fascists", who aim at establishing cooperation with international organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, ARTICLE 19, as well as the International Federation for Human Rights. In some cases, these organizations may be seen as successful in gaining support from the international community, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union (EU). The anti-fascists argue national-socialist ideology has been increasing in the Baltic states, particularly in Latvia, where an annual march commemorates the Latvian Legion, a formation of Waffen-SS soldiers created in 1943, and is supported by Latvian veterans and Latvian nationalist organizations.

Other NGOs include several organizations dealing with art, music, dance, theatre, poetry, Russian language and literature, Russian folklore and tradition, the Orthodox religion, as well as historical memory and commemorations. Among them are organizations of Russian-speaking teachers, writers, academics, actors, pensioners, and Great Patriotic War and Afghanistan veterans. A few of them are targeted at resolving social issues, such as community members' low economic status, unemployment and poverty. The projects are addressed to the ethnic Russian community as well as to Russian-speaking people of various ethnic groups, including Poles, Ukrainians, Belarussians, Tatars and Jews, and dedicated to all age groups.

Currently, in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, there are at least 60¹⁰, 70¹¹ and 60¹² NGOs respectively that represent members of the Rus-

10 Tautinių mažumų departamentas prie Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės [Government of the Republic of Lithuania, Department of National Minorities], *Tautinių mažumų organizacijos, 2016* [National Minorities Organisations, 2016], Vilnius, 2016.

11 S. Struberga, *op.cit.*, p. 116.

12 K. Kaldur, I. Sutrop and K. Kallas, *Political participation of third country nationals on national and local level. Country Report of Estonia*, Institute of Baltic Studies (IBS), 2011, pp. 10-14, https://www.ibs.ee/wp-content/uploads/IBS_ESTONIA_country_report.pdf [2017-08-16].

sian-speaking community. The number of Russian-speaker NGOs in Lithuania alone may astound in comparison to the small population and relatively homogenous Russian-speaking community in Lithuania. The numbers mentioned above are only approximate because some of the organizations are passive or may have transformed into other ones. Indeed, a few of them seem to have fictional status, that is, they have been founded to get financing or for a specific project. Exceptions to this ethereal status are groups related to two serious incidents that proved a significant ethnic and social division in the Baltic states: a series of protests in Latvian cities (in 2003-2004) against an educational reform measure reducing the number of Russian schools in Latvia; and, in Tallinn (2007), protests against the relocation of a Soviet monument from the center of the capital. In 2012 in Latvia, Russian-speaker NGOs became more active in promoting the Russian language after a referendum on amendments to the constitution to add Russian as a second official language took place.

Despite these examples, it seems that the NGOs in general are ineffective in strengthening the Russian-speaking communities. The simplest reason is that Russian-speaking individuals represent a low-level of activity in this area. The lack of participation can be associated with the low level of trust among Russian-speakers towards the NGOs as well as the low level of knowledge about existing NGOs, and these individuals' involvement in civil society in general. For example, while participation in civil-society associations and organizations has grown in recent years, it is nevertheless higher among ethnic Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians. In the Latvian and Estonian cases, several attempts have been made by national governments to decrease the number of stateless persons there, thereby increasing the rate of naturalization by raising the political participation of Russian-speaking individuals. In Estonia in particular, a significant increase in participation among Russian-speakers has been seen, which could be explained by the increased willingness of Russian-speakers to participate in the life of the local municipality. Although, when compared to the number of NGOs, Russian-speakers prefer to be active in professional and vocational associations, those related to a hobby and associations promoting their (language, cultural and religious) interests

rather than to political parties and related associations.¹³ Moreover, Russian-speaking media is generally less informing than the national media in the Baltic states about civil-society work and is more likely to display a negative Russian speakers' stance towards NGOs.¹⁴

There is no close cooperation between organizations of different ethnic minorities (Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Tatar). Russification of non-Russian minorities has been observed due to the lack of cohesion, the number of representatives and the dominance of the Russian language among minorities.¹⁵ Furthermore, the majority of organizations are local and operate with a very small budget. According to a member of the Latvian NGO D.V.I.N.A., they have limited access to European funding programs. Most of Russian-speaker NGOs are dependent on state financial support or seek funding from the municipality. For example, the municipality of Riga provides support to these NGOs in the field of integration. Civil society activists from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia argue the financing is too low.

While for middle and older generations of Russian-speaking people, the NGOs are an instrument to change their situations and solve problems concerning Russian-speaking communities, the motivation for youth involved in the NGOs is to reach their personal goals. According to Struberga, young people in Latvia are less involved in NGOs and many of them consider the Russian-speaker NGOs to be obsolete. Similarly, fewer and fewer young people take an interest in Russian/Soviet history, as one human rights activist in Estonia (Russian School of Estonia) claimed. Additionally, they perceive as outdated or pointless to focus on legal protection since the issue of non-citizenship in Latvia and Estonia is a problem of middle and old generations, not young people. Instead, young people are predominantly interested in career possibilities and achieving certain goals.¹⁶ Frėjutė-Rakauskienė adds that young people in Lithuania are less interested in promoting "Russian-ness" because they are well integrated or assimilated into

13 K. Kaldur, I. Sutrop and K. Kallas, op.cit.

14 USAID, *2012 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and East Europe and Eurasia*, 2012, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1863/2012CSOSI_o.pdf [2017-08-18].

15 A. Aidarov and W. Drechsler, 'Estonian Russification of Non-Russian Ethnic Minorities in Estonia?', *Trames*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2013, pp. 103-128.

16 S. Struberga, op.cit., p. 106.

their respective national societies.¹⁷ On the other hand, the Latvian survey proved that Russian-speaking individuals who have adopted (Latvian) citizenship have recently become more politically and socially active than non-citizens and other citizens. They assess the state of democracy and development in Latvia higher than non-citizens. Finally, they express greater trust in public institutions and political parties.¹⁸

Russian-speaker NGOs in the Baltic states represent various interests of the Russian-speaking population which are not always complementary and some even contradictory. Since most of these NGOs are involved in the promotion of Russian culture, the European Russian Movement in Latvia, which aims to promote European ideas and values among the Russian-speaking community in Latvia, was formed in response to the growing influence of Russian media in the Baltic states and, in fact, against Russia's politics in the region. Similarly, in Lithuania, Russian-speaking journalists have started the project InBaltic, offering impartial and objective information for the Russian-speaking audience on social media. As a result, it is argued that Russian-speaker NGOs have had little influence on the consolidation of the Russian-speaking population in the Baltic states. Among the most important obstacles to the development of Russian-speaker NGOs are the passive participation, small memberships, low interest in cooperation with other organizations, lack of funding, suspicion by the state these NGOs are disloyal, and a clearly visible generational split. The key problem is low government support and a lack of transparency in the funding of institutions focused on cultural and ethnic minorities.¹⁹

2. Transnational Cooperation between Russian-Speaker NGOs

Although cooperation between these NGOs in the Baltic states and elsewhere is rather low, the Russian diaspora has the potential to influ-

17 M. Фрежуте-Ракаускаене [M. Frėjūtė-Rakauskienė], op.cit., p. 107.

18 D. Auers, *Comparative Politics and Government of the Baltic States*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015, pp. 120-153.

19 A. Jansons, 'Ethnopolitics in Latvia: Ethnopolitical. Activities of State Institutions and Non-governmental Organisations and their Influence on the Social Integration Process', *Ethnicity Studies*, 2003, pp. 124-133.

ence political decisions on the internal matters of both their respective state and Russia and to function as a bridge in the bilateral relations between them, as well as to initiate and lobby on issues of global politics. While the diaspora is perceived as a subject of both domestic and foreign policy, the role of the diaspora in the international arena is neglected. International organizations have resulted from the intensification of contact at various levels in the political and social spheres. These international actors have replaced the role of national political parties and local associations of Russian speakers in the Baltic states.

In contrast to Lithuania, where citizenship was granted to all permanent residents in Lithuania following the regaining of independence, one of the goals of these NGOs, besides human rights protection, is highlighting the problems of non-citizens as well as violations of minority rights in Latvia and Estonia. For example, in 2014, NGOs tied to Russia compatriots in Latvia informed international and European audiences about the deprivation of a significant group of minorities' right to vote in the country.²⁰ Moreover, OSCE representatives of the Russian School of Estonia have described the official policies of Estonia as Russophobic and accused Estonia of not following the Paris Principles (Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions to promote and protect human rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1993).²¹ Additionally, they have highlighted "the extreme politicization of ethnical [sic!] relationships in Estonia" where the "Estonianization" of Russian schools attempts to assimilate the Russian national minority.²² Although the problem of human rights' violations is not as serious in Lithuania as in the other two Baltic states, defenders of Russian-speakers' rights in Lithuania tend to take part in various international organizations and human-rights forums and, along with Russian diplomats, claim Lithuania violates the rights of ethnic minority communities. Further, the European Association for the Defence of Human Rights (AEDH), which includes the Legal Information Centre

20 Resolution of the 6th conference of NGOs of Russia's compatriots in Latvia, Riga, 24 August 2013, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/106210?download=true> [2017-08-16].

21 Russian School of Estonia, *Statement by NGO "Russian School in Estonia"*, 29 September 2014, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/124477?download=true> [2017-08-16].

22 Report by Maksim Nikolajev (NGO "Russian School of Estonia") at OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), Warsaw, 1 October 2015, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/188481?download=true> [2017-08-16].

for Human Rights (LICHR, Estonia), Latvian Human Rights Committee (LHRC), Lithuanian Human Rights League (LHRL) and Lithuanian Human Rights Association (LHRA), was launched in Brussels. LICHR is seen as “particularly involved in promoting the concerns of Russian-speaking inhabitants and with outstanding contacts to West European research institutes,” which, “is considered as one of the few attempts in Estonia to develop competence in the understanding of human rights issues, whereas Estonian judges or the legal education system, for instance, have remained uninterested.”²³

While lesser-known Russian-speaking human-rights activists come from Lithuania and Estonia, the most well-known are from Latvia. Among them are Vladimir Buzaev, Aleksander Gaponenko, Illarion Girs, Victor Gushin, Vladimir Linderman and Tatjana Zdanoka. The last, Zdanoka, is particularly familiar and popular in Latvia, which may be explained by Russian President Vladimir Putin’s popularity among the Russian-speaking population there. She was co-chairman of LHRC and one of the leaders of the For Human Rights in United Latvia alliance. As a current Member of the European Parliament, Zdanoka uses her position to inform the European community about the Russian-speaking population’s situation and promotes Russian values and culture in Europe.²⁴ These NGO leaders are popular in Russian-speaking media but are not in the mainstream of the Russian-speaking non-governmental sector. They are usually ignored by the national authorities and do not receive much support from Russian-speakers themselves, who are more interested in social and economic matters than politics and human-rights violations.

Additionally, some organizations cooperate with others or are connected in a larger, united network of institutions or state agendas representing certain political forces.²⁵ These include organizations such as the social organization “Slavic center of aesthetic education” in Lithuania; the Baltic association of students and participants of the “Mayor of Moscow Scholarship” program in Latvia; the Union of Russian compatriot organizations in Latvia; and the Union of Russian

23 H.M. Birckenbach, ‘Half Full or Half Empty?’, The OSCE Mission to Estonia and its Balance Sheet 1993-1999, *ECMI Working Paper*, no. 6, 2000, p. 39.

24 Т. Жданок [T. Zhdanok], *Европейский дневник* [European diary], Riga: Averti-R, 2009.

25 S. Struberga, *op.cit.*, pp. 98-99.

compatriot organizations in Estonia which are members of the International Council of the Russian Diaspora, ICRD (*Международный совет российских соотечественников, МСРС*). ICRD is an international NGO with Russian-speaker organizations from 52 countries taking part in it. ICRD has cooperated with Russian state authorities and engaged in several of Putin's initiatives. Another example is the Council of the Latvia's social organizations (*Совет общественных организаций Латвии, СООЛ*), which formally unites more than 70 organizations in Latvia. It is argued that these semi-independent organizations can be characterized as deeply politicized and serving as political instruments of Russia.

3. Dependence on Russia

Despite the weak sense of belonging and low civic loyalty to Russia itself among external Russian speakers, there has been a need for strengthening cultural relations with Russia.²⁶ Most organizations look to partner with Russian governmental organizations or NGOs. Because state support is rather low, many NGOs seek alternative sources of financing. For some Russian-speaker organizations in the Baltic states, Russia is the only source of financial and organizational support. While transparency is lacking in NGO decision-making and funding—information from the sector is not required to be made public—human rights and legal organizations are seen as receiving greater support from Russia than others.²⁷ However, following the annexation of Crimea and subsequent EU sanctions on Russia, the financial support from Russia for Russian-speaker NGOs in the Baltic states has been decreasing, a teacher from the Vilnius Russian School Teachers Association confirmed. Several of these NGOs have struggled to maintain their activities with inadequate funding, as argue NGOs in Lithuania (Cultural and Historical Heritage Association of the Baltic

²⁶ K. Kallas, op.cit.

²⁷ Several of books representing unfavourable for the Baltic authorities point of view have been published with support of the Russian Fund to Support and Protect the Right of Compatriots Living Abroad, such as: V. Buzayev, *Legal and social situation of the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia*, Averti-R, SIA, 2013; В. Бузаев [V. Buzayev] (ed), *Правовое и фактическое положение национальных меньшинств в Латвии* [Legal and actual situation of national minorities in Latvia], Riga: Averti-R, SIA, 2015.

Slavs, Russian drama theatre of Lithuania), Latvia (World coordination Council of Russian compatriots) and Estonia (Russian School of Estonia). Interestingly, the NGO representatives admitted Russia's relatively low interest in supporting Russian-speaking communities in the Baltic states and some were aware they were being used as a tool for furthering Russia's political goals.

Russia's financial support for Russian-speaker NGOs in the Baltic states is seen as a factor creating dependence on and subordination to the Russian authorities. As a result, Russian-speaker NGOs can be considered together as an influential instrument representing Russia's political interests in the post-Soviet area. Russian-speaker NGOs are seen as politicized because they promote a similar view of history and defense of so-called Russian traditional values as the current Russian authorities. Russian-speaker NGOs are said to defend the Kremlin's politics in the Baltic states, with the most active supporters found in Latvia.²⁸ Some NGO representatives favor neutrality in Baltics security and foreign policy, which is favorable to the Russian interests, or even advocate their country's exit from NATO.²⁹ NGO leaders also are invited to participate in economic forums held in Russia. There are a few diaspora consultative representations working in Russian state institutions, such as the Coordinating Councils of Russian Compatriots. Russia considers its compatriots abroad to be a force contributing to Russia's economic, cultural and political interests in the post-Soviet space, but the diaspora expects to get more support from Russia.

For Russia, its Moscow House and Russian Cultural Centre projects remain particularly important. They have relatively large symbolic and practical meaning to Russia as tools of influence, compatriot policy and public diplomacy. There is a Moscow House in Riga and a Russian Cultural Centre in Tallinn, which are part of a network of dozens of institutions promoting Russian language and culture. The Russian Cultural Centre at the Pushkin Institute in Tallinn offers Russian language courses and develops teaching materials for Russian language

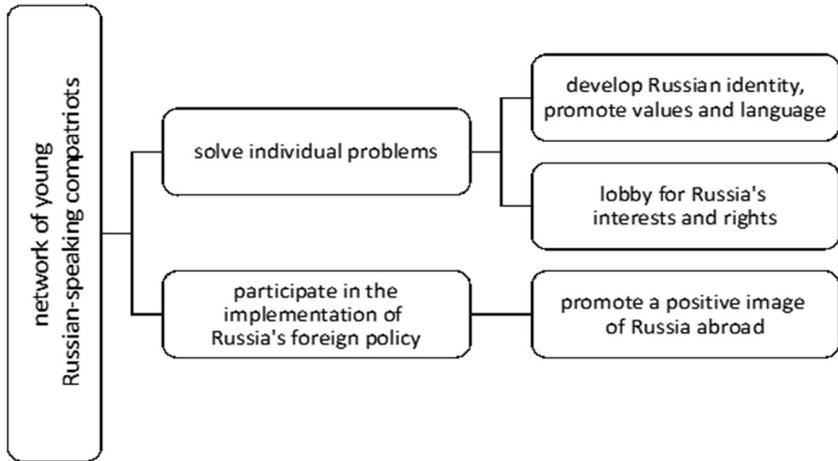
28 ERR, 'Over 40 Russian-funded NGOs operate in Baltic states', *News ERR*, 7 September 2015, <http://news.err.ee/116670/over-40-russian-funded-ngos-operate-in-baltic-states> [2017-08-16].

29 State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania, *National Security Threat Assessment*, Vilnius, 2017, <http://www.vsd.lt/Files/Documents/636265688721000000.pdf> [2017-08-17].

teachers as well. Russia has not managed to establish any institution of similar status in Lithuania.

Several organizations for youth have been established in the Baltic states, including the “Green light” children and youth center (Lithuania) and the Russian Youth Theatre (Estonia). The main goal of these is the spiritual education of children and young people, aesthetic education, creative study, revival and fostering of Russian and other cultural traditions, and the rapprochement of Baltic national and Russian cultures. On the other hand, a few of them, such as the “YUVENIS” Baltic Youth Association (Lithuania), the Baltic Association of Students and Graduates of the “Moscow Mayor’s Scholarship” Program (Latvia) and the Young Word (Estonia), are visibly engaged in the implementation of Russia’s compatriot policy and seen as instruments of Russian soft power (Table 1).

Table 1: Network of young Russian-speaking compatriots



Source: H. Tatkało [N. Tatkało], Консолидация молодых соотечественников за рубежом как инструмент «мягкой силы» России [Consolidation of the young compatriots abroad as an instrument of Russia’s soft power], Всемирный координационный совет российских соотечественников проживающих за рубежом [The World Congress of Compatriots Living Abroad], 23 January 2017, <http://vksrs.com/publications/konsolidatsiya-molodykh-sootchestvennikov-za-rubezhom-kak-instrument-myagkoy-sily-rossii/> [2017-08-18].

The views presented by the Russian-speaker non-governmental sector may contradict national policies and opinions held by officials, and therefore may be perceived as a threat to social stability in the Baltic states. Official state reports detail their possible threats to

national sovereignty and social development.³⁰ For example, the Estonian Internal Security Service has stated that Aleksei Semjonov, head of LICHR, was a pro-Russia candidate in the 2009 European Parliament elections and that he carried out activities financed and directed by the Russian authorities.³¹ Following Russia's annexation of Crimea, numerous anti-minority sentiments and practices have been expressed and accepted more frequently than before. The Latvian Security Police have identified dozens of NGOs as "carrying out actions hostile to official policy of the state." Russian-speaker organizations, foundations and intellectual societies, such as the Independent Centre for Human Rights and the Centre for Defense and Research of Fundamental Rights in Lithuania, LHRC and LICHR, were accused of being GONGOs (government-organized NGOs), enlisted by Russia to disinform, propagandize and portray falsifications of history.³² Estonia accused Russian-speaker NGOs participating in the OSCE's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw in 2016 of trying to discredit the Estonian authorities. In this context, some Russian-speaker NGOs are viewed as sources of threat or as a hostile stranger in their respective countries, and their activities are perceived as dangerous to state stability. Although Russia-friendly organizations are not influential, their representatives are still effectively exploited by Kremlin-controlled propagandist media to form the image that Russian foreign-policy-supporting public society representatives and politicians are still active in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

- 30 Loc.cit.; Drošības policija [Security Police], *Publiskais pārskats par Drošības policijas darbību 2016. gadā* [Public Report on Security Police Activity Operation in 2016], Riga, 2017, <http://www.dp.gov.lv/lv/?rt=documents&ac=download&id=18> [2017-08-17]; Estonian Internal Security Service, *Estonian Internal Security Service Annual Review 2016*, Tallinn, 2016, <https://www.kapo.ee/en/content/annual-reviews.html> [2017-08-17].
- 31 Estonian Internal Security Service, *Estonian Internal Security Service Annual Review 2008*, Tallinn, 2008, p. 26, <https://www.kapo.ee/en/content/annual-reviews.html> [2017-08-17].
- 32 AALEP, *Russian GONGOs and NGOs*, Association of Accredited Public Policy Advocates to the European Union (AALEP), 10 July 2016, <http://www.aalep.eu/russian-gongos-and-ngos> [2017-08-16]; V. Vojtišková, V. Novotný, H. Schmid-Schmidfelden and K. Potapova, *The Bear in Sheep's Clothing. Russia's Government-Funded Organisations in the EU*, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2016.

Conclusion

The Russian-speaking communities in the Baltic states are heterogeneous and weakly consolidated, stemming from their diverse interests, historical roots and socio-economic status. They seek to preserve their cultural, historical, linguistic and political ties with their kin state through a variety of NGOs. These organizations are fragmented and compete with each other, particularly in terms of interests and funding. Thus, these NGOs have influenced the consolidation of the Russian-speaking population of the Baltic states only to a small extent. It is interesting that while a consolidation of the Russian-speaking community in Latvia took place in 2004, when the issue of protection of a school unified the masses of Russian-speaking protesters, that phenomenon now cannot be observed.

Most opportunities for Russian-speaker NGOs to change the social environment exist on the local level. Russian-speaker NGOs are interested in various problems and issues, but both the Baltic state and Russian governments only partially recognize these NGOs as political partners in the dialogue. There are not enough opportunities for them to take part in the international agenda, despite several attempts.

Some of these organizations have been ready to take on the responsibility to articulate the diaspora's interests in the international arena, where they are moderately successful. International NGOs focused on Russian-speaking communities are where the dialogue and cooperation between institutions and social activists occurs at the international level. European integration in particular has facilitated the institutional development of Russian-speaking communities. Russian-speakers' problems have been transferred from the local and national levels to the international one. Thus, these organizations may be seen as a platform of communication for the Russian-speaking diaspora as well as a means of information for the international community about Russian-speakers' needs. It is worth noting that just a few Russian speakers from the Baltic states represent the interests of the Russian-speaking communities in international NGOs, where they hold high positions. Since it has been argued that some Russian-speaker NGOs are dependent on Russia, that country may influence international processes and phenomena through the voice of the diaspora.

The activities of most of the organizations concerned are aimed at promoting Russian tradition, values, culture and language. They are not

only a platform for cooperation between members of various Russian organizations but also a way of communicating with the non-Russian world. But the phenomenon of the politicization of Russian-speaker NGOs and the securitization of Russian-speaking communities in general result from Russia's foreign policy towards the Baltic states, particularly after the annexation of Crimea. The Russian authorities actively support Russian-speaker NGOs because they embody the idea of "Русский Мир" (the "Russian World"). As a result they may be quasi-independent and can be seen as Russian soft power instruments in the Baltic states.³³

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