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Sammanfattning

Ryssland använder i allt högre utsträckning *public diplomacy* och ”mjuk makt” för att uppnå utrikespolitiska mål. I det utrikespolitiska konceptet från 2014 uppmanas ryska akademiker och experter att engagera sig i landets offentliga diplomati och föra dialog med utländska specialister inom området internationella relationer. Rapporten undersöker hur Ryssland använder *public diplomacy* och mjuk makt för att påverka forskarsamhället och en vidare opinion i Väst.

Nio ryska tankesmedjor eller GONGOs (statligt styrda enskilda organisationer) studeras närmare. Samtliga är direkt eller indirekt beroende av statlig finansiering. Övrig finansiering kommer främst från ryska storföretag. Alla tankesmedjor som analyseras har starka band till den verkställande makten i Rysslands politiska system. Rapporten finner att tankesmedjor vars målsättning är att bidra till den globala diskussionen i olika frågor och inte i första hand att främja Rysslands intressen har väl utvecklade kontakter med utländska forskare. Deras experter är eftersökta som talare vid olika evenemang världen över. Att de har tillgång till ryska makthavare ses som en fördel och innebär att de kan lämna intressanta bidrag i debatter och i olika internationella samarbeten. De tankesmedjor som framförallt vill påverka opinionen utomlands genom att föra fram den ryska politiska ledningen synpunkter tenderar däremot att bilda nätverk med experter och organisationer som är mer marginella.

Nyckelord: Ryssland, tankesmedjor, mjuk makt

Summary

Russia has put increasing emphasis on public diplomacy and the use of "soft power" to achieve foreign policy objectives. The Foreign Policy Concept of 2016 specifically calls for Russian academics and experts to get involved in the country's public diplomacy efforts and to do so in dialogue with foreign specialists on international relations. This report investigates how Russia tries to influence expert communities and wider public opinion in the West with the help of think tanks and similar GONGOs. Nine Russian think tanks or GONGOs (government-organized non-governmental organizations) were selected for closer analysis in this study. They are all directly or indirectly dependent on the Russian state for financial support. Other important donors are Russian big business. All of the think tanks analysed are, moreover, closely linked to the Russian political executive.

A finding of the study is that the think tanks that take on less of an advocacy role in their messaging tend to be the ones with the best relations with Western researchers. Their experts are sought after as speakers at conferences and roundtables around the world and their access to Russian government circles adds to their attraction as cooperation partners. The think tanks that are more propagandistic tend to end up creating networks with experts, organizations and institutes in the West that are less mainstream.

Keywords: Russia, think tanks, soft power

Innehållsförteckning

Acronyms and abbreviations

CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CFDP	Council for Foreign and Defence Policy
DOC	Dialogue of Civilizations
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
HSE	National Research University Higher School of Economics
IDC	Institute of Democracy and Cooperation
GGTTI	Global Go to Think Tank Index
GONGO	government-organized non-government organization
IISI	Institut problem informatsionnoi bezopasnosti
	Information Security Institute
IMEMO	Institut mirovoi ekonomiki i mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii
	Institute of World Economy and International Relations
ISEPR	Institute of Social-Economic and Political Research
MGIMO	Moskovskii gosudarstvennyi institut mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii
	Moscow State Institute of International Relations
NGO	non-government organization
ONF	All-Russia People's Front
RCMD	Rossiiskii sovet po mezhdunarodnym delam
	(see RIAC)
RG	*Rossiiskaia gazeta*
	(government newspaper)
RIAC	Russian International Affairs Council
RISI	Rossiiskii institut strategicheskikh issledovanii
RISS	Russian Institute for Strategic Studies
	(see RISI)

Rossotrudnichestvo	Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of the Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation
SVOP	Sovet po vneshnei i oboronnoi politike (see also CFDP)
SVR	Foreign Intelligence Service
UDPRF	President's Directorate for Administrative Questions
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VPK	*Voenno-promyshlennyi kurer* (newspaper on military affairs)
VTsIOM	Vserossiiskii tsentr izucheniia obshchestvennoga mneniia
	Russian Opinion Research Centre
WPF DoC	World Public Forum "Dialogue of Civilizations"

1 Introduction

There is a wide array of think tanks in Russia today. Most of them are geared primarily towards a domestic audience and compete for attention from the Presidential Administration and government. Good relations and commissions from the highest political level mean better funding. This is not unique to Russia. Many think tanks in the West fight for attention from the government machinery. However, in Russian society independent political activity is severely limited and there are simply few alternative sources of income for a think tank. These conditions apply also for the Russian think tanks that are active on an international arena and there is every reason to be aware of the very different domestic circumstances in which these think tanks operate.

The think tanks examined below are all in varying degrees active in trying to promote Russia's view of international relations, the country's policy positions and its political system internationally. This is not a new practice for Russia and we should bear in mind the history of, for example, the Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies, which was a foreign policy tool for the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.[1]

The concept of soft power describes a country's ability to attract and cooperate as means of persuasion in foreign relations (Nye 2004). A defining feature of soft power is that it is non-coercive. Instead the instruments of soft power are cultural and political values and foreign policies. The original concept was modelled on the US use of soft power in the 1990s after the end of the Cold War (Rutland & Kazantsev 2016: 397). Later, the term has also been used to describe policies attempting to influence social and public opinion through less transparent channels and lobbying through powerful political and non-political organizations. Russia started to refer to "soft power" in the early 2000s. Its objectives were primarily to regain influence over other post-Soviet countries. The colour revolutions in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004) as well as the EU's expansion to the east during the same period were perceived by Russia as threats to its interests in the post-Soviet space (Ćwiek-Karpowicz 2012: 6).

Russia uses both state organizations and so-called government-organized non-governmental organizations, GONGOs, in its attempts to influence opinions in the West. A special type of GONGO is think tanks that may be instrumental in helping a government to reach specific foreign policy goals by building networks with

[1] This department coordinated the Soviet Union's active measures – overt and covert methods of influence – abroad (Levchenko 1982). According to Katri Pynnöniemi (2016: 41) the Soviet open propaganda effort was closely coordinated with the official foreign policy. It relied on "widely appealing themes and slogans: peace, democracy, national self-determination, land reform and racial equality". She identifies front organizations such as the World Peace Council and the World Federation of Teachers' Unions as the open influence agents of the Soviet era (2016: 40).

international researchers and to influence their agendas as well as shaping media reporting and public opinion in other countries. There are different definitions of think tanks but in this study we refer to organizations that produce public-policy research analyses or take part in public debate and the media by other means. Think tanks often act as a bridge between the academic and policymaking communities and between the state and civil society.

The main purpose of this study is to explore how Russia tries to influence expert communities as well as wider public opinion in the West with the help of think tanks and similar GONGOs. This means that organizations primarily addressing a domestic audience or compatriots abroad are not discussed. The study also examines how the Russian state influences the think tanks and GONGOs examined – through direct and indirect control as well as through funding – and what channels are used to disseminate ideas and narratives about Russia and the world.

As a starting point a number of GONGOs were identified as representing think tanks and similar organizations that channel the voice of the Russian government in varying degrees. An important criterion for the selection of think tanks has been that they should be active in the English-language sphere rather than more or less exclusively among the Russian-language community. The idea was to provide representative examples rather than an exhaustive list. The think tanks selected for our case studies are listed in Table 1 below. Representatives of a few of these organizations were interviewed during a study visit to Moscow in January 2017 (see the list of interviews at the end). The interviews focused on the funding, the activities of the organizations, the organizational structure, and links to partners in the West. In addition, the organizations were studied from the point of view of how they present themselves on their websites and in their publications, and from that of previous Western analyses of Russian GONGOs. Of the think tanks analysed, three are ranked in the *Global Go to Think Tank Index* (GGTTI) developed by Pennsylvania University under James G. McGann (2017).

This report starts with a discussion of the concept of soft power, how it is reflected in the Russian Foreign Policy Concept, how it is interpreted and applied in the Russian case and how different GONGOs are used as vehicles for public diplomacy. The third section looks more closely at how think tanks and GONGOs are financed in Russia. The fourth section examines nine selected think tanks in more detail regarding their objectives and activities. The final section applies the concept of soft power as well as the findings on how GONGOs and think tanks are funded to draw conclusions about how dependent they are on the Russian government and which different aims and primary audiences the think tanks have.

2 Projecting soft power

Russia puts emphasis on public diplomacy and more specifically on the use of "soft power" as one of the methods of achieving foreign policy objectives (*Foreign Policy Concept* 2016: §9; see Persson 2014: 19). The foreign policy goals that the Russian political leadership wants to attain using thinks tanks and GONGOs are evident in Russian security documents. The National Security Strategy (2015) states that among foreign powers there is a policy "to contain Russia" and that this is done by applying various pressures, including informational pressures (§12; see Hedenskog et al. 2016: 97ff). The Information Security Doctrine (2016) lists as one of Russia's national interests in the information sphere "providing the Russian and international community with reliable information" on Russian policies (§8).

The section on "Information Support for Foreign Policy Activities" in the Foreign Policy Concept merits quoting in full since it explicitly mentions the role of Russian experts:

> Delivery to the international community of unbiased information about Russia's perspectives on key international issues, its foreign policy initiatives and efforts, processes and plans of its socioeconomic development and Russia's cultural research achievements is an important element of foreign policy activities of the Russian Federation.
>
> Russia seeks to ensure that the world has an objective image of the country, develops its own effective ways to influence foreign audiences, promotes Russian and Russian-language media in the global information space, providing them with necessary government support, is proactive in international information cooperation, and takes necessary steps to counter threats to its information security. New information and communication technology is used to this end. Russia is intent on promoting a set of legal and ethical forms regarding the safe use of such technology. Russia asserts the right of every person to access unbiased information about global developments and various points of view.
>
> Greater participation of Russia's academics and experts in the dialogue with foreign specialists on global politics and international security is one of the areas of public diplomacy development.
> (Foreign Policy Concept 2016: §§46–48)

A couple of themes in this quotation stand out and need to be put in a wider context of Russian thinking on security and information security. First, Russia considers the global information community to be fundamentally skewed or biased in favour of the West. This is why there is an insistence on the need to bring "unbiased information" about global events and to provide an "objective image" of Russia. In Russian thinking about the information space, the West dominates the international media, including the internet. To a certain degree, this is a justified claim. Many of the leading television networks with a global reach and certainly the internet were created in the West and by companies that are firmly grounded in a Western ideology, which is, among other things, pro-free speech (Garton Ash 2016: 21ff). This constitutes a challenge for the Russian authoritarian system which wants to control its information space, and this challenge has become more

acute with the advent of information and communication technologies that are difficult to confine within national borders.

This leads on to the second aspect in the quotation above that merits an explanation. Russia has promoted the adoption of an international convention on information security at the United Nations (UN). Thus, when Russia states that it "is intent on promoting a set of legal and ethical forms regarding the safe use of such technology", this is in line with its promotion of a binding treaty that would respect national borders and the concerns of states like Russia and China when it comes to protecting their respective national information spaces. It is worth noting that in the very same paragraph, Russia states that it uses "new information and communication technology" in developing its own ways of influencing foreign audiences. As will be evident below, the majority of the think tanks and GONGOs below are active on Facebook, Twitter and other social media.

Finally, the Foreign Policy Concept states that Russia would like to see a greater participation by its own "academics and experts in the dialogue with foreign specialists on global politics and international security". In other words, engaging experts to promote Russian public diplomacy and Russia's strategic narrative externally is an explicit goal in the concept. This is part and parcel of a larger strategy to use information as a way of influencing foreign countries (Hellman & Wagnsson 2016: 3–5). The experts that are expected to promote a Russian strategic narrative are attached to the leading think tanks on foreign policy in Russia. This strategic narrative can be analysed on three levels. First, the narrative about how the international system is structured and how it is evolving; second, a narrative about what Russia is and which values it promotes as well as the goals it pursues; and, finally, a narrative that explains the virtues of specific policies and the way Russia pursues these (Roselle et al. 2014: 76).

Russia and soft power

When the American political scientist Joseph Nye defined soft power in the 1980s the emphasis was on influence through attraction (Nye 2004; 2008: 95). The concept quickly migrated from the academic world into the policy realm. As it did so it often came to be reinterpreted, misunderstood or even misused by governments that, for example, allowed public diplomacy to move into one-way broadcasting or even propaganda, which was not the original meaning of the concept. Among other things, Nye has underlined that soft power messaging from a government must be in line with the concrete policies and actions pursued (Kearn 2011; Nye 2008: 103, 108).

When employing soft power, Russia does not primarily attract through lifestyle and prosperity. Indeed, in Russian official rhetoric it often appears to mean the use of just about all instruments and methods other than military to reach foreign policy goals (Hedenskog et al. 2016: 108; Hudson 2015: 331). An important component in Russia's soft power strategy has been to use Russians and Russian-

speakers abroad (Just 2015: 83; Meister & Puglierin 2015: 4–5; Persson 2014: 25ff). Many analyses have focused on the message that Russia is promoting through channels such as Rossotrudnichestvo (Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of the Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation) and the Russkiy Mir Foundation (see below) and reached the conclusion that Russian soft power, in the true sense of the concept, has not been very effective. It has, for example, proved difficult for Russia to increase its attraction outside an audience that is already Russia-friendly (Just 2015). Furthermore, there are internal contradictions in the narratives sent from Russia and the lack of positive ideas and values gives the message less traction (Hudson 2015: 334; Rutland & Kazantsev 2016: 403). Russia's attempts to influence other countries are furthermore state-centric and are managed from above rather than attracting through prosperity and popular culture in Russian society (Just 2015: 85; Lutsevych 2016: 3–5; van Herpen 2015: 27–29).

Russian GONGOs and public diplomacy

The government-managed think tanks are examples of GONGOs, since they are managed by the state but presented as at least semi-independent. Any country can create this type of organization to promote certain issues, but GONGOs are more common in countries with authoritarian regimes where civil society is weak (Moisés 2007; Steinberg 2001). Because the GONGOs are controlled by the government they play a different role than civil society organizations in democracies that channel the voice and opinions of different social groups on various issues and thereby balance the views of the state (Oxenstierna 2014). In other words, GONGOs are not a counterbalance to the state in Russia and their ability to influence decision making is limited at best. Instead, Russia can use GONGOs to interact with civil society organizations in democracies around the world, since they represent a different platform to work from than formal state structures. Credibility has become an important resource in projecting soft power (Nye 2008: 100). Think tanks and GONGOs with experts who are well regarded therefore become a strategic asset for a government that wants its public diplomacy efforts to succeed.

The agency Rossotrudnichestvo, which comes under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was established by presidential decree (No. 1315, 6 September) in 2008. It is responsible for promoting a positive image of Russia abroad, primarily among Russians and Russian-speakers, but also in more general terms, for example, by supporting Russian cultural initiatives abroad and proficiency in the Russian language. There is a clear focus on the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), where Rossotrudnichestvo has established Russian Science and Culture Centres. According to the information on its website, Rossotrudnichestvo is represented in 80 countries around the world and has representatives in 21 Russian embassies. In line with the wording of the Foreign Policy Concept (2016) the agency and its missions abroad are active in promoting "an objective image of

contemporary Russia" (Rossotrudnichestvo, "About"; "Public Diplomacy"; van Herpen 2015: 35–7). One indication that Rossotrudnichestvo is directing its activity primarily towards a Russian-speaking audience is the fact that the English version of the agency's website appears not to have been language-edited.

Another important organization is the Russkiy Mir Foundation, which aims to promote the Russian language and culture abroad. It was created by presidential decree in 2007 (No. 796, 21 June) and is funded through the federal budget, voluntary contributions and "other sources in accordance with Russian legislation". Responsible ministries are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Science. One of the missions of the foundation is to contribute to distributing objective information about Russia and Russian compatriots as well as to forming a positive view of Russia among the public. Its activities are, however, primarily geared towards a Russian-speaking community (Russkiy Mir Foundation, "O fonde"; van Herpen 2015: 37–8).

Russian public diplomacy directed at an English-speaking audience through think tanks and GONGOs has not been so thoroughly examined. Tomila Lankina and Kinga Niemczyk (2015: 105) identify a number of toolkits to project soft power, such as "vertically integrated propaganda networks". These networks can include state authorities, state-organized think tanks and research institutes. The aim is to promote a positive image of Russia and its policies abroad as well as to counter Western soft power.

The Iron Curtain that used to separate the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact countries from Western Europe no longer exists. In other words, Russia can easily reach a Russian-language community outside Russia as well (Pynnöniemi 2016: 47). However, to reach a wider audience internationally, it needs to publish and organize events at least in English as well as to be active on social media using English. Public diplomacy directed at an English-speaking audience is directed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and think tanks or GONGOs with strong links to it as well as to the Presidential Administration. The think tanks and GONGOs selected below are all funded by or dependent upon the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Presidential Administration or individuals close to these entities.

In addition there are academic research institutes like the MGIMO (Moskovskii gosudarstvennyi institut mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii), which is Russia's leading institute for the study of international relations. Similar institutions for the study of international politics exist at other institutes as well, for example at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) and the above-mentioned Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies. In this overview, however, an analytical choice has been made to focus on think tanks rather than on academic institutions, and especially on the think tanks that are clearly geared towards an international audience. However, it is important to note that there are links between individual researchers at, for example, the MGIMO and the HSE, and different GONGOs. Several of the think tanks below, not least the Russian International Affairs

Council (RIAC) and the *Council for Foreign and Defense Policy* (SVOP), include experts from the MGIMO and the HSE and cooperate closely with the academic world.

3 The financing of think tanks

As with the situation internationally, the financing of think tanks and other forms of GONGOs in Russia is usually mixed. Part comes from the government and the rest from private actors and clients, usually big business. There is furthermore a wide array of research foundations and grant operators – something that makes it difficult to determine exactly how a particular think tank funds its activities. In some cases it is absolutely clear that state funding accounts for the bulk of funding or, in the case of the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI), all of it. State funding comes from the government, for example from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or from the president, channelled mainly through the President's Directorate for Administrative Questions (UDPRF). These funds in turn are often operated through mediators. Thus, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs funds the work of the Gorchakov Fund, which in turn grants funding to think tanks and GONGOs. The UDPRF funds a number of research institutes, among them the RISI and the HSE, but from April 2017 also channels money to the Fund for Presidential Grants for the Development of Civil Society (Presidential Order No. 93).

Private funding may be in the form of grants and support from businesses and individuals or in the form of paid assignments and commercial services that the GONGO provides. For example, the RIAC has 50-50 per cent state-private funding. Part of the money comes from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Presidential Order No. 67, 22 February 2012). The structure of the funding of the Valdai Club, created in 2004, is probably similar (van Herpen 2015: 59–62). The think tank Dialogue of Civilizations (DOC) is managed by the former chairman of Russian Railways, Vladimir Yakunin, who is probably key to the financing of this think tank (see section 4.7 below for details).

It is, however, important to keep in mind that much of the funding that these GONGOs receive from commercial entities would not happen if there were not a clear understanding that these think tanks are closely connected to the political leadership. Any funding of the activity of alternative think tanks to those favoured by the political leadership could be considerable risk for any company. On the other hand, we may assume that contributing to activities that *do* enjoy the trust and patronage of the political leadership could give both enterprises and individual businessmen advantages.[2]

State funding takes the form of direct funding as well as grants that are government-controlled, but some is disbursed through intermediate organizations that are linked to the Kremlin (Vojtišková et al. 2016: 29–30). The problem of the opacity of funding for think tank activities is in no way unique to Russia

[2] On how these kinds of informal relationships and power networks between business and government form an integral part of Russian governance, see Ledeneva 2013.

(Transparify 2016) and it is difficult to obtain exact information on how much funds different NGOs and GONGOs get from the state.

Similarly, Dialogue of Civilizations appears remarkably wealthy as think tanks go judging from its wide-ranging activity, but the only information available on funding leads to a foundation with a similar name in Switzerland.[3]

The fact that a considerable share of the work of think tanks is funded through sponsorship and grants from big business with strong links to the political leadership suggests that the exact share of state funding is less important. In a political system where economic and political activity are intrinsically linked, the fact that business finances a think tank does not mean that it is therefore more independent of the political leadership.

There are signs that the funding of entities such as the Russkiy Mir Foundation, Rossotrudnichestvo and the Gorchakov Fund has increased. Rossotrudnichestvo's budget was around €24 million in 2013 and was set to increase to €113.8million (0.1 per cent of Russia's GDP) in 2020 (Vojtišková et al. 2016: 43). Hudson (2017: 30) reported that Rossotrudnichestvo receives $95.5 million per year, the Russkiy Mir Foundation $15 million, and the Gorchakov Foundation for Public Diplomacy $2 million. However, in comparison to what other countries spend on soft power instruments the Russian numbers are still quite modest. In the budget year 2015–2016 the British Council received €210 million from the government, and its total income for those years was €1.2 billion. Likewise the Goethe Institute received €213 million from the German Foreign Office in 2014–2015 (Vojtišková et al. 2016: 29).

Also important to keep in mind is the introduction of the 2012 law on "foreign agents",[4] referring to NGOs with foreign funding that have to register with the Ministry of Justice. The law has severely restricted the activities and existence of such NGOs. Generally after the law was enforced NGOs became more dependent on domestic funding and the Presidential Administration increased its capacity to distribute presidential grants. In 2016 nine grant operators distributed presidential grants to a total of RUB 4.6 billion (Nagornykh 2017). In 2017, the overall sum was set do decrease somewhat, to RUB 4.3 billion, at the same time as control over

[3] In effect, there is probably a wider financial network behind Dialogue of Civilizations, with Vladimir Yakunin in the centre. Apart from his international think tank, Yakunin is a key person in two domestic think tanks with a Russian Orthodox and patriotic agenda, the Foundation of Saint Andrew the First-Called (*Fond Andreia Pervozvannogo*) and the Centre for National Glory (*Tsentr natsionalnoi slavy*), which are connected to the Millennium Bank, the banking licence of which was revoked in February 2016 by the Bank of Russia (2016). Millennium Bank, in turn, was closely connected to Russian Railways (Golunov & Galakshionova 2016).

[4] "On Amendments to Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation regarding the Regulation of the Activities of Non-profit Organisations Performing the Functions of a Foreign Agent", FZ-121, 20 July 2012.

distribution was centralized in the Fund for Presidential Grants for the Development of Civil Society. The NGOs to receive grants were to be confirmed by the deputy head of the Presidential Administration, Sergei Kirienko (Mukhametshina & Churakova 2017; TASS 2017). In addition to this, think tanks promoting a political agenda that is in line with official policy can continue to receive funding from abroad without ending up on the "foreign agents" list (Kolezev 2015).

The overall trend in recent years has been for individual grants to become larger and the grant operators to become more specialized. Human rights activists complain about the lack of transparency in the distribution of grants (Nagornykh 2017) and patriotic organizations appear to have been given priority over traditional NGOs focusing on, for example, human rights, democracy and the environment (Mukhametshina 2015). Although presidential grants for civil society are probably not the primary source for financing any of the think tanks studied below, it is safe to assume that most think tanks with generous funding have been forced to adapt to the current political climate in Russia.

4 Case studies

This section now looks in greater detail into nine organizations that bear the characteristics of think tanks or are organizations with similar qualities.[5] These are listed in Table 1 and are discussed as case studies below. Most importantly these organizations have activities that address experts, policymakers, or students in the West. Three of the organizations chosen are ranked in the GGTTI: the Russian International Affairs Council, Rethinking Russia and the Council for Foreign and Defence Policy (McGann 2017). The GGTTI ranking can be criticized for the way in which it categorizes some of the think tanks and the methodology does not include an in-depth study of the quality of output. Nevertheless, it provides an impression of how individual think tanks are rated by the Western expert community.

The GGTTI also ranks some leading Russian research centres that are not discussed in this study. These are the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) and the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE). We have made the analytical choice not to include these research centres because these institutes and universities are academic and cover a multitude of disciplines and topics rather than just focusing on international relations. In the case of the MGIMO and the HSE they are also elite universities. Instead our focus lies on smaller think tanks with a clearer focus on outreach to the international audience. However, it may be noted that many experts at the MGIMO, IMEMO and HSE contribute to the activities of the think tanks studied quite frequently and are part of their pools of experts. Another important think tank that is missing below is the Carnegie Moscow Center, which is one of the most influential today. However, this think tank is part of the International Carnegie Endowment for International Peace which is a global network of policy research centres and is therefore not included in this study, which is devoted to Russian think tanks.

The weight of the different think tanks also depends on whether they are able to influence decision making in their own country (Koshkin 2016; Krastev 2001). When it comes to foreign policy, it seems that most Russian think tanks are not involved in providing expert advice to the government or the president. This may be because Russian decision making on foreign policy is a closed process relying to a considerable degree on secret information (Koshkin 2016; Hedenskog, Persson & Vendil Pallin 2016: 99–100). However, think tanks can be instrumental in helping a government to reach specific foreign policy goals, to build networks

[5] At the beginning of this study the organization Roscongress was also included among the organizations selected, but it was later excluded since it is not a think tank but rather a professional event organizer, mainly for business events.

with international researchers and influence their agendas, as well as shaping media reporting and public opinion in other countries.

Table 1. Selected think tanks[6]

Think tank	Objectives/Target groups	Characteristics
4.1 Russian International Affairs Council, RIAC Rossiiskii sovet po mezh-dunarodnym delam, RCMD	International experts and policy environment	A think tank with a network of foreign affairs and security policy experts. Established by President Medvedev.
4.2 Valdai Club	International experts and indirectly also policy environment	Founded by SVOP, MGIMO and HSE. Link to the President through yearly Valdai conference.
4.3 Council for Foreign and Defense Policy, CFDP Sovet po vneshnei i oboronnoi politike, SVOP	Influence experts and policy makers	Founded 1992 by experts and officials at power ministries and journalists.
4.4 Gorchakov Fund Fond Gorchakova	Public diplomacy towards civil society	Founded by President Medvedev 2010. Closely linked to Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
4.5 Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, RISS Rossiiskii institut strategich-eskikh issledovanii, RISI	Internationally active, e.g. through RISI centres abroad	Established by President Putin. Linked to SVR, financed by the President's Directorate for Administrative Questions.
4.6 Rethinking Russia	Influence experts and policy-makers	Probably founded by the ISEPR think tank. Described as "International Analytical Center". Cooperation with VTsIOM.
4.7 Dialogue of Civilizations (DOC)	Influence experts and policy-makers	Founded by Vladimir Yakunin, former chair of Russian Railways, with close ties to President Putin
4.8 Institute of Democracy and Cooperation (IDC)	Influence experts and policy environment	Institutes in Paris and New York to balance the EU's promotion of democracy and human rights in Russia.
4.9 Information Security Institute Institut problem informats-ionnoi bezopasnosti, IISI	Influence experts and policy environment on information security	Institute at Moscow State University.

[6] Generally, we have opted to use Russian acronyms throughout the report. Three exceptions have been made. The Russian International Affairs Council is widely referred to as RIAC in the West. The think tanks Dialogue of Civilizations (DOC) and Institute of Democracy and Cooperation (IDC) do not really have activities in Russia and therefore there is little sense in using Russian acronyms for these.

4.1 Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC)

The Russian International Affairs Council is a non-profit academic and diplomatic think tank that was established by the resolution of its founders pursuant to Presidential Order No. 59, dated 2 February 2010, "On the Establishment of the Non-profit Partnership 'Russian International Affairs Council'". It operates as a link between the government, academia, business and civil society in an effort to provide foreign policy proposals on complex problems. The RIAC's mission is to facilitate Russia's peaceful integration into the global community, partly by facilitating greater cooperation between Russian scientific institutions and foreign analytical centres and scholars on the major issues of international relations (RIAC, website).

About 50 per cent of the RIAC's funding comes from the state and 50 per cent from assignments from mainly big business and the regions. Judging from its publications, the RIAC appears to be relatively independent when taking part in public debate. The office employs about 35 staff but the organization relies on hundreds of experts to cover different issues. The think tank forms "ad hoc groups" that work and write together on different topics and they have cooperated with different people in academia (interview). The link to the president and the government implies certain restrictions when it comes to topics, but it also means that the RIAC has access to the highest echelons of power. On the RIAC's presidium are to be found Igor Ivanov, who is president of the RIAC but also former minister of foreign affairs; Andrei Kortunov, who is director general of the RIAC; Fyodor Lukyanov, with leading positions in both the Valdai Club and SVOP; Petr Aven, who is one of Russia's most prominent representatives of big business, especially Alfa Bank; Aleksei Meshkov, who is deputy minister of foreign affairs; and Dmitrii Peskov, who is deputy head of the Presidential Administration and Putin's press secretary (RIAC, "Presidium").

The fact that RIAC members have these close links to the Russian political leadership is interesting to a Western audience – they promise something of interest and unique insights to contribute to the discussions at seminars and conferences. However, according to the RIAC, it does not take on an advocacy role, i.e. it does not advocate on specific policy questions or positions. Instead it contributes analyses in debates (interview).

RIAC staff and experts participated in Medvedev's reform programme in 2009–2010 and today they are participating in the developing of a new economic strategy under Alexei Kudrin, a former minister of finance. The RIAC has ambitions to be seen on the global scene and has projects with other countries e.g. Turkey, the UK and Latvia (interview). Yet most of the partners listed on the RIAC's website are Russian. There are academic and educational organizations such as the HSE, but

also Rossotrudnichestvo, the Gorchakov Fund and media outlets such as RIA Novosti and RT[7] (RIAC, website).

The channels used by the RIAC to distribute its message are different kinds of projects, publications and other activities. Projects include "Russia and the Euro-Atlantic Community", "Roadmap for International Cooperation in the Arctic" and "Development of Russian-Chinese Relations". The institute produces RIAC reports, working papers and policy briefs. Publications are available in English on the website. Most are written by Russian experts working at different institutes and organizations that RIAC cooperates with. Other activities include meetings with Russian and foreign politicians, world economy sessions, talks to ambassadors and civil dialogue sessions (RIAC, website).

The RIAC is one of the think tanks that make it into the top sub-lists of the GGTTI, for example, under "Top Foreign Policy and International Affairs Think Tanks", where in 2016 it was ranked 133 of 135. In the regional index for think tanks in Central and Eastern Europe, the RIAC came in 82nd out of 90 think tanks (McGann 2017: 66, 86).

Although the RIAC claims it does not have an advocacy role, it is clear that certain narratives are more prevalent than others. The very fact that it has access to active and former politicians who are still considered to have a certain leverage in the Russian political system is one reason why it is influential. Although the RIAC certainly directs much of its activity at a domestic audience, its strong point when it comes Russian soft power is its ability to attract the leading Russian experts on international affairs as well as high-level political participation. This makes it an attractive cooperation partner in the West.

4.2 Valdai Club

The Valdai Club was created in 2004 and is best known for the annual conference that it organizes for the Russian president in October every year. The name is derived from Lake Valdai, close to which the first conference was held in 2004. The first conferences were more informal sessions than the well-directed media event that the Valdai Conference had developed into by October 2016 (President of Russia 2016).

In 2011, the Foundation for Development and Support of the Valdai Discussion Club was created in order to expand activities to research and outreach work, and regional and thematic programmes. In 2014, this foundation took over management of the Valdai Club's projects. The founders listed on the Valdai

[7] RT is the main Russian English-language news channel which gives the Russian view on global news.

website include the RIAC, the HSE, the MGIMO and SVOP (Valdai Club, "About").

Apart from the annual conference in October, the Valdai Club organizes three regional conferences, the Asian, Middle Eastern and Transatlantic dialogues. It also regularly sets up a special Valdai Club session during the Saint Petersburg Economic Forum each year. According to the Valdai Club it does not receive state funding for these activities but relies on large companies for this (interview). The website of the Valdai Club lists as partners two banks (Alfa-Bank and VTB) and two metallurgical companies (Severstal and Metalloinvest) and the charity fund Renova (Valdai Club, "About").[8]

The executive leadership team of the Valdai Club includes its director, Andrey Bystritskiy, with a background overwhelmingly in the media; Nadezhda Lavrentieva, who is executive director and has a background in media; Fyodor Lukyanov, who is academic director and a journalist by training (see also his role in SVOP and as editor of the journal *Russia in Global Affairs* below); and Leonid Burmistrov, who is advisor to Lavrentieva and has a background in media, especially in public relations (Valdai Club, "Executive Team").

Fyodor Lukyanov acknowledges that the club used to publish information that was more geared towards promoting a positive image of Russia (interview). On its website, the Valdai Club describes this as having gone from a format where the emphasis was on telling "the story of Russia to the world" to concentrating on the practical work of setting the global agenda (Valdai Club, "About"). Lukyanov underlines that the Valdai Club does not want to be compared to propaganda organs such as the state-controlled television channel RT or the RISI (interview).

The aim of the regular work of the Valdai Club has thus evolved into functioning as a platform for Russian as well as foreign academics, "to promote a dialogue between the Russian and international intellectual elite and an objective scientific analysis of the political, economic and social events in Russia and the world" (Valdai Club, "About"). The emphasis on promoting an "objective" analysis of Russia is similar to the wording in the Foreign Policy Concept, which stresses the need to deliver "unbiased information" about Russia's position on international affairs as well as to ensure that the international community has an "objective image" of Russia (*Foreign Policy Concept* 2016: §§46–48).

The publications of the Valdai Club are available in both English and Russian and its Facebook page publishes news and links in English (Facebook "Valdai…"). There are three Valdai publications series: Expert Opinions, Valdai Papers and Reports. In addition, the chairman of the foundation, Andrey Bystritskiy, writes

[8] All the banks and companies above are owned by so-called oligarchs, i.e. people with an influential position in big business and close connections to the political leadership.

"Messages from the Chairman" that are published on the website. All of these publications are produced with high-quality layout and are language-edited.

Starting in 2017, the Valdai Club will make an award to Russian and international experts who have made a significant contribution to thinking about world politics. An academy of 30 experts of the Valdai Club has been specially created to nominate candidates for the award (TASS 2016).

The Valdai Club is an example of how communities of experts overlap and are dependent upon each other. SVOP, the RIAC, the MGIMO, IMEMO and the HSE were all founding members of the Valdai Club in its present form (from 2014) and Fyodor Lukyanov is an influential member of SVOP as well as academic director of the Valdai Club. It does not engage in propaganda, but at the same time the Valdai publications echo many of the views promoted by Russia internationally, and the global agenda that Russia would like to promote. Although formally not a government organization, the greatest asset for the Valdai Club is its annual presidential conference. Its link to the president and the visibility that it brings are important components in attracting leading experts to engage with the Valdai Club and probably also attract funding from commercial companies. Another important asset is the high quality of the layout and language-editing of its publications. In spite of this, the Valdai Club is not mentioned in the GGTTI rating.

4.3 Council for Foreign and Defense Policy (SVOP)

The Council for Foreign and Defence Policy was created in 1992 as a non-government organization according to the council's website. Its founding members were a group of policymakers and businessmen as well as people from the so-called power ministries (e.g. the Ministry of Defence and security and intelligence services), the defence industry, the scientific community and the mass media (SVOP, "About"). This council quickly acquired an influential role not least since there were few similar organizations in Russia just after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It was active in proposing policies and strategic concepts in the security policy sphere. As new competing institutions emerged with a similar agenda, it lost some of its influence, but there is a considerable overlap in membership between it and, for example, the RIAC. There is little or no information on who funds its activities, but among its partners the council lists the Valdai Club and the journal *Russia in Global Affairs*, the newspapers *Voenno-promyshlennyi kurer* (VPK) and *Rossiiskaia gazeta* (RG) and the news agency RIA Novosti (SVOP, "Partnery"). VPK is closely connected to the Russian defence industry whereas RG and RIA Novosti are both government-controlled news outlets. According to SVOP's website, its work is financed through sponsorship, grants and donations from individuals and NGOs (SVOP, "About").

At first sight, SVOP does not appear to direct its activity primarily towards a Western audience. Its website and Facebook page are almost entirely in Russian and its publications primarily in Russian. In other words, much of its activity is geared towards a domestic audience and, more specifically, towards the Russian expert community. What makes the council interesting in spite of this is that it appears to remain an important network for Russian experts. Most importantly, its former and current figureheads like Sergei Karaganov and Fyodor Lukyanov are well known to an international audience and often participate in international conferences and seminars. The journal *Russia in Global Affairs*, which is closely affiliated with both SVOP and the RIAC, is published in both Russian and English. Its editor-in-chief, Fyodor Lukyanov, is head of the presidium of SVOP. *Russia in Global Affairs* is one of few Russian journals that reach an English-speaking community. Its editorial board includes renowned international scholars as well as former and current dignitaries from countries like the US, Germany, Finland and Sweden. Also represented are Russian scholars and people from the Presidential Administration, the minister of foreign affairs, Sergei Lavrov, and the former minister of foreign affairs, Igor Ivanov. It is furthermore a journal in which prominent international academics publish articles (*Russia in Global Affairs*).

Furthermore, in the GGTTI ranking of think tanks SVOP makes it into a number of "sub-lists". For example, it is ranked 41 out of 135 under "Top Foreign Policy and International Affairs Think Tanks"; and it is ranked as 58th of 110 under "Top Think Tank by Area Research" (McGann 2017: 72, 84). It is furthermore ranked at 24 out of 75 "Best Government Affiliated Think Tanks" as well as 107 out of 150 "Best Independent Think Tanks (McGann 2017: 106, 144). This ranking probably highlights two aspects of studying think tanks and their activities. First, the international expert community is probably slow to pick up how the influence of an individual think tank changes domestically. Second, categorizing think tanks is difficult.

4.4 Gorchakov Fund

The Gorchakov Fund was established in 2010. The objective of the fund is to engage in public diplomacy. Financing is mixed, coming from the state and undefined sponsors. The work of the fund is disbursing grants to NGOs in Russia and abroad. Projects are funded after an application procedure where projects compete for grants. The fund runs about 260 projects in 20 thematic areas yearly (interview). There are dialogue projects with different countries, regions and topics, and there are academic and educational projects. There are also projects facilitating mobility and travel of experts and students (Gorchakov Fund, website).

The fund supports what it calls NGOs in Russia and abroad; however, this category also includes work with other groups such as parliamentarians. The Gorchakov Fund works with young people of different ages and supports youth centres at

universities (interview). Partners are the RIAC, Rossotrudnichestvo, the Russkiy Mir Foundation and the MGIMO (Gorchakov Fund, website).

The Gorchakov Fund works with different countries and regions. For example, it has cooperation with France, Finland, China, Iran, Central Asia and the Baltic states. It has a cooperation scheme with German parliamentarians in the so-called "Postdamskie vstrechi" where German and Russian members of Parliament meet twice a year in Russia and Germany (interview). The fund has an Information Centre in Kyiv and a Russian-Georgian/Georgian-Russian Public Centre in Tbilisi which was founded in July 2013 (Gorchakov Fund, website). It does not have any publication series of its own.

During the first three years of the fund's existence, activities included about 300 participants from CIS and the Baltic countries and Eastern and Southern Europe who became alumni of the fund's research and educational programmes. Many of them continue to maintain a close relationship with the fund, supporting its cooperation with NGOs and universities. In 2013 a decision was made to create a Club of Friends of the Gorchakov Fund and invite the most active young participants of the research and educational programmes for cooperation. The club takes part in roundtables, presentations and other events that are organized on various Russian and foreign platforms (Gorchakov Fund, website).

The Gorchakov Fund appears to have a broad approach and there is no very strict focus or mission. It targets youth organizations, which indicates that it wants to build networks for years ahead, but it also engages with established actors like parliamentarians. Public diplomacy may come in a variety of aspects but the representatives the authors met in the interviews in 2017 gave few concrete examples of with whom they actually work. This organization might work with foreign political parties and their youth organizations or with foreign NGOs attempting to influence public opinion or supporting activism in different fields; however, this could not be proved during his study.

4.5 Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI)

The Russian Institute for Strategic Studies was founded by Presidential Decree No. 202 of 29 February 1992. From 1992 to 2009, the RISI was an institute under the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR). Even after the institute was tasked with providing the Presidential Administration in particular with analyses, its directors have had an SVR background. Leonid Reshetnikov attained the rank of lieutenant-general within the SVR before going on to head the RISI from 2009 to 2016; Mikhail Fradkov headed the SVR from 2007 to 2016 and took over as director of the RISI in January 2017.

The RISI is entirely state-funded and its director is appointed through presidential decrees (RISI Statutes; UDPRF, "Perechen…"). Its funding is channelled through the Office for Administrative Affairs of the President of the Russian Federation and the RISI supplies the federal organs of power with analytical information for strategic decisions on national security policy (UDPRF, "Federalnoe…"). It appears to have become one of the main institutes for reviewing policy documents (interview) and is the think tank that is most likely to influence Russian foreign policymaking since its analyses are circulated within the Presidential Administration, the Security Council and government.

According to a former senior researcher at the RISI, the think tank provided analysis and advice on Ukraine that was very much in line with the Russian foreign policy conducted. The former senior researcher, Aleksandr Sytin (2015), claims that under Reshetnikov the institute changed its research direction and became preoccupied with Russian imperial history as well as the Russian Orthodox Church. Although Sytin can perhaps be argued to have an axe to grind with the RISI after having left the institute, a quick browse through the publications on the institute's website suggests that his claim is at least partly true. Whether the RISI's research direction will change again under Fradkov remains to be seen.

According to the RISI statutes adopted in 2012, the institute is tasked by the Presidential Administration and the themes in this tasking order are not open information. The organization of the institute into a number of centres suggests that focus themes are research on "the near abroad" (the CIS and the Baltic states), economics, Euro-Atlantic and defence studies as well as Asia and the Middle East. There is also a Centre for Research on Complex Problems, which appears to concentrate on domestic problems as well as migration and demographics (RISI 2017b).

The tasks of the institute according to its statutes are:

- researching current international and military-political problems; the military and military-industrial policy of the leading countries in the world; the future development of bilateral relations between Russia and other states; and the social-political situation in the "near abroad";
- expertise in and evaluation of Russia's security policy;
- studying the development of international economic relations, the development of the world economy and the economic policy of Russia's main partners; and
- analysis and forecasting of developments in certain countries where crises could erupt as well as developing proposals for how to handle such situations.

In order to fulfil these tasks, the RISI conducts research, gathers information and develops relations with institutions of higher education in Russia and other

countries. It can also establish formal cooperation agreements with Russian and foreign research centres (RISI Statutes).

On its Facebook page, the RISI comments mainly in Russian on international affairs and informs about its own work (Facebook "RISI") and its journal *Problemy natsionalnoi strategii* (National Strategy Issues) is published in Russian with a short description of its content in English. The journal invites authors from Russia and from other countries, but with the caveat that: "The RISI team feel free to express their patriotic positions and invite everyone for cooperation. Everyone who is fond of Russia" (RISI, "Journal"). Its other publications, for example its books series and reports, are mostly in Russian with only a few reports available in English. All in all, this suggests that a Russian-speaking audience is the main target for the RISI's analytical activity.

The RISI is also active in different formats within the CIS and the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). For example, the RISI has run a School for Young Political Scientists especially for participants from the CIS countries since 2012 (RISI, "School"). There is furthermore a clear focus on the former republics of the Soviet Union as well as on Eurasian integration. However, the institute reaches out beyond the CIS not least through its representatives in Turkey, Poland, France and the countries of Northern Europe. The RISI has a representative office in Serbia, (RISI, "Contacts"; RISI, "Kapnist"). In addition, it often receives visits from representatives of other countries in Moscow and there are examples of RISI associates taking part in conferences abroad. For example, Vladimir Kozin, who is presented as the main advisor to the RISI director, delivered a talk at the conference "The North – a Zone of Peace" in Stockholm on 4 February 2017. His talk centred on the danger that the US and NATO posed to the world (Kozin 2017).

A study from 2016 highlights that one of the things that set the RISI apart from other institutions is its production of propaganda video material (Vojtíšková et al. 2016: 51). What is probably meant here is "RISI TV", which produces YouTube clips publicizing the RISI's activities as well as its view on topical issues. Its motto is "We know more" (RISITV, website). According to Mark Galeotti at the Institute of International Relations Prague and the Centre for European Security, the RISI remains the SVR's PR arm. "From warning against Sweden and Finland joining NATO to damning the 'terrorists' of Ukraine, its position is in step with official policy and Foreign Intelligence Service analysis" (Galeotti 2016: 12).

In 2017, the RISI was furthermore accused of having advised the Presidential Administration on how to interfere in the US elections. A Reuters article claimed that a RISI document from June 2016 argued in favour of launching a campaign through social media to promote presidential candidates believed to stand for a softer approach towards Russia (*Reuters* 2017). A second analysis from October 2016 reportedly reached the conclusion that Hillary Clinton was likely to win and that the best strategy therefore was to undermine the legitimacy of the US election

and political system rather than focus on pro-Trump propaganda (Parker, Landay & Walcott 2017). These allegations were ridiculed by Russian officials, including Mikhail Fradkov in a statement on the institute's website (RISI 2017a).

In early May 2017, Mikhail Fradkov launched a reorganization of the institute. There were to be two main directions of its research. A regional direction was divided into six centres for studying the US; Canada and Latin America; Europe; Central Asia and Asia-Pacific; the Near East and Middle East; Africa; and the countries of the "near abroad". A functional direction was divided into a centre for humanitarian, one for economic, and one for military-political research (RISI 2017b). Furthermore, during the reorganization a new scientific plan was to be developed in order to "significantly raise the productivity and quality of the expert work" (RISI 2017b). New directors often want to put their stamp on an organization and point out a new direction, but the emphasis on raising quality and productivity nevertheless suggests that there might have been a level dissatisfaction with previous work in the RISI. This was underlined by the comment of Mikhail Fradkov that accompanied the RISI announcement of the reorganization. After stating that the institute had become the target of information provocations he stated that there was a need to be "more professional" so that there would be no need "to refute wild guesses" (RISI 2017b).[9]

4.6 Rethinking Russia

Rethinking Russia has its roots in another think tank, the Institute of Social-Economic and Political Research (ISEPR). When you sign up to receive Rethinking Russia's newsletter, you receive a thank-you in response from the ISEPR. The ISEPR has been mainly involved in Russian domestic politics and is closely connected to the All-Russia People's Front (ONF)[10] and to the speaker of the Duma, Viacheslav Volodin, who was behind the setting up of the ONF when he was deputy head of the Presidential Administration and responsible for monitoring Russian domestic politics.

The ISEPR was instrumental in creating Rethinking Russia, which directs part of its efforts abroad. The ISEPR chairman, Dmitrii Badovskii, plays a more influential role in Russian politics than his formal position suggests. He has been directly involved in setting up political parties to dilute the vote for the opposition in Russia (Vendil Pallin 2016). In 2013, Putin issued a presidential order (No. 115, 29 March) that made the ISEPR Foundation one of the recipients of the "presidential grant". In addition, a presidential executive order in January 2014

[9] The RISI tried to establish a regional centre for Northern Europe with an office in Helsinki, managed by the Finnish researcher Johan Bäckman. This idea appears to have been abandoned; there is no information on such a centre on the RISI's website.

[10] The ONF was established in 2011 as an additional election vehicle for the re-election of Vladimir Putin.

entrusted the ISEPR (2015b) with distributing state support to NGOs "that implement socially important projects and projects in the field of protection of the rights and freedoms of man and citizen".

In 2015, the ISEPR brought together a group of Russian and international researchers, referred to as "Klub 21", and presented a volume entitled *Democracies XXI: A Paradigm Shift* (ISEPR 2015a). Volodin was among those who attended the launch of the research volume. According to the initiators, Rethinking Russia was created as an alternative to the Valdai Club. The intention was to specialize in domestic politics based on scientific research and to bring to a Russian and international audience a "more informed view" of how Russia's political system was evolving. There appeared to be an ambition to relaunch or rebrand the idea of a Russian "sovereign democracy" as being equally valid as the liberal democracy promoted by the West. Offices were reportedly opened in Moscow and Brussels (Nagornykh 2015; Shevchuk 2015).

Its director in the years 2015–2017 was Yan Vaslavskii, who came from a position at the MGIMO. The current director is Alexander Konkov who came to it from a position as deputy head of the Department of Political Analysis of the Faculty of Public Administration at Moscow State University. He had furthermore been an advisor to the executive director of the Gorchakov Fund (*Rethinking Russia* 2017).

The English website of Rethinking Russia states that this international analytical centre "takes as a premise" that there is (a) a strong interdependence between domestic and foreign policies; (b) a need for dialogue between Russia and the West "in a new format of relationship"; and (c) a "current crisis of Russian studies, lack of profound expert support for decisions on Russia in the West" (Rethinking Russia, "About"). The Facebook page of Rethinking Russia notes that there are many analysts in the West who are sympathetic to Russia or objective, analysts who have an interest in arriving at a conclusion as to what is "the true state of affairs in Russia". These analysts are, according to Rethinking Russia, often hindered from making their analyses public and forced to adapt to the "mainstream" (Facebook "Rethinking Russia").

The same message is underlined in the study *Think Tank Atlas: Russian Studies Abroad*, published by Rethinking Russia in 2016. The study lists over 600 think tanks outside Russia that occasionally to frequently publish on Russia. They are a motley crew – everything from government agencies to single-person institutes is included and in the appendix some institutes appear to have been registered twice. In addition to the database on think tanks, the study builds on interviews conducted especially in the US, large European countries and Asia. The study concludes that after the Cold War the countries in the West especially downsized their respective Russia studies programmes. This has, according to the study, "led to the disintegration of the expert community working on Russia and the gradually declining quality of expertise on Russia". In turn, the study concludes that this has

had a negative effect on Russian public diplomacy and Russia's image abroad (Rethinking Russia 2016: 71).

> As expert interviews show, the decision-makers in Europe are strongly influenced by the media. However, it is important that foreign think tanks rely heavily on studies and comments of their Russian colleagues. In this context it is valid for Russian "think tanks" to cover the events in Russia for the international research community.
> (Ibid: 72)

In other words, Rethinking Russia claims that it is a dearth of knowledge in the West that is behind Russia's poor image abroad rather than an informed analysis of Russia's policies and activities at home and abroad. This brings to mind the emphasis in the Foreign Policy Concept on the need for Russia to project an "objective" image (*Foreign Policy Concept* 2016: §§46–48).

In its publications as well as its communications through social media, it is obvious that the core message is to relay Russia's perspective on world affairs. It is especially worth noting how much effort went into promoting the Russian parliamentary elections in September 2016 as effective and democratic. Putin is quoted extensively in publications and on social media, as is Viacheslav Volodin on the website. Moreover, Rethinking Russia's Facebook page was active in distributing messages and analyses about how American democracy was seriously flawed during the US election campaign (Facebook "Rethinking Russia", 2 August 2016) and interpreted Donald Trump's victory as evidence of the "deep systemic crisis in American society" (Facebook "Rethinking Russia", 14 November 2016). The conclusions of the Dutch investigation into what brought down flight MH17 are dismissed as "no surprise considering the seething anti-Russia hysteria that has gripped the Western imagination of late" (Facebook "Rethinking Russia", 29 September 2016).

Rethinking Russia is geared towards both a domestic and an international audience. This is indicated by the fact that its website, its Facebook page and its journal, *Rethinking Russia*, are all published in both English and Russian. The think tank has taken part in conferences abroad and seeks to engage with the international research community. It has managed to attract international researchers to write articles or chapters in its publications.

Rethinking Russia and the ISEPR publish a yearbook, *Surprising Russia*, together with the opinion survey institute Russian Opinion Research Centre (VTsIOM) and the coordination centre "Platform". In *Surprising Russia 2015*, the head of VTsIOM, Valerii Fedorov, starts by establishing that the sociology developed in the West cannot be applied to Russia – that another approach is required (Firsov et al. 2016: 3) and Dmitrii Badovskii ends his introduction to *Surprising Russia 2015* by stating that the publication has "the potential to become a manual for policymakers" by helping them to understand Russia (Firsov et al. 2016: 7). *Surprising Russia* contains a number of opinion polls in selected years, but usually

not entire time series that would show how polling results have fluctuated over time. Instead the reader is presented with the marked difference in expressed opinions in 2014–2015 compared to individual years, sometimes as far back as 1990. The book also contains expert opinions, sometimes commenting on the findings in opinion polls, but often not. For example, the section on Ukraine contains opinion polls among Russians on the war in Donbas, while expert opinions conclude that Ukraine has "lost its sovereignty to outer forces" since Washington and Brussels dictate Ukraine's domestic and foreign policy (Firsov et al. 2016: 40) and that Euromaidan was the result of Western meddling (Firsov et al. 2016: 36). This is very much in line with how the chain of events leading up to the war in Ukraine is described in Russia's National Security Strategy, where it is stated that:

> The support of United States and the European Union for an anti-constitutional coup d'état in Ukraine resulted in a deep-going divide in Ukrainian society and that an armed conflict began.
> (National Security Strategy 2015: §17)

From the opinion polls that express increased trust in Vladimir Putin and endorsement of the annexation of Crimea, expert opinion concludes, among other things, that "Russia's political system rests upon the principles of direct democracy" and that "wholesale democratic transformations" had been initiated by the Russian government after the demonstrations in 2011–2012 (Firsov et al. 2016: 72–73). This part of the report appears to have been written to boost the legitimacy of the Russian political system as a whole, but perhaps more specifically its democratic credentials.

In 2017, the GGTTI rating included Rethinking Russia as number 35 of 45 "Best New Think Tanks 2016", but its overall impact on the international academic debate should probably not be overemphasized as yet. Rethinking Russia does stand out as a think tank with a clear mission to promote Russia's view of the world. It is also very vague about its funding and management.

4.7 Dialogue of Civilizations (DOC)

The DOC Research Institute opened officially in Berlin in the summer of 2016 (Schult 2016). According to its website, the think tank was funded through an endowment, the World Public Forum "Dialogue of Civilizations" (WPF DoC), based in Switzerland, as well as through membership fees and sponsorship. The endowment was registered in 2013 by Vladimir Yakunin, the former CEO of Russian Railways (DofC, "WPF…"). However, it is obvious that the DOC Research Institute builds on previous activities. The endowment from the WPF DoC dates back to 2002 and in June 2017 the DOC Research Institute was set to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of its annual Rhodes Forum.

Yakunin is regarded as belonging to an inner circle of the power network around Vladimir Putin and became notorious in Russia for his opulent lifestyle, especially when details of his mansion outside Moscow were published (Gel'man 2016: 457; Schult 2016). His wife, Natalia Yakunina, is chairperson of the WPF DoC and the foundation states that it focuses "on intercultural dialogue according to the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures programme of UNESCO, as well as developing of alternative concepts of world order, such as Chinese dream, Trans-Eurasian Belt Development and world order, based on dialogue and historical traditions" (DofC, "WPF 'Dialogue of Civilizations' today"). The foundation specifically refers to the resolution on a "Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations" adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2001 (UN 2001). The foundation's work is in line with Russia's policy of trying to push the agenda in different UN forums towards civilizational-diversity and traditional-values agendas to challenge what have previously been regarded as universal liberal democratic values (Cooley 2016: 121).

Apart from funding through the WPF DoC endowment, the research centre states that it is funded through membership fees and sponsorship as well as proceeds from publishing and activities arranged by the DOC (DOC, "Funding"). The aim of the DOC is to "offer global policy makers and major multi-national corporations practical advice and solutions" on six topics:

- East and West: Bridging the Postmodern Identity Gap;
- Life Space for Humanity: protecting the Humane in Human Beings;
- Policies, Institutions, and Progress for Global Inclusive Development;
- Civilizations Against the Threat of Social Barbarism;
- Infrastructure as the Backbone of Global Inclusive Development; and
- The Economics of Post-Modernity: When Conventional Models Fail (DOC, "Mission").

Apart from emphasizing diversity and civilizational agendas, the DOC's "paradigm" includes looking for alternative economic models. Thus, in a call for papers under the headline "The Economics of Post-Modernity: When Conventional Models Fail", authors are instructed to consider "novel economic models", "new critiques of neo-liberalism" as well as "non-mainstream economic models" (DOC 2017).

The WPF DoC underlines its connections, however tenuous, with the UN agenda (UN 2001), but is vague on exactly how it cooperates with the UN. Yakunin served in the Soviet diplomatic mission to the UN 1985–1991 and is thus probably well versed in how the organization works. In spite of this, actual traces of cooperation with the UN are not evident from the WPF DoC webpage and there are now representatives of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC),

which it says it enjoys a consultative status in the management of the foundation. The UN is generally well looked upon internationally and stating that an activity or an aim is in accordance with a UN framework or resolution is a way of legitimizing it.

In the first of a promised series of Yakunin speeches published by the DOC in May 2017, he provided a strong advocacy for the Eurasian Union. He stated that there was "a serious shortfall among political scientists capable of adequately carrying out research and providing recommendations to politicians and public officials" when it comes to analysing the dissolution of the Soviet Union and developments in the countries that became independent. To rectify this he announced that there was now "an agreement for implementing a master's degree program in English entitled Post-Soviet Public Policy at the Moscow State University" (Yakunin 2017).

The Dialogue of Civilizations research centre appears to be well funded. Few think tanks around the world invite authors to write papers with a specific angle – usually GONGOs and think tanks spend a great deal of time hunting for commissions instead. Funding of all the activities the DOC engages in is basically done through the foundation WPF DoC, which in turn provides few details about how it was set up financially, but in its origin it is intimately connected with Yakunin and his agenda.

4.8 Institute of Democracy and Cooperation (IDC), Paris

At the EU–Russia Summit in Lisbon in October 2007, President Putin officially launched the Russian initiative to create a "Russian–European institute for freedom and democracy". The EU was active in supporting similar activity in Russia, he stated, and now the time had come for Russia to do the same for the EU by opening an institute in Brussels "or another of the European capitals". Russia was ready to devote the same kind of financial resources as the EU was devoting to activity "on Russian territory" (President of Russia 2007). The Institute of Democracy and Cooperation was founded in 2008 in Paris and the former Duma deputy Natalia Narochnitskaya[11] became its director. An institute with an identical name was created in New York almost simultaneously. Both were supported by Russia's political leadership and intended to serve as an instrument of influence in

[11] Natalia Alekseevna Narotchnitskaya is a Russian politician, historian and diplomat. Between 1982 and 1989 she worked at the Secretariat-General of the UN in New York. She was elected to the Russian State Duma as a representative of the Rodina bloc in 2003–2007 and served as vice-chair of the International Affairs Committee in the State Duma. Narochnitskaya advocates that an indispensable condition for the success of Russia's foreign policy in the modern world is the renewal and in-depth study of traditional (pre-Soviet) foundations of Russian diplomacy.

the West. Both were probably set up with initial government funding, according to an American diplomat. He concluded as much in 2008 based on information from Anatolii Kucherena (information in a Wikileaks cable, quoted by Braw 2015). Kucherena headed the Moscow-based fund Institute for Democracy and Cooperation, which in turn opened the offices in New York and Paris (the Paris office was later branched off since French legislation did not allow it to be headed from Moscow).

The New York institute, under the leadership of Andranik Migranyan,[12] was closed down in December 2015, probably mainly because of problems with funding. At the same time, Narochnitskaya admitted that the IDC in Paris was also finding it difficult to attract funding. It seems that most of the funding had come from Russian businesses and they were hit by sanctions and the fall in the oil price in 2014–2015. There were sources close to the political leadership that claimed that the institutes were gradually being replaced by a younger generation of experts and institutes, among them Rethinking Russia (Vinokurov et al. 2015).

The IDC in Paris appears to be a two-people operation. Apart from Narochnitskaya, John Laughland[13] is director of studies. The institute does not appear to publish reports and analyses itself. The aim of the institute at its inception, to deliver analysis and research on the observance of human rights in Europe (IDC 2008), appears to have been abandoned. Instead the institute's main activity seems to consist in Narochnitskaya and Laughland making statements, addressing conferences or being interviewed on a variety of topics, where they are presented as experts – between them they cover everything from Brexit and the French elections to the war in Ukraine (IDC, website). Overall, the institute's activity appears to be grinding to a halt because of lack of funding and low or non-existent output in terms of publications and research events.

4.9 Information Security Institute (IISI)

The Information Security Institute was founded in 2003 and is a separate department of Moscow State University. Its focus is research and there are no courses taught for students at the institute (IISI, "About us"). No details are

[12] Andranik Migranyan is an Armenian-born Russian political scientist who is a professor at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations. During the 1990s he was an advisor to Boris Yeltsin. From 1993 till 2000 he was a Member of the Presidential Council of the Russian Federation. In 1994 served as chief advisor to the Committee on CIS Problems in the Russian Duma. From 2008 to 2015 he served as the director of the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation, New York, founded in 2007.

[13] John Laughland is a British eurosceptic academic and author who writes on international affairs and political philosophy. He has a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Oxford. Until 2008 he was the European director of the European Foundation, a eurosceptic think tank. He has been Director of Studies at the IDC in Paris since 2008.

provided on funding, but there is a list of customers and partners, which indicate that the institute works on commission mainly for the Presidential Administration, ministries and government services and agencies, including the Russian General Staff and the Federal Security Service, as well as Russian big business (IISI, "Our Customers"; IISI, "Our Partners"). There is furthermore a strong link with the apparatus of the Russian Security Council, which is part of the Presidential Administration. Among directors and deputy directors of the IISI, three out of four have worked for the Security Council apparatus (IISI, "Rukovodstvo"). The IISI director, Vladislav Sherstiuk, has a background within the KGB and has served as deputy secretary of the Security Council; the first deputy director, Valerii Yashenko, served in the Soviet security service up to 1991 and has in his capacity as advisor to the principal represented the Moscow State University in various commissions of the Security Council; Deputy Director Anatolii Streltsov has a background working for the Ministry of Defence and has also worked as head of the department of the apparatus of the Security Council that was responsible for information security (Streltsov 2013).

The IISI has been described as "one of the Russian Security Council's channels for exercising influence abroad" (Nocetti 2015: 119). It is clearly involved in promoting Russia's view on information security to an international audience. Among other things, the IISI organizes an annual conference on information security, usually in Garmisch-Partenkirchen in Germany. The fourteenth annual conference was organized there in April 2017. From the programme and the conference resolution issued by the IISI, it is obvious that the Russian agenda of strengthening the sovereignty of states in the cyber arena is actively promoted for discussion (IISI, "Odinnadtsatyi…"). The institute has also been engaged in bilateral meetings "with European and Asian officials and experts, with the evident aim of influencing them on 'information security' issues" (Nocetti 2015: 119). At a conference arranged by Georgetown University, Anatolii Streltsov (2013) recognized the work done within the framework for developing the Tallinn Manual[14] as a first step, but underlined that international law needed amendment. He went on to argue in favour of the draft convention on information security presented by Russia at the UN.

The institute employs just over twenty researchers and its work is organized in three sections and two centres:

- Mathematical Studies in Information Security Section;

[14] The *Tallinn Manual on the International Law Applicable to Cyber Warfare* is an academic, non-binding study on how international law applies to cyber conflicts and cyber warfare. Between 2009 and 2012, the *Tallinn Manual* was written at the invitation of the Tallinn-based NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence by an international group of experts. It was published by Cambridge University Press in April 2013.

- Information Security for the Computer Systems Section;
- Humanist Studies in Information Security Section;
- Qualification Documents Expertise and Approval Centre; and
- Centre of the International Collaboration in Security Studies and Terrorism Counteracting. (IISI, “About Us”)

The institute is manned by specialists in information systems and security, but there are relatively few publications listed on its website (IISI, “Trudy i publikatsii”). Obviously the institute’s work consists more in providing services to Russian government authorities and big business than in producing scholarly work. Certainly, the institute has a key role in promoting Russia’s position on information security to an international audience through its experts and is open about this as well as the background of its director and deputy directors.

5 Conclusions

The main purpose of this study was to explore how Russia uses soft power to influence expert communities as well as a wider public opinion in the West with the help of think tanks and similar GONGOs. In addition the study has attempted to find out how the Russian state finances and controls the think tanks and GONGOs examined and what channels are used to disseminate ideas and narratives about Russia and the world.

The study discusses nine organizations of which three – the RIAC, Rethinking Russia and SVOP – are listed as think tanks in the international GGTTI rating. However, we would suggest that the Valdai Club also has the characteristics of a think tank. The RISI is a state-owned organization that produces government propaganda and the remaining four – the Gorchakov Fund, the DOC, the IDC and the IISI – are GONGOs that channel their influence through grant schemes, projects with NGOs and political organizations, and a presence in different policy environments. All these organizations are dependent on the Russian state for financial support. Other donors are as a rule Russian big business and private persons. The experts of the think thanks often come from well-known research institutes or the policy arena, are attractive to Western partners and often appear as guests at expert events abroad. The fact that they have access to the Russian government and president, in a way that few Westerners have, increases their attraction and perceived relevance on these occasions.

Overall, the think tanks and GONGOs that have the widest interface with Western researchers tend to be the ones that are the least propagandistic, that take on less of an advocacy role in their messaging. The RIAC and to a certain extent the Valdai Club and SVOP have good working relations with the Western academic and expert community and their experts are highly sought after as speakers at conferences and roundtables around the world.

The think tanks that are more obviously conveying the Russian official message tend to end up creating networks with experts, organizations and institutes in the West that are less mainstream – but not necessarily less influential since they may work with extreme political groups or movements. This is certainly the case for the RISI, but Rethinking Russia and the DOC have found it more difficult to establish an influential voice in the international debate on foreign relations – but then perhaps this is not the overall goal, but rather to reach marginal groups. The Gorchakov Fund works with youth groups in other countries, which could indicate that it takes a long-term perspective in its efforts to forge contacts and build networks to carry Russian values and views in the future.

The study finds that for most of the think tanks there are close links to the Presidential Administration and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Therefore, when cooperating and having dialogue with Russian think tanks there is every reason to

be well aware of the conditions in which they operate as well as what agenda they are likely to promote. There is also a need for more transparency when it comes to exactly how such cooperation takes place and on what terms. There are already codes of conduct for how to present research data and results (see for example ALLEA 2011). Similar codes of conduct for transparency of funding and links to government authorities or big business when conferences and workshops are organized would be a good step on the way to becoming aware of links and dependencies (see also Foxall 2015: 13).

One of the messages conveyed above by certain Russian think tanks is that knowledge about Russia is lacking in the West, or perhaps more precisely the right knowledge is lacking. Partly this is in line with the security policy documents that call for "objective" or "unbiased" information on Russia and its policies. But there is also a Russian proposition here that research and analysis in the West arrive at negative conclusions about Russia and therefore must be of poor quality.

Finally, this study has not addressed the narratives promoted by individual Russian think tanks in greater detail. However, the study shows that the think tanks follow the intentions of the Foreign Policy Concept in that they engage Russian academics and experts in the dialogue with foreign specialists on global politics and international security. Thereby, think tanks promote Russian public diplomacy and Russia's strategic narratives externally, which is an explicit goal of the Concept. The Concept may also be seen as a guideline for which narratives think tanks may promote. Deeper investigation of how individual think tanks' narratives develop would be a good task for future research.

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List of interviews

Date 2017	**Organization**
13 January	Valdai Club
16 January	RIAC
16 January	Embassy of Sweden in Moscow (about RISI)
17 March	Press attaché of Embassy of Sweden
16 January	Gorchakov Fund
18 January	SVOP
18 January	Roscongress

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