

Zoya Baran

Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (Ukraine)

ORCID 0000-0001-9685-3953

Tamara Poleshchuk

Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (Ukraine)

ORCID 0000-0002-8802-0633

Olga Wasiuta

University of National Education Commission, Krakow (Poland)

ORCID 0000-0003-0481-1567

Russkiy mir (the Russian World): from an Abstract Concept to State Ideology and Geopolitical Strategy

Introduction

The concept of *Russkiy mir* (the Russian World), according to scholars, has no unambiguous interpretation or legal definition, but is an eclectic mix of various religious-orthodox dogmas (Russian Orthodox Church), anti-Western sentiments, historical myths, and intellectual and political constructs. The genealogy of *Russkiy mir* has its roots in: the messianic ideology of “Moscow is the Third Rome”, formulated in the first quarter of the 16th century by the monk Philotheus; the imperial pan-Slavism of the 18th and 19th centuries; the Russian state policy of the second quarter of the 19th century, known as “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality”; Slavophile sentiments of the Russian

well-educated society of the 19th and early 20th centuries; Bolshevism/communism, centred on the idea of world revolution and proletarian internationalism; and Russian Eurasianism of the 1920s and 1930s, which was based on the idea of Russia–Eurasia as a special civilisation, etc.

The basis of the modern vision of the idea of *Russkiy mir* should be sought in the heated intellectual debates that swept the Russian public space at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, as a reaction to the collapse of the USSR and the desire to define the national and state ideology/identity of the new Russia. The impetus for the design of this project was the “discovery” that as many Russians lived outside Russia as within it. On this basis, the fundamental postulate for *Russkiy mir* was formulated: Russia is a socio-cultural reality not limited to the borders of the Russian Federation, but extending to all areas inhabited by both ethnic Russians and those who speak and think in Russian.

Dissident and Nobel laureate Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn probably played a decisive role in the discussion of topics related to *Russkiy mir*. In July 1990, he published the publicistic essay *Rebuilding Russia*. One of the chapters of it was entitled “What is Russia?”. In Solzhenitsyn’s understanding, “Russia” was the land of the three East Slavic peoples: Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian. He wrote that they were commonly called “Rus”, and only in the 18th century did the name “Russia” begin to be applied to them. At the same time, the word “Russian”, according to the writer, united three East Slavic peoples: Little Russians (namely Ukrainians), Great Russians (Russians), and Belarusians. Geographically, Solzhenitsyn also included Kazakhstan as part of Russia. As he wrote, “its territory was cut up by communists without a mind, as it were” and “transformed and built up – by Russians, prisoners, and peoples in exile”.¹

A. Solzhenitsyn, philosophers Vadim Tsimbursky and Michail Hefter, presidential advisers Valeriy Tishkov and Sergey Karaganov, and neo-Eurasian ideologues Aleksandr Panarin and Aleksandr Dugin were just a few of the participants in the 1990s discussions about the search for a new national and state idea. One of the participants, Peter Shchedrovitsky, in his 2000 publication, formulated a modern vision of the concept of *Russkiy mir* for the first time. He defined it as a network structure of large and small communities that think and speak Russian. In fact, it was a possible tool for gaining access to global economic and financial resources through Russian-speaking

¹ А. Солженицын (1995). Как нам обустроить Россию? In: А. Солженицын. Публицистика: в 3 т. Верхняя Волга, vol. 1. https://web.archive.org/web/20170930035618/http://www.solzhenitsyn.ru/proizvedeniya/publizistika/Publitsistika_T_1-1995.pdf [accessed: 24.07.2024]. More: T. Poleshchuk (2006). *The Ukrainian-Russian relations in the context of mutual myths and stereotypes*. “Przegląd stosunków międzynarodowych. The International Affairs Review”, 1(153), pp. 121–126.

diaspora communities. The political elite of the Russian Federation, headed by newly elected President Vladimir Putin, adopted this concept.

One of the most thorough studies of the ideology and practice of *Russkiy mir* was carried out by the Ukrainian and American historian Serhiy Plokhii, who analysed the evolution of this phenomenon in the context of the emergence and development of Russian statehood.² The author is convinced that the political and ideological sources of *Russkiy mir* date back to the emergence of modern Russian statehood in the second half of the 15th and early 16th centuries. At that time, the foundations of the autocratic model of rule of the Moscow Dukes were laid, and brutal wars against the closest East Slavic neighbours were justified by claims to the legitimate political, religious, and cultural succession from Kyivan Rus' and its Byzantine heritage. Beginning in the second half of the 17th century and throughout the following centuries, Ukrainians (along with Belarusians) found themselves at the epicentre of the empire's search for a state and national identity, based on the concept of the so-called Great Russian Nation. The outbreak of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine prompted S. Plokhii to publish a study in which he exhaustively analysed the preconditions, course, and possible outcomes of the largest military conflict in Europe after World War II.³ The author is convinced that for Ukraine, it is a war for independence, for the right to exist. The same opinion is shared by T. Snyder, an American historian and one of the world's most famous researchers of Eastern Europe.⁴ Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the historian took an active pro-Ukrainian position and prepared several landmark texts aimed at understanding the nature of this war and the role of history in the ideology of *Russkiy mir*.⁵

The historical sources of *Russkiy mir*, as well as the formation and content of this concept in the 1990s and early 2000s, are outlined in the work of Marlene Laruelle, a well-known researcher of the ideological landscape of Russia and national movements in the post-Soviet space. The author considers *Russkiy mir* as a phenomenon of soft power and the geopolitical course of modern Russia.⁶

² С. Плохій (2019). *Загублене царство. Історія "Русского мира" з 1470 року до сьогодні*. Фоліо.

³ С. Плохій (2023). *Російсько-українська війна: повернення історії*. Книжковий Клуб "Клуб Сімейного дозвілля".

⁴ T. Snyder (2018). *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*. Tim Duggan Books. New York.

⁵ T. Snyder (2022, May 29). *We should say it. Russia is the Fascist*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/19/opinion/russia-fascism-ukraine-putin.html> [accessed: 12.07.2024]; T. Snyder (2024). *Putin's Legend. The Nonsensical Basis of a Terrible War*. <https://snyder.substack.com/p/putins-legend> [accessed: 10.09.2024].

⁶ M. Laruelle (2015). *The "Russian World". Russia's Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination*. Center on Global Interests.

At the same time, in 2021, Laruelle published a study in which she questioned the accusations of fascism against Russia that have circulated around the world since the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the aggression in Eastern Ukraine.⁷

Larysa Yakubova is one of the most authoritative Ukrainian historians, who has studied the ideology and practice of *Russkiy mir* in depth and comprehensively. In her works, she has pointed out the threats of *Russkiy mir* to modern Ukrainian statehood, arguing that the test of *Russkiy mir* will be the most difficult exam that Ukraine must pass in order to fully acquire the state sovereignty proclaimed in 1991. In one of her most recent works (*Rashism: The Beast from the Abyss*), the historian linked Putin's neo-totalitarian regime, rashism, to the doctrine of *Russkiy mir*.⁸

The purpose of the research is to analyse the formation and content of *Russkiy mir* ideology, and to show the transformation of *Russkiy mir* into the core of state policy and geopolitical strategy.

The methodological basis of the article is the principles of historicism, determinism, and systematicity, which, when applied through historical – typological and comparative – historical methods, allow for an analysis of the content of the *Russkiy mir* ideology and its impact in modern Russia.

Formation and evolution of the concept of *Russkiy Mir* in post-Soviet Russia in the 1990s–2014

At the turn of the 1990s and 2000s, the idea of *Russkiy mir* as a special civilisation based on the Russian language and culture, Orthodoxy, common history, and historical memory was rapidly spreading in Russian socio-political and academic discourse. Economist and philosopher Sergey Chernyshov and political scientist and political technologist Gleb Pavlovsky played a special role in organising the discussion of the idea of *Russkiy mir*. Their collection of articles, *Other. A Textbook of the New Russian Identity* (1995, in four volumes), became an intellectual platform for Russian authors with different political views.⁹ They also initiated the creation of the Russian Institute in 1996, which

⁷ L. Marlene (2021). *Is Russia Fascist? Unraveling Propaganda East and West*. Cornell University Press, p. 27.

⁸ Л. Якубова (2018). “Русский мир” в Україні: на краю прірви. „Кліо”; Л. Якубова (2020). Євразійський розлам. Україна в добу гібридних викликів. „Кліо”; Л. Якубова (2023). До свободи крізь вогонь: Україна проти рашизму. „Кліо”; Л. Якубова (2023). Рашизм: Звір з безодні. Академперіодика.

⁹ In his letter to G. Pavlovsky, S. Chernyshov called the collection *Other* a “philosophical steamer returning to its homeland” – an allusion to the so-called “philosophical steamer” when dozens of famous Russian intellectuals left Russia on two German steamers in the

was called an “autonomous non-profit organisation”. The declared aim of its activities was “promoting the formation of Russian cultural consciousness and institutions of a new social identity”. One of the most notable and successful projects of the Russian Institute was the online resource *Russian Journal*, founded in 1997, which included discussions on *Russkiy mir* and the search for Russia’s place in the world.

The final stage of the conceptualisation of *Russkiy mir* is associated with a representative of the so-called methodological school, Pyotr Shchedrovitsky. He was one of the authors of the book *Other* and participated in the activities of the Russian Institute.¹⁰ According to him, the idea of *Russkiy mir* “emerged between 1993 and 1997, gradually crystallising from a premonition, an amorphous sense of the right form to a complete name”.¹¹ In February 2000, in the midst of the presidential election campaign in Russia, P. Shchedrovitsky published in the liberal *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* an article entitled “*Russkiy mir*”. The article argued that in the 20th century, under the influence of tectonic historical shifts, world wars, and revolutions, “*Russkiy mir* emerged on the planet – a network structure of large and small communities that think and speak Russian”. The author emphasised that “barely half of the population of the Russian world lives on the territory outlined by the administrative borders of the Russian Federation... The more citizens of other states need Russia, the more stable Russia’s position in the world is”. Therefore, P. Shchedrovitsky argued, “the foundations of stability and relevance of the emerging Russian statehood can and should be sought within the Russian world, in the policy of constructive development of its global networks”.¹²

Newly elected Russian President Vladimir Putin, speaking at the First World Congress of Compatriots in October 2001, described language as a determining indicator of belonging to *Russkiy mir* (“Russian-speaking community”) and the conventionality of territorial borders for its spread. In particular, he stressed that the Russian-speaking community, including Russian citizens, is the fifth largest in the world. “Tens of millions of people who speak, think,

autumn of 1922 under pressure from the Bolshevik authorities (*Из деловой переписки Глеба Павловского и Сергея Чернышова* (1997, July 14). „Русский журнал”. <http://old.russ.ru/journal/dsp/97-07-14/pav-che.htm> [accessed: 22.07.2024]).

¹⁰ П. Щедровицкий (1995). В поисках формы. In: *Иное. Хрестоматия нового российского самосознания*. Volume 2. Россия как субъект. Аргус. <http://old.russ.ru/antolog/inoe/schedr.htm> [accessed: 22.07.2024].

¹¹ П. Щедровицкий (2001). *Русский Мир: восстановление контекста*. “Русский архипелаг”. http://www.archipelag.ru/ru_mir/history/history01/shedrovitsky-russmir/ [accessed: 22.07.2024].

¹² П. Щедровицкий (2002, February 11). *Русский мир*. “Независимая газета”. http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2000-02-11/8_russian_world.html [accessed: 22.07.2024].

and perhaps even more importantly, feel Russian, live outside the Russian Federation,” Putin said.¹³

Since then, the idea of *Russkiy mir* has been gaining popularity in Russian political circles. For example, in September 2003, Russian politician and high-ranking official Anatoly Chubais formulated the concept of a “liberal empire”, which closely aligned in its ideology with the approaches of P. Shchedrovitsky. In the pages of *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Chubais argued that in the near future, Russia’s ideology should be liberal imperialism, and its mission is to build a liberal empire. Such a “new” empire, on the one hand, would recognise the independence of post-Soviet states, while on the other, it would protect Russians and the Russian-speaking population in the “near abroad” in every possible way, and facilitate the expansion of Russian capital into new countries.¹⁴

At the suggestion of G. Pavlovsky, who at that time was the Kremlin’s consultant on election strategy, Deputy Chief of the Presidential Administration Vladislav Surkov approved the use of *Russkiy mir* ideology for Putin’s second presidential election campaign.¹⁵ At the same time, the Rose Revolution in Georgia (2003) and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004) were perceived in the Kremlin as Western “projects” that threatened Russia’s geostrategic interests in the post-Soviet space.¹⁶

Meanwhile, Putin’s second presidential term (2004–2008) was marked by further concentration of power in the hands of the Kremlin. Influential positions in the most important areas of state life were increasingly taken over by representatives of the so-called St. Petersburg team – the president’s former university classmates, colleagues in the St. Petersburg mayor’s office, and KGB (FSB) structures. In response to the opposition’s accusations and Western criticism of the curtailment of democracy and the rise of authoritarian tendencies in the government, Kremlin ideologues stated that the

¹³ В. Путин (2001, October 11). *Выступление В. В. Путина на Конгрессе соотечественников. Первый всемирный конгресс соотечественников. Москва*. <http://special.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21359> [accessed: 22.07.2024].

¹⁴ А. Чубайс (2003, October 1). *Миссия России в XXI веке*. “Независимая газета”. https://www.ng.ru/ideas/2003-10-01/1_mission.html [accessed: 22.07.2024].

¹⁵ Later, Surkov himself confirmed his role in promoting the idea of *Russkiy mir* as a determinant in shaping state policy. In addition, he frankly and cynically formulated its content: “For me, what is *Russkiy mir*? It is wherever people speak and think in Russian. It is where, perhaps, they do not speak and think Russian, but where they have great respect for Russian culture.” He also noted that, for him, *Russkiy mir* is also about places where “they respect our Putin” and “where people are afraid of Russian weapons” (*Сурков рассказал о своём понимании русского мира* (2021, June 12). *Russia Today*. <https://russian.rt.com/russia/news/872342-surkov-russkii-mir> [accessed: 22.07.2024]).

¹⁶ More: S. Baran (2006). *Schwierigkeiten in der bilateralen Kooperation zwischen der Ukraine und Russland: politische Beziehungen*. “Przegląd stosunków międzynarodowych. The International Affairs Review”, 1(153), pp. 127–135.

political system being established in the country represents a manifestation of “sovereign democracy”. The creators of this doctrine argued that the huge support of the population for the president of Russia was evidence of the true democratic nature of the political system. To promote a positive image of the state, as well as Russian culture in the world, in December 2005, the multilingual news channel Russia Today (RT) was launched, targeting a foreign audience and positioning itself as an “alternative to the Anglo-Saxon global information space”. While in 2005–2006, the budget of RT was about \$30 million, by 2008 it had reached \$100 million.¹⁷

V. Putin, in his welcoming speech to the participants of the regular World Congress of Compatriots in October 2006, stated that the National Unity Day on 4 November, introduced in 2005, “unites not only the multinational people of Russia, but also millions of our compatriots abroad, unites the so-called *Russkiy mir*”.¹⁸ During the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of the famous historian and public figure Dmitry Likhachev (November 2006), Putin made a policy statement in which he noted that “*Russkiy mir* can and should unite all those who value the Russian word and Russian culture, wherever they live, in Russia or abroad, and whatever ethnic group they belong to. Use this phrase more often – *Russkiy mir!*” According to Ukrainian researchers, the Russian media spread this phrase, although the transcript of the president’s speech does not contain these words.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the phrase became a hallmark, eventually suggesting in almost complete form the formula of *Russkiy mir* that is now commonly used: Russian culture = Russian state = Russian ethnos = Russian language.

The official start of the promotion of *Russkiy mir* at the state level began in 2007, when it was declared the Year of the Russian Language. In his annual address to the Federal Assembly, V. Putin stressed that Russian is the language of “historical brotherhood of nations” and international communication, which is “the custodian of a whole layer of world achievements” and at the same time “the living space of the multi-million *Russkiy mir*, which is much wider than

¹⁷ Л. Якубова. *Євразійський розлам... Оp.cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁸ В. Путин (2006, October 24). *Вступительное слово президента Российской Федерации Владимира Путина на Всемирном конгрессе соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом*. Всемирный конгресс соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом. Санкт Петербург. <http://www.dxb.ru/project/re/detail.php?ID=283> [accessed: 24.07.2024].

¹⁹ Стенографический отчет о встрече с творческой интеллигенцией, посвященной 100-летию со дня рождения Дмитрия Лихачева (2006, November 29). Сайт президента Российской Федерации. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23931> [accessed: 24.07.2024]; Л. Якубова, В. Головки, Я. Примаченко (2018). *Русский мир на Донбасі та в Криму: історичні витоки, політична технологія, інструмент агресії. Аналітична доповідь*. Рр. 79–80.

Russia itself”.²⁰ On 21 June 2007 the *Russkiy mir* Foundation was established by a presidential decree. Its activities are financed from the federal budget and private sponsors. The main tasks of the Foundation include: 1) promotion of the Russian language – development of teaching methods and programmes for studying the Russian language and literature; 2) promotion of knowledge and formation of a positive image of modern Russia, as well as popularisation of the Russian language and culture; 3) support of the activities of Russian diasporas abroad; 4) support of foreign Russian-language media and expert communities that are oriented towards achieving the goals of the Foundation; 5) preservation of the manuscript heritage of Russia; 6) cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church and other confessions in promoting the Russian language and culture.²¹ Since its inception, the *de facto* head of the Foundation has been historian and well-known politician Vyacheslav Nikonov, one of the key theorists serving the needs of the current Russian authorities. He is the author of the Foundation’s ideology published on the website: “*Russkiy mir* is not only Russians, not only Russian citizens (in the original – “not only *russkije*, not only *rossiyanie*”), not only our compatriots in the countries of near and far abroad, emigrants, immigrants from Russia and their descendants. They are also foreign citizens who speak Russian, study or teach it, all those who are sincerely interested in Russia and its future”.²² The Foundation’s priorities include organising Russian centres abroad aimed at supporting Russian-language media, holding international holidays and festivals of Russian culture, providing textbooks and teaching materials for teachers of Russian studies, organising Russian language courses, etc. The Foundation was created as a network structure: in addition to the centres, there was an Internet portal, a radio and TV channel, and the magazine *Russkiy mir*.

Since 2007, the concept of *Russkiy mir* has become not only the main ideological basis of Putin’s authoritarian regime, but also the cornerstone of Russia’s foreign policy. V. Putin’s Munich speech, delivered during the International Security Conference in February 2007, showed the Kremlin’s intention to return to active foreign policy.²³ In his speech at the NATO summit

²⁰ Послание Федеральному Собранию Российской Федерации Президента России Владимира Путина (2007, April 26). <http://www.rg.ru/2007/04/27/poslanie.html> [accessed: 24.07.2024].

²¹ О создании фонда “Русский мир” (2007, June 21). Указ Президента Российской Федерации, no. 796. <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/25689/> [accessed: 24.07.2024].

²² Фонд “Русский мир”, Идеология Фонда. <https://russkiymir.ru/fund> [accessed: 24.07.2024].

²³ В. Путин (2007, February 10). Выступление и дискуссия на Мюнхенской конференции по вопросам политики безопасности. http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2007/02/10/1737_type63374type63376type63377type63381type82634_118097.shtml [accessed: 24.07.2024].

in Bucharest on 4 April 2008, Putin openly questioned Ukraine's subjectivity as a state for the first time. He convinced the international community that "Ukraine... was created in the Soviet era; it received territories from Poland – after the Second World War, from Czechoslovakia, from Romania... from Russia it received huge territories in the East and South of the country..."²⁴ The 2008 *Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* stated that the Russian state is tasked with "protecting the rights and legitimate interests of Russian citizens and compatriots living abroad on the basis of international law and existing bilateral agreements, considering the multimillion Russian diaspora – *Russkiy mir* – as a partner, including in expanding and strengthening the space of the Russian language and culture".²⁵

The several-day war against sovereign Georgia in August 2008 was a confirmation of Russia's declared geopolitical goals. Alongside military actions, Russian culture was actively promoted. In September 2008, shortly after the war with Georgia ended, President Dmitry Medvedev established the "Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation" (*Rossotrudnichestvo*).²⁶ The activities of this state organisation are aimed at spreading a positive image of Russia in the world through cultural diplomacy, international humanitarian cooperation, and work with broadly defined compatriots. According to Ukrainian experts, this combination of different areas of work is, unusual for Western soft power institutions, and also notable due to the overlap of some functions with another institution of Russian cultural diplomacy, the *Russkiy mir* Foundation.²⁷

A special role in promoting the ideas of the *Russkiy mir* belonged to the Moscow Patriarchate and its branches in the former Soviet republics. According to the Ukrainian religious scholar Serhiy Shumylo, the concept of *Russkiy mir* was developed within the World Russian People's Council, founded in 1993. The organisation was initiated by the current head of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad Kirill (Vladimir Gundyayev), now Patriarch of

²⁴ В. Путін (2008, April 4). Виступ на саміті НАТО. Бухарест. <https://www.unian.ua/politics/110949-vistup-volodimira-putina-na-samiti-nato-buharest-4-kvitnya-2008-roku.html> [accessed: 24.07.2024].

²⁵ В. Путин (2008, July 15). Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации. <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/785> [accessed: 24.07.2024].

²⁶ О некоторых вопросах государственного управления в области международного сотрудничества (2008, September 6). Указ Президента Российской Федерации, No. 1315. <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/28020/page/1-2> [accessed: 24.07.2024].

²⁷ Море: Н. Коваль, М. Ірисова, С. Титюк, Д. Терещенко (2022). Роспівробітництво: нестерпна жорсткість "м'якої сили". <https://ui.org.ua/sectors/rossotrudnichestvo-the-unbearable-harshness-of-soft-power/> [accessed: 24.07.2024].

Moscow. The role of the Council grew significantly in 2001, when its Congress was opened in Moscow by Vladimir Putin. From that point, not only representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, but also high-ranking officials began participating in the organisation's activities, including the Chairman of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, the leadership of the Federation Council, the Presidential Administration, leaders of major political parties, and representatives of law enforcement agencies. Between 2005 and 2007, the Council's experts, including the New Eurasianist ideologue A. Dugin, developed the "Russian Doctrine" programme, which extensively addressed *Russkiy mir*, "spiritual staples", "common historical space", etc.²⁸

In November 2009, the newly elected Patriarch Kirill, speaking at the opening of the Third Assembly of the *Russkiy mir* Foundation, said: "Only a united *Russkiy mir* can become a strong actor in international politics, stronger than any political alliances". He also proclaimed that Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus are the core of *Russkiy mir*. Moreover, he essentially identified *Russkiy mir* with "Holy Rus": "Russia, Ukraine, Belarus are the Holy Rus".²⁹ Since then, the manipulation of slogans about the "single *Russkiy mir*", "single Holy Rus", "single civilisational space", and "single spiritual staples" has become systemic, being adopted not only by the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, but also by Russian authorities and special security services.

Putin's return to the presidency in 2012 was accompanied by massive political protests that pushed the authorities towards a "super-presidential" model of government. The *Russkiy mir* project became a natural component of this model. In Putin's public speeches, the concepts of "Russia is a civilised state", *Russkiy mir*, and appeals to the values of Orthodoxy were increasingly used, along with active criticism of liberalism and the values of Western civilisation. In his first address to the Federal Assembly after being re-elected for a third term in 2012, Putin stressed: "Russia has been developing for centuries as a multinational state..., a state-civilisation, united by the Russian

²⁸ С. Шумило (2024, April 5). "Звичайний фашизм": розбір тез про "священную войну" Росії проти України та Заходу. Радіо Свобода. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/zvychnyy-fashyzm-rozbir-tez-pro-svyashchennuyu-voynu-rosiyi/32890534.html> [accessed: 25.07.2024].

²⁹ More: O. Wasiuta (2017). "*Russkiy mir*" jako narzędzie imperialnej polityki Kremla. „Przegląd Geopolityczny”, 21, pp. 67–87; O. Wasiuta (2021). *Russkiy mir jako technologia penetracji państwa*. In: O. Wasiuta, S. Wasiuta (eds.). *Encyklopedia Bezpieczeństwa* (Vol. 3). Wydawnictwo Libron. Kraków, pp. 799–807; O. Wasiuta, S. Wasiuta (2017). *Wojna hybrydowa Rosji przeciwko Ukrainie*. Wydawnictwo Arcana. Kraków; А. Бабинський (2023). Війна за "руський мир" чи "Святу Русь"? Ідеологічні корені російської агресії. "Наукові записки УКУ: Богослов'я", 10 (2023), pp. 225–251.

people, the Russian language and Russian culture, which are dear to all of us, which unite us and prevent us from dissolving in this diverse world. For the planet, regardless of our ethnicity, we have been and remain one people”.³⁰

Intellectuals from the conservative/right-wing radical environment actively participated in the discussion of *Russkiy mir* ideology. The “Manifesto of the Founding Fathers of the Izborsky Club” (2012), which included a number of cultural figures and politicians such as writer Aleksandr Prokhanov and A. Dugin, stated that “the thousand-year history of Russian statehood is the history of several Eurasian empires”: the first was the Kyiv-Novgorod Empire, the second was the Moscow Kingdom, the third was the Romanov Empire, and the fourth was the Soviet Empire. It further stated: “The present-day Russian state, despite the loss of large margins, has an imperial character. The geopolitics of the Eurasian continent is reassembling the violently rejected spaces”.³¹

An important strategic task for President Putin, who has repeatedly stressed that the “collapse of the USSR was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century”, was the reintegration of the post-Soviet space. The final stage of it seems to be the creation of the Eurasian Union. The Russian leadership paid special attention to Ukraine. After President Viktor Yanukovich came to power in 2010, the activities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and agents of Russian influence in government bodies became much more visible. They supported pro-Russian political and economic integration projects, which aimed at drawing Ukraine into the Russian sphere of influence.

In July 2013, Patriarch Kirill, President Putin, and a number of Russian officials and politicians arrived in Kyiv to celebrate the 1025th anniversary of the Christianisation of *Kievan Rus’*. In his speech, Putin spoke of a “single people” to which he referred primarily Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians: “There are the Ukrainian people, the Belarusian people, and other peoples, and we respect their heritage. But at the heart of it, no doubt, are our common spiritual values, which make us a single people”.³²

Thus, during the first decade of the 21st century, the Russian authorities, the Russian Orthodox Church, and part of the intellectual elite established the idea of *Russkiy mir* as a special civilisation based on the Russian language

³⁰ В. Путин (2012, December 12). *Послание Президента РФ Владимира Путина Федеральному Собранию*. <http://www.rg.ru/2012/12/12/stenogramma-poln.html> [accessed: 24.07.2024].

³¹ *Изборский клуб, Манифест отцов-основателей* (2012, September 8). <https://izborsk-club.ru/887> [accessed: 24.07.2024].

³² 27 липня 2013 року: *День, коли Путін оголосив Україні війну* (2018, July 27). <https://www.depo.ua/ukr/life/27-lipnya-2013-roku-den-koli-putin-ogolosiv-ukrayini-viynu-20170727613074> [accessed: 25.07.2024].

and culture, Orthodoxy, common history, and historical memory. *Russkiy mir* also became the ideological basis for an authoritarian political regime and an important factor in Putin's geopolitics.

Russkiy mir and Russia's war against Ukraine (2014–2024)

The victory of the Revolution of Dignity (*Revoliutsiia hidnosti*) in Ukraine in 2013–2014 was perceived by the Russian authorities and society as a threat to Russia's geostrategic interests. In the Spring of 2014, when the Russian invasion of Crimea had already begun, the press secretary of the Russian President, Dmitry Peskov, stated that President Putin "is the guarantor of *Russkiy mir*" because Russia is the country "on which *Russkiy mir* is based".³³ In the so-called Crimea speech of 18 March 2014, which referred to the ratification of the Treaty on the Accession of Crimea and Sevastopol to Russia, Putin accused the Bolsheviks of having "included significant territories of the historical south of Russia" in Soviet Ukraine, and CPSU leader Nikita Khrushchev of having initiated the transfer of the Crimean region with Sevastopol to the Ukrainian SSR in 1954. The speech also referred to a *coup d'état*, "Banderite fascists", and the "insidious West" led by the United States. Cynical and hypocritical were the words about the "brotherly Ukrainian people", whose relations, according to the Kremlin leader, would remain the most important.³⁴

During the so-called "direct line" between the President and Russians on 17 April 2014, Putin talked about the uniqueness of the "Russian soul", the "Russian cultural code", and the "man of *Russkiy mir*". At the same time, he spoke about "Novorossiya", including Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk, Mykolaiv, Kherson, and Odesa. And again, he accused the Soviet government of having "transferred" these territories to Ukraine.³⁵

The vast majority of the Russian population, according to opinion polls conducted by the Levada Centre in the Spring 2014, approved of Putin's policy towards Ukraine.³⁶ Only a few voices, such as the opposition politician Boris

³³ Д. Песков (2014, March 7). Владимир Путин является гарантом безопасности русского мира. "Аргументы недели". <https://argumenti.ru/society/2014/03/324424> [accessed: 10.01.2024].

³⁴ В. Путин (2014, March 18). Обращение Президента Российской Федерации. <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603> [accessed: 10.01.2024].

³⁵ Прямая линия с Владимиром Путиным (2014, April 17). President of Russia. Official website. <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796> [accessed: 10.01.2024]. More: С. Плохий, Російсько-українська війна: повернення історії, pp. 120–137.

³⁶ Происходящее в Украине, Крыму и России (2014, March 26). Левада-Центр. <https://www.levada.ru/2014/03/26/proishodyashhee-v-ukraine-krymu-i-reaktsiya-rossii/> [accessed: 10.01.2024].

Nemtsov, who was murdered in central Moscow on 27 February 2015, called on Russians to use common sense and respect international law.

The image of Putin as a “collector of Russian lands” and a defender of *Russkiy mir*, promoted by state and government-affiliated media, allowed the Kremlin to further strengthen the vertical of power, concentrating all levers of influence in the hands of Putin and law enforcement agencies, while restricting civil liberties and rights. In October 2014, the First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration (now the Chairman of the State Duma), Vladimir Volodin, said during a closed-door meeting at the Valdai Club (where top Russian officials regularly meet with foreign journalists, political scientists, civil society activists, etc.): “If there is Putin, there is Russia, if there is no Putin, there is no Russia”.³⁷

The Russian Orthodox Church was a loyal ally of the government during the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of Russian military aggression in Eastern Ukraine. Its hierarchs openly took an anti-Ukrainian position, denying Russian aggression, framing the conflict as a civil war in Ukraine, supporting the Russian authorities and Putin personally. In 2015, a collection of Patriarch Kirill’s speeches was published under the title *Seven Words about Russkiy mir*. The doctrine of *Russkiy mir*, according to his version, contained the following main theses: the identity and sovereignty of *Russkiy mir* (“Russia is a civilisation with its own set of values”); the symphonic nature of *Russkiy mir* as an integration of peoples and cultures (“Russia has never been a “prison of peoples”, there were no first and second class peoples”); and the Russian people is the foundation and stronghold of *Russkiy mir* (“On a global scale, Russians (*russkie*) are an exceptionally integral, united nation”).³⁸

The concept of *Russkiy mir* was becoming more and more clearly defined. The Izborsk Club held a number of conferences and published dozens of articles discussing the content of *Russkiy mir*. Particularly noteworthy is the 2016 collection of articles authored by such Russian World ideologues as Alexander Prokhanov, Alexander Dugin, Oleg Platonov, Vitaly Averyanov, and others. The central text of the publication, titled “The Doctrine of *Russkiy mir*”, formulates the content and strategic objectives of *Russkiy mir*.³⁹ The authors of the report stated that “*Russkiy mir* was a reality” that emerged in the late 20th century to “define the final unity of civilisational, cultural, social, family, industrial, infrastructural, economic ties that exist despite the

³⁷ *Есть Путин – есть Россия, нет Путина – нет России* (2014, October 22). “Известия”. <https://iz.ru/news/578379> [accessed: 10.01.2024].

³⁸ Кирилл (2015). *Патриарх Московский и всея Руси, Семь слов о Русском мире*. ВРНС.

³⁹ *Доктрина Русского мира* (2016). Доклад под редакцией В.Аверьянова. In: *Доктрина Русского мира*. Изборский клуб, Книжный мир. http://www.litres.ru/pades/biblio_book/?art=23318523&lfrom=92259001 [accessed: 10.01.2024].

borders drawn due to the collapse of the USSR”; “it was a field of attraction of the ‘Russian civilization’ that draws in representatives of other peoples, cultures and civilisations”.⁴⁰ The authors argued that “the most accurate and verified form of real civilisation construction of *Russkiy mir*” is the Eurasian project. However, it is more correct to speak of Russia as a “North Eurasian” or “Russian-Eurasian” civilisation. This should include “the countries and peoples of Europe and Asia that participated in the implementation of two imperial projects – the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union”. Therefore, it is not surprising that when outlining the so-called “frontiers of *Russkiy mir*”, the authors referred to the fate of “42 million people of Russian culture of the Soviet model”.⁴¹

Analysing the “Baltic frontier”, the authors argued that although Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania were completely under Western control in the 1990s, “the Russians of the Baltic states, who managed to preserve their identity under the pressure of ethnocratic regimes, are ready to join the new great Russian project”. Therefore, the ideologues of *Russkiy mir* warned that if national radicals in the region increase their pressure on the “Russians”, Russia might raise the question of a possible revision of the borders established after World War II.⁴²

Particular attention was paid to the “Ukrainian frontier”. It formulated the theses that would later be repeated by Putin, representatives of Russian politics, scientists, and cultural figures, justifying Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The authors argued that the “Ukrainian project” was created by the Austrians in the late 19th century, and the state of Ukraine was created by the Bolsheviks; the Orange Revolution of 2004 was initiated by the United States, and the Euromaidan of 2013–2014 led to a *coup d’état* and civil war. Then the authors of the document, who were well-educated, demonstrated banal stupidity. In their opinion, Ukraine could break up because its population is divided into “Ukrainians themselves, who live mainly in the western part of the country – *Galicia*”, and “Russians”, who live in the “eastern part – *Novorossia*”. They also claimed that in the centre of the country, there are “people with mixed Russian-Ukrainian identity – Little Russians” (*malorosy*), and in Transcarpathia – “Russian and Russified Little Russians”. Faced with the prospect of a possible breakup of the country, the authors of the text were convinced that “Russia should prepare for the consolidation of the Russian-populated remnants of Ukraine”, and this consolidation “could take place both through the direct incorporation of these territories into Russia and through the creation of new states”. For them, “the integrity of

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 17–18.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 23–24.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 30–32.

Ukraine has not been and cannot be of value in itself to the Russians and *Russkovo mira*... Ukraine is a man-made product aimed at fragmenting and perpetuating the division of the Russian (East Slavic) people, who found themselves, by the will of Providence, in different political formations”.⁴³ As we can see, this amounts to a holistic justification of the reasons for a full-scale war against Ukraine.

In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian hybrid war, the security forces and state-controlled media continued to be key instruments for strengthening the regime. At the same time, the scope of criminal liability for actions interpreted as crimes against the state was significantly increased (anti-terrorist laws of 2016). At the same time, society was being purged of “foreign agents”, which included organisations and individuals (2012 law). Subsequently, the legislation was supplemented with the concept of an “undesirable organisation”, which applied to foreign and international entities deemed undesirable in Russia (2015). The list of undesirable organisations included the National Endowment for Democracy, the Open Society Foundations, founded by U.S. business magnate George Soros, among others. In November 2017, the law tightened control over media outlets that received funding from abroad, recognising them as foreign agents with all the relevant restrictions. The first targets of sanctions were Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and a number of their projects. Under such circumstances, Putin easily won the 2018 presidential election and the 2019 regional elections. Oppositional organisations such as Mikhail Khodorkovsky’s *Otkrytaya Rossiya* (Open Russia) and Alexei Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation were forced to relocate their activities outside Russia. A court ban on Navalny’s participation in the presidential elections, the attempt to poison him in August 2020, and his imprisonment upon his return to Russia in January 2021 left the non-systemic opposition facing a virtual defeat.⁴⁴

Especially important for the strengthening of authoritarianism in Russia was the all-Russian vote on amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation, which took place in late June 2020. The amendments provided a redistribution of powers between the branches of power in Russia with a tendency to strengthen the power of the president. They included the so-called “zeroing of Putin’s terms”, which allowed him to run for president in the next two elections. In addition, the amendments effectively enshrined the president’s lifetime immunity, allowing him to remain a member of the Federation Council even after the end of his political career. The amendments also expanded the powers of the authorities to combat “internal threats” and established the

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 25–29.

⁴⁴ Л. Якубова (2023). *До свободи крізь вогонь...* *Op.cit.*, pp. 294–334.

priority of Russian legislation over international law.⁴⁵ Almost 78% of Russian citizens supported the constitutional amendments.⁴⁶ According to L. Yakubova, the “great zeroing” prepared the legal grounds for a radical transformation of Russia’s state system and was one of the key aspects in preparing both for an all-out war in Ukraine and for long-term geopolitical isolation.⁴⁷

Obviously, Moscow was counting on a change of power in Ukraine in 2019. However, in its relations with Russia, the Ukrainian government, having enlisted the support of the US and the EU, responded to public sentiment and did not make any significant concessions.

Meanwhile, on 12 July 2021, an article entitled “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians” appeared in Russian and Ukrainian on the website of the Russian President (the Russian Ministry of Defence added the article to the list of “mandatory topics for military and political training”). Putin’s article consists of a summary of Russia’s vision of the history of the two nations and a review of relations between Russia and Ukraine at the time. He argued that Ukrainians and Russians are “one people”, “the triune Russian people”. He emphasised that “Ukraine’s true sovereignty is possible only in partnership with Russia”, as Ukrainian and Russian “spiritual, human, civilisational ties had been formed over centuries, stemming from the same sources, forged by common trials, achievements and victories”. By repeating the old imperial myths about the artificiality of Ukrainian statehood, and by claiming that the conventional West (primarily the United States) wants to “turn Ukraine into a barrier between Europe and Russia, into a bridgehead against Russia”, he was in fact blackmailing both Ukraine and the international community with the prospect of a full-scale military conflict.⁴⁸

Since the autumn of 2021, threats have been made not only against Ukraine’s leadership, but also against the United States and NATO. Numerous military units were deployed on Ukraine’s borders, and constant manoeuvres have been conducted. The imminent completion of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, which effectively removed the Ukrainian GTS from supplying Russian energy to Europe, and the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan

⁴⁵ *Constitutional change in Russia: More Putin, or preparing for post-Putin?* (2020, May 27). European Parliament. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/651935/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)651935_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/651935/EPRS_BRI(2020)651935_EN.pdf) [accessed: 10.01.2024].

⁴⁶ *Constitutional reform in Russia 2020 – statistics & facts* (2023, December 21). Statista Research Department. <https://www.statista.com/topics/6056/constitutional-reform-in-russia-2020/> [accessed: 10.01.2024].

⁴⁷ Л. Якубова (2023). *До свободи крізь вогонь... Оп. cit.*, p. 301.

⁴⁸ В. Путін (2021, July 12). *Про історичну єдність росіян і українців*. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66182> [accessed: 10.01.2024]. More about Putin’s views on history: T. Snyder (2024, August 25). *Putin’s Legend. The Nonsensical Basis of a Terrible War*. <https://snyder.substack.com/p/putins-legend> [accessed: 10.09.2024].

convinced Putin that he would quickly achieve his goals in Ukraine and in confrontation with the US and the EU.⁴⁹

A few days after the recognition of the independence of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic, on 24 February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Kremlin leader's declaration of war to destroy Ukraine and Ukrainians was mostly taken for granted by Russian society.⁵⁰ Over the following months, it demonstrated a pattern of moral degradation that made the world shudder.

It was also striking that a number of influential state and public figures took part in justifying the genocidal nature of the *Russkiy mir* ideology. A Russian political strategist close to the Kremlin, Timofei Sergeytsev, in an article published on 3 April 2022 on the website of the Russian state news agency RIA Novosti, called for the complete destruction of Ukraine as a state and the ethnocide of Ukrainians. Sergeytsev explained Putin's proclaimed "denazification" of Ukraine as "re-education" of the population, "ideological repression", "strict censorship in the political sphere..., culture and education", and "de-Ukrainisation". The author also wrote about the need for the physical extermination of Ukraine's political class and military, along with mass repression and ethnic cleansing.⁵¹

Similar thoughts were voiced by Deputy Secretary of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev on 5 April 2022. He said that "Russian President Vladimir Putin had firmly set the goal of demilitarising and denazifying Ukraine. These complex tasks could not be accomplished overnight, and they would not be solved only on the battlefields. The most important goal is to change the bloody and full of false myths consciousness of some of today's Ukrainians. The goal is for the sake of the peace of future generations of Ukrainians themselves and the opportunity to finally build an open Eurasia – from Lisbon to Vladivostok".⁵²

⁴⁹ С. Плохий (2023). *Російсько-українська війна... Op.cit.*, pp.161–168.

⁵⁰ On the dynamics of mass opinion on the war against Ukraine: *Конфликт с Украиной: июль 2022 года* (2022, August 1). Левада-Центр. Аналитический центр Юрия Левады. <https://www.levada.ru/2022/08/01/konflikt-s-ukrainoj-iyul-2022-goda/> [accessed: 10.01.2024].

⁵¹ Т. Сергейцев (2022, April 3). *Что Россия должна сделать с Украиной*. <https://ria.ru/20220403/ukraina-1781469605.html> [accessed: 10.01.2024].

⁵² Д. Медведев (2022, April 5). *Преобразившуюся ментально в Третий рейх Украину его же судьба и постигнет*. Реальное время. <https://realnoevremya.ru/articles/246686-medvedev-napisal-post-o-feykah-i-nastoyaschey-istorii> [accessed: 10.01.2024]. Read more about genocidal rhetoric in the public space of Russia: *Геноцидна риторика російського режиму* (2023). Центр стратегічних комунікацій та інформаційної безпеки, Київ, p. 39. <https://spravdi.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/genocide.pdf> [accessed: 10.01.2024].

Since the beginning of the full-scale war, the Western media have been calling the leader of neo-Eurasianism, Alexander Dugin, as “Putin’s brain”, emphasising his decisive influence on the Russian dictator’s views on Ukraine.⁵³ A year after the outbreak of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, in a programmatic article, Dugin argued that Russia was in a state of “full-fledged and severe war” not only with Ukraine but also with the “collective West”. Threatening the world with the use of nuclear weapons, he proclaimed that Ukraine was doomed and that Russia could not lose this war. Reflecting on the scenarios for such a victory, A. Dugin wrote that “Russia’s complete victory would be the liberation of the entire territory of Ukraine from the control of the pro-Western Nazi regime and the restoration of the historical unity of both the state of the Eastern Slavs and the great Eurasian state”.⁵⁴

The Russian Orthodox Church, headed by Patriarch Kirill, played a particularly important role in the united anti-Ukrainian front. On 23 February 2022, in his greetings to Russian President Vladimir Putin, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and the military on the occasion of Defenders of the Fatherland Day, the Patriarch noted the existence of threats on Russia’s borders and focused on the fact that, although no war is without casualties, every soldier must be ready to defend the Russian people and be prepared to sacrifice.⁵⁵ In fact, this speech amounted to a blessing for the Russian troops to start fighting against Ukraine on 24 February. In a sermon on 27 February, the Patriarch claimed that the situation in Ukraine was characterised by “evil

⁵³ A. Barbashin, H. Thoburn (2014, March 31). *Putin’s brain. Alexander Dugin and the philosophy behind Putin’s invasion of Crimea*. Foreign Affairs. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-03-31/putins-brain> [accessed: 12.07.2024]; D. Von Drehle (2023, March 22). *The man known as “Putin’s brain” envisions the splitting of Europe – and the fall of China*. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/03/22/alexander-dugin-author-putin-deady-playbook/> [accessed: 24.01.2024]. More: Т. Полещук (2023). *Історичні джерела концепту “руський мір” в українському питанні: євразійство*. “Народознавчі зошити”, 5(173), pp. 1202–1215.

⁵⁴ А. Дугин (2023, February 21). *СВО: год первый. Смена парадигмы*. Геополитика.ru. <https://www.geopolitika.ru/article/svo-god-pervyy-smena-paradigmy> [accessed: 12.01.2024].

⁵⁵ *Поздравление Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла Президенту России В. Путину с Днем защитника Отечества* (2022, February 23). <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5900861.html> [accessed: 12.10.2024]; *Поздравление Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла министру обороны России С. Шойгу с Днем защитника Отечества* (2022, February 23). Patriarchia.ru. <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5900883.html> [accessed: 12.01.2024]; *В День защитника Отечества Святейший Патриарх Кирилл возложил венок к могиле Неизвестному солдату у Кремлевской стены* (2022, February 23). Patriarchia.ru. <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5903402.html> [accessed: 12.01.2024].

forces that had always fought against the unity of Russia and the Russian Church” trying to take over.⁵⁶

During the XXV World Russian People’s Council (27 March 2024), chaired by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, the document “The Present and Future of *Russkiy mir*” (“Order of the XXV World Russian People’s Council”) was approved. As stated in the preamble, it is a programme document of the World Russian People’s Council, as well as an “order addressed to the legislative and executive authorities of Russia”.⁵⁷ This document is unprecedented because, firstly, it was formulated under the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church and received the highest blessing and approval from the Moscow Patriarch and other hierarchs. Secondly, it was unanimously supported by 488 delegates, including more than 30 bishops, over 60 priests of the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as other participants representing all branches of government and social groups in Russian society. Most importantly, it indicates how Russia should develop further and build *Russkiy mir*. Of course, Putin, although appearing only via video link, “blessed” the meeting with his support.

The “Order” called the “Special military operation” (*Specyálnaia Voennaia operatsiia*, SVO) a new stage in the national liberation struggle of the Russian people, “waged in the lands of Southwestern Russia since 2014 against the criminal Kyiv regime and the collective West that stands behind it”. From a spiritual and moral point of view, the SVO is a “holy war”, “in which Russia and its people, defending the unified spiritual space of Holy Russia, (...) protect the world from the onslaught of globalism and the victory of the West, which has fallen into Satanism”. According to the Russian Orthodox Church, after the completion of the SVO, the entire territory of modern Ukraine should be included in Russia’s exclusive influence. “The possibility of the existence of a Russophobic political regime hostile to Russia and its people on this territory, that is, a political regime controlled from an external centre hostile to Russia, must be completely excluded”, the “Order” emphasised. The document also stated that “the reunification of the Russian people should become one of the priorities of Russia’s foreign policy”. The authors of the document expressed their belief that “Russia should return to the doctrine of the triunity of the Russian people, which has existed for more than three centuries, according to which the Russian people consists of Great Russians, Little Russians, and Belarusians, who are branches (sub-ethnic groups) of

⁵⁶ Слово Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла в Неделю о Страшном Суде после Литургии в Храме Христа Спасителя (2022, February 27). Patriarchia.ru. <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5904390.html> [accessed: 12.01.2024].

⁵⁷ Наказ XXV Всемирного русского народного собора “Настоящее и будущее Русского мира” (2024, March 27). Patriarchia.ru. <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/6116189.html> [accessed: 12.07.2024].

one people, and the term “Russian” covers all Eastern Slavs – descendants of historical Russia”.⁵⁸ As we can see, in the context of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, the Russian Orthodox Church remains a key pillar of the ideology and practice of *Russkiy mir*.

Thus, the annexation of Crimea and the aggression in eastern Ukraine marked the beginning of the transformation of the Russian authoritarian regime into “rashism” – a totalitarian regime based on the ideology of *Russkiy mir*. Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine has become a forceful means of implementing the *Russkiy mir* project in Ukraine. Its main goal is to destroy the state and national self-determination of Ukrainians, assimilate them and integrate them into the socio-cultural space of *Russkiy mir*, and restore historical Russia/USSR, where there is no place for an independent Ukraine, the Ukrainian nation, language, and culture.

Conclusions

The ideologeme of *Russkiy mir*, whose roots date back to the formation of the foundations of modern Russian statehood (the second half of the 15th and early 16th centuries), absorbed a number of heterogeneous anti-Western trends, historical myths, and intellectual and political constructs. After the collapse of the USSR, the state ideology on which several generations of Soviet people had been brought up was lost, while the outlines of the future Russia were only beginning to take shape, accompanied by socio-economic and political instability. Therefore, there was a demand among Russian intellectual circles to find a new Russian (*russkoi*) idea. As a result of heated debates between supporters of the market economy and liberal democracy, on the one hand, and advocates of Russia’s distinctive, special historical path, on the other, the concept of *Russkiy mir* crystallised. In the early 21st century, through the efforts of part of the intellectual elite, the political establishment, and the Russian Orthodox Church, *Russkiy mir* came to be defined as a special civilisation based on the Russian language and culture, Orthodoxy, common history, and historical memory.

⁵⁸ It is worth noting that on 13 March 2022, more than 1,600 Orthodox theologians and clergymen from dozens of countries condemned the concept of *Russkiy mir* as heretical in a special declaration. The document cites the Bible and quotes the Holy Scriptures to show that Orthodoxy does not accept the shameful actions taken by the Russian government and the Russian Orthodox Church under the leadership of Kirill (A Declaration on the “Russian World” (*Russkii mir*) Teaching (2022, March 13). Public Orthodoxy. <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/> [accessed: 12.01.2024]).

Since 2007, the concept of *Russkiy mir* has become the ideological basis of the authoritarian political regime and an important factor in Putin's geopolitics. The Russian president has publicly addressed topics related to the historical past of Russia and the USSR and has constantly emphasised the linguistic, cultural, and civilisational unity of "Russian compatriots" living abroad. The state created several powerful organisations that were supposed to promote a positive image of the state, spread the Russian language, and popularise Russian culture around the world. A number of conservative intellectuals, especially the Russian Orthodox Church, led by Patriarch Kirill, were actively involved in promoting the ideas of *Russkiy mir*. Under the slogans of protecting the Russian and Russian-speaking population of Ukraine, Russia annexed Crimea and launched an aggression in Eastern Ukraine (Spring 2014). These events were welcomed by the majority of Russian society and marked the beginning of the transformation of Russian authoritarianism into "rashism" – a totalitarian regime based on the ideology of *Russkiy mir*. Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine (2022) was a forceful form of implementing the *Russkiy mir* project on that territory. The real consequences of this war include the genocide of the Ukrainian people, the forced deportation of residents of the occupied territories to the regions of the Russian Federation, the destruction of Ukrainian cities, cultural monuments, and critical infrastructure, and the terrorization of the civilian population. In the temporarily occupied territories, the study of the Ukrainian language is banned, Ukrainian educational programmes are being cancelled, and teaching materials on the Ukrainian language, Ukrainian history, and Ukrainian literature are being withdrawn. The main goal of the war is to destroy the state and national self-determination of Ukrainians, to assimilate them and integrate them into the socio-cultural space of *Russkiy mir*, and to restore historical Russia/USSR, where there is no place for an independent Ukraine, the Ukrainian nation, language, and culture.

In the course of the full-scale war waged by the Russian Federation since 2022, Russia's centuries-old imperial expansionism and the true nature of its attitude towards Ukraine, in the optics of *Russkiy mir*, have become clearly visible: Ukrainophobia, ethnocide, abuse, and contempt for Ukrainians. *Russkiy mir* is an ideology of war that places Ukrainians before an existential choice: not to exist at all or to exist as Malorossia and the Malorossians – components of the "single Russian people". This doctrine poses a threat to the sovereignty and existence of all countries declared by the Russian Federation to be part of the so-called *Russkiy mir*.

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List of abbreviations

CIS – the Commonwealth of Independent States
CPSU – the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DNA – deoxyribonucleic acid: the molecule, located in the nucleus of the cells of living things that determines the structure and purpose of each cell and carries genetic information necessary for reproduction
EU – the European Union
FSB – the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (*Federal'naya sluzhba bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii*)
KGB – the Committee for State Security (*Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti*)
MGIMO – the Moscow State Institute of International Relations
NATO – the North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO – the Non-Governmental Organization
OUN – the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists
RF – the Russian Federation
RT – Russia Today
SVO – Special Military Operation (*Specyalnaia voennaia operatsiya*)
Ukrainian GTS – the natural gas transmission system of Ukraine
UPA – the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (*Ukrayins'ka Povstans'ka Armiia*)
US – the United States of America
USSR – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Abstract

The purpose of the article is to analyse the formation and content of *Russkiy mir* (Russian World) ideology, its establishment as a state doctrine, and the geopolitical course of modern Russia. The contemporary vision of *Russkiy mir* is the result of the search by Russian intellectuals and the establishment for a new national and state identity after the collapse of the USSR. The main features of *Russkiy mir* ideology are the Russian language and culture, Orthodoxy, common history, and historical memory. The ideologeme justifies the uniqueness of Russia as a special civilisation and is an instrument of Russian geopolitical expansion. It is emphasised that Russia's war against Ukraine is a manifestation of the violent implementation of the *Russkiy mir* project. This doctrine also poses a danger to the sovereignty of countries declared by the Russian Federation to be a zone of *Russkiy mir*.

Russkiy mir (Świat Rosyjski): od pojęcia abstrakcyjnego
do ideologii państwowej i strategii geopolitycznej

Abstrakt

Celem artykułu jest analiza kształtowania się i treści ideologii *Russkiy mir* (Świat Rosyjski), jej ustanowienia jako doktryny państwowej oraz geopolitycznego kursu współczesnej Rosji. Współczesna wizja Rosckiego mira jest wynikiem poszukiwań

rosyjskich intelektualistów i elit politycznych dotyczących nowej tożsamości narodowej i państwowej po upadku ZSRR. Główne elementy tej ideologii obejmują język i kulturę rosyjską, prawosławie, wspólną historię oraz pamięć historyczną. Ideologiem ten uzasadnia wyjątkowość Rosji jako odrębnej cywilizacji i stanowi narzędzie rosyjskiej ekspansji geopolitycznej. Podkreślono, że wojna Rosji przeciwko Ukrainie jest przejawem brutalnej realizacji projektu *Russkij mir*. Doktryna ta stwarza również zagrożenie dla suwerenności państw, które Federacja Rosyjska deklaruje jako część strefy *Russkogo mira*.

Keywords: *Russkiy mir* (the Russian world), state ideology, geopolitics, Russian-Ukrainian war, historical memory

Słowa kluczowe: *Russkij mir* (Świat Rosyjski), ideologia państwowa, geopolityka, wojna rosyjsko-ukraińska, pamięć historyczna

Zoya Baran is a Candidate of Historical Science and Associate Professor in the Department of World Modern History at Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Universytetska Street, 79000, Lviv, Ukraine, E-mail: zoja_baran@ukr.net.

Tamara Poleshchuk is a Candidate of Historical Science and Associate Professor in the Department of Central and Eastern European History at Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Universytetska Street, 79000, Lviv, Ukraine, E-mail: tpol@ukr.net.

Olga Wasiuta is a professor with a habilitated doctor degree, Head of the Institute of Security and Information Technology, and Chair of International Security at the University of the National Education Commission in Krakow. Her main research areas include international, European, and regional security, as well as a wide range of threats: hybrid war, information warfare, new-generation warfare (including ISIS tactics), and the use of UAVs in modern wars. Professor. Olga Wasiuta's achievements and their thematic scope reflect the interdisciplinary nature of security studies.