



Russian World(s) in Vienna: agents, compatriots and people

Alexandra Yatsyk

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Studies in Contemporary Russia

RUSSIA AND THE EU

SPACES OF INTERACTION

Edited by
Thomas Hoffmann and Andrey Makarychev



Russia and the EU

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Russia's support for military insurgency in eastern Ukraine undermined two decades of cooperation between Russia and the EU, leaving both sides in a situation of reciprocal economic sanctions and political alienation. What is left of previous positive experiences and mutually beneficial interactions between the two parties? And, what new communication practices and strategies might Russia and Europe use?

Previously coherent and institutionalized spaces of communication and dialogue between Moscow and Brussels have fragmented into relations that, while certainly not cooperative, are also not necessarily adversarial. Exploring these spaces, contributors consider how this indeterminacy makes cooperation problematic, though not impossible, and examine the shrunken, yet still existent, expanse of interaction between Russia and the EU. Analysing to what extent Russian foreign policy philosophy is compatible with European ideas of democracy, and whether Russia might pragmatically profit from the liberal-democratic order, the volume also focuses on the practical implementation of these discourses and conceptualizations as policy instruments.

This book is an important resource for researchers in Russian and Soviet Politics, Eastern European Politics and the policy, politics and expansion of the European Union.

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4 Russian World(s) in Vienna

Agents, compatriots, and people

Alexandra Yatsyk

There are no doubts that the policy of our country towards its compatriots doesn't forge ahead. No one among current Russian politicians reproduces the Soviet Union's compatriot policy, which has considered compatriots as traitors and is over now. Our understanding of this brooks no ambiguity ... We esteem you, our compatriots, as an inseparable part of our common nation, of the Russian World ... it is Russia's obligation and responsibility to protect your rights and duties, to realize your capacity in favour of Russia's development ... This is a two-way street ... We are keen to rely upon you as a powerful social and political force able to affect local politicians in pursuing ... projects where Russia and Austria proceed together.

(Konstantin Kosachev, Vienna, 2016)¹

Russia is a nation loyal to the Tsar or his replacement. It is exactly the belonging to the Russian Empire or its successor, generally speaking, which determines the Russian identity.

(Russian journalist living in Vienna, 2017)²

Introduction

This chapter addresses discourses of the Russian World(s) as produced by social, political, economic, cultural, and religious institutions, representing and popularizing Russian language, culture, and the Orthodox values abroad. I particularly focus on the Austrian case, raising a question of how the concept of the Russian World, grounded in biopolitical conservatism (see Makarychev and Yatsyk 2015, 2017), spirals beyond Russia's borders and reifies in a culturally hybrid European milieu of the city of Vienna.

As seen from the Kremlin, Austria conducts a much more friendly policy towards Russia than some of its European peers.³ It is one of the few EU members that have been consistently opposing sanctions against Russia, and was the first European country that welcomed Vladimir Putin at his official visit after the sanctions were introduced in 2014 (Embassy of Russian Federation 2016). Russian authorities have been carefully cultivating connections with a plethora of Austrian political forces sympathetic with Russia, including both the ruling social democratic SPÖ

(Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs) and the conservative ÖVP (Österreichische Volkspartei), as well as with the oppositional far-right FPÖ (Die Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs).⁴ The Vice Mayor of Vienna Johann Gudenus, an FPÖ member, attending a conference in Moscow on 22 June 2017, spoke against sanctions that the EU imposed on Russia (Yuschchenko 2017). The Austrian Chancellor and SPÖ's representative Christian Kern also harshly criticized the 2017 US sanctions against Russia for their damaging effect for the European business involved in transporting Russian natural gas to Europe (Jordans 2017).

In contrast to Finland and Sweden, where Russian annexation of Crimea and the subsequent war in eastern Ukraine led to the nationwide debates about the merits of joining NATO, Austria tries to avoid such a public discussion, which could be explained by the history of the modern Austrian state. In the aftermath of the Second World War it avoided partition – unlike Germany – only due to the *Anschluss* in 1938, which dissolved the Austrian sovereignty and turned the country, into an unwilling part of the Nazi state. Nonetheless, after the war Austria was divided into four occupation zones among the United States, Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union. This arrangement was fraught with tension as the Cold War descended on Europe, but Stalin's death in 1953 ushered in détente, which resulted in gradual demilitarization as the Soviet authorities reduced their troops. The previously stalled talks on independence resumed, and the Austrian Chancellor Julius Raab negotiated with the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov the agreement that eventually led to the signing of the Austrian State Treaty by the four Allied Powers in May 1955. At the Soviet Union's insistence, after the occupying forces left Austria in October 1955, the Austrian Parliament declared permanent neutrality, which guaranteed that the country would not join NATO. Thus, as the legal successor to the Soviet Union, Russia views itself as one of the four states that safeguarded the Austrian sovereignty, which gives official Moscow a special status vis-à-vis Vienna.

The Russia-friendly Austria's disposition also largely stems from the country's considerable economic connections with Russia, and, first of all, its energy dependence, which accounts for 60 per cent of its gas consumption (RIA novosti 2017). About 79 per cent of Russia's export to Austria consists of gas and hydrocarbon products (Palad'eva 2016). The sanctions had a detrimental impact on bilateral trade. Russian–Austrian trade turnover declined by 25 per cent (EurAsia Daily 2016) and shrank to 2.7 billion US dollars in 2016 (Ru-Stat 2017), compared to the peak of 4.9 billion in 2011 (Edinaya Rossiya 2012). In 2016 Austria occupied 34th place among Russian trade partners with a 0.6 per cent share (compared with China's 14 per cent at the top of the list) (Ru-Stat 2017). Yet, according to the Russian Embassy in Austria, at the beginning of 2017 the Russian–Austrian trade turnover increased up to 30 per cent, which improved Russia's rank in the list of Austria's trade partners (from 15 to 14) (Torgovoe predstavitel'stvo 2017).

The year 2017 was announced as a “year of Austrian–Russian tourism”, which attests to a stable positive trend in economic cooperation between the two countries.

According to official data, about 100,000 people with a Russian migration background lived in the country in 2016 (Medien-Servicestelle Neue ÖsterreicherInnen 2016), including 32,018 Russian citizens (Statistik Austria 2017). The scope of Russian speakers in Austria is largely due to several successive waves of immigration after the Second World War, as well as the Soviet military occupation that lasted until July 1955. As a diplomatic centre, Vienna hosts numerous international companies, among which are the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). This fact partly explains the city’s reputation as the “capital of spies” with close to 7,000 intelligence agents, evidently including Russians, operating there (McElroy 2014).

Due to all these circumstances, Russia’s promotion of the Russian World agenda in Austria does not take such aggressive forms as, for example, in Germany where the Kremlin claims to “protect” its compatriots from the “rotten” liberal influence of the West. The Austrian case demonstrates the hybrid coexistence of Western liberal models and Russian conservatism, intersecting with each other in the narratives of the *Great Patriotic War* and *the Orthodox religion*. Both discourses, being constitutive to the ideas of the geopolitical and/or the civilizational mission of Russia, currently draw lines of belonging to, or exclusion from, the Russian Worlds communities.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first conceptualizes the Russian World as a rhizome. The second and third sections are focused on the local debate on religion, memory and the current role of Russia in Europe in close connection to developments in the “near abroad” (more specifically, Ukraine). The work is based on empirical data that includes participant observations (Vienna, April–June 2017),⁵ media coverage of the local Russian language sources⁶ and eight in-depth interviews with the representatives of the Russian Embassy in Vienna, the Society of the Austrian–Russian Friendship (Österreichisch-Russische Freundschaftsgesellschaft (ORFG)), the Russian Orthodox Church, the All-Austrian Association of Compatriots in Austria, Russian- and German-language local media, and an Austrian radical movement.

Russian World: a methodological framework

In this section I intend to reach beyond the traditional conceptualizations of the Russian World in terms of soft power or public diplomacy (O’Loughlin et al. 2017; Bogomolov and Lytvynenko 2012; Grigas 2012). I share some scepticism about their applicability in this regard (Makarychev 2017). In the post-Crimean political milieu Russia’s cultural influence became much more propagandistically aggressive and militarized, morphing into what could

be considered “‘soft coercion’ rather than attraction” (Lutsevych 2016, 4). Due to incapability to attain attraction by promoting innovative social and economic models, Russia’s approach to soft power mostly appeals to the common Soviet cultural background, including the Russian language as its *lingua franca*, through “state-directed exercise aimed at exploiting a targeted country’s vulnerabilities” (Lutsevych 2016, 4).

Some recent works on the topic analyse Russia’s propaganda efforts in the EU and the “near abroad” (Weidinger et al. 2017; Krekoř et al. 2016; Reimon and Eva Zelechowski 2017; Grigat 2017) approaching the Russian World concept as a construct that encompasses the meaning-making elements of the neoliberal economy of late capitalism. The Kremlin does use the Russian World as a substitute to the non-existent national ideology for the purpose of solidifying and mobilizing Russian diasporas dispersed around the globe. I endeavour to avoid pointing to the Russian World as a series of allegedly linear projects produced and disseminated by a group of centrally positioned actors (“the Kremlin”, “the Russian Orthodox Church” or the “Russian World” Foundation) for passive and peripheral audiences. In contrast, I focus on multiple actors producing their own Russian Worlds as multi-layered discourses structured rhizomatically, reaching beyond the logic of territorial politics and harmonized with transnational and cross-border hybridities.

For Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, a rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, and offshoots; it establishes inter-connections between semiotic chains resembling “a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive” (Deleuze and Guattari 2015, 7). In the categories of Ernesto Laclau, these chains are made up of discursive nodal points related to each other through the principle of equivalence (Laclau 2015). The rhizomatic nature of the Russian World is manifested in its connectivity with the ideas of conservatism and Orthodoxy. All these modalities represent a neo-imperial discourse that seeks to transcend state borders and turn them into movable and permeable (often intentionally uncertain) frontiers. In this sense, the Russian World is one of rhizomatic mechanisms that inscribe Russia and its foreign interlocutors into the logic of a globalized world with its diasporal politics and humanitarian concerns. Three versions of the Russian World, as differently promoted beyond the state, could be spotted in this regard.

The *technocratic* version was proposed in the 1990s by Piotr Schedrovitsky, Sergey Chernyshov, Sergey Gradirovsky and later developed by Gleb Pavlovsky. It promotes the ideas of cosmopolitanism and offers a “business-like project of constructing diaspora as a network of equal partners”, as “global Russians” (Suslov 2017, 21). This version didn’t imply territorial expansion and used the Russian World concept as a soft power tool, which raised a conceptual dilemma “between the geopolitical interpretation of the

‘Russian World’ as a territorial entity on the one hand, and the cultural-economic, de-territorialized vision of a partnership with diaspora” on the other (Suslov 2017, 14).

The *religious* version was proposed by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), which considers the Russian World a community of people sharing the Orthodox faith and the so-called traditional values. Geographically, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova are seen as elements of this community (Kirill 2010), but its influence is also meaningful in northern Kazakhstan – mostly populated by Russian speakers – and Georgia with its strong Orthodox identity. As for Europe, ROC actively communicates with religious (basically Catholic) organizations that are in opposition to the liberal ideas of tolerance, political correctness, multiculturalism, and the erosion of the institution of family.

The *nationalist* version of the Russian World is rooted in the Russian Doctrine that the *Izborsky Club* issued in 2007. It states that Russian identity can’t be deduced from other identities, and doesn’t need any external justifications for its existence (Russkaia Doktrina 2017). Patriotism and loyalty to the state are declared the key principles of belonging to the Russian World community (Nikonov 2010b). However, within the state itself the attitudes are less rigid. Vyacheslav Nikonov, the head of the state-funded Russian World Foundation established in 2007, pointed out that

if inside our country “Russianness” mostly means an ethno-cultural identity, and “Russian” is a matter of citizenship, then beyond the country “Russian” connotes supranational, supra-ethnic and, in some sense, civilizational meanings. The Russian World is a civilization that is broader than concepts of ethnic groups, territories, religions, political systems and attitudes ... The Russian World includes Russia and its near abroad. The belonging to it is a kind of self-description.

(Nikonov 2010a, 5)

Nikonov came up with a biopolitical argument, saying that “we need to reassemble people, not lands. And globally, not domestically, since inside Russia these connotations can sound nationalistic” (Nikonov 2011). Underlying the allegedly “objective” and politically neutral character of the Russian World idea, he asserted that “it is about justice and truth, not nationality” (Smetanina 2014).

The third presidential tenure of Vladimir Putin was marked by a substantial shift in Russia’s vision of its compatriots within the framework of the Russian World. After the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, some parts of the Russian diaspora (former Soviet citizens and Russian speakers in the “near abroad”) were prioritized, while others (“global Russians”) were downplayed, which meant the solidification and foreclosure of the semantic borders of the Russian World concept. In fact, the official

policy towards diaspora has moved away from the liberal and technocratic versions of the Russian World as a cosmopolitan space of “all Russians, wherever they live” (Suslov 2017, 28) to more nationalistic and ethnically-grounded projects. For Mikhail Suslov, “the logic of the recent ideological thrust towards conservatism, anti-Westernism, and isolationism offers a specific interpretation of diaspora as part and parcel of the geopolitical and civilizational entity of the ‘Russian World’. This vision excludes possibilities for constructing diaspora as a de-territorialized partner of globalizing Russia” (Suslov 2017, 7).

In the next section I will focus on the Russian Worlds narratives by the Russian diaspora in Vienna and its Austrian interlocutors. I will unveil areas where they intersect, as well as semantic ruptures between them.

Russian World in Vienna: agents and hubs

There are five groups of Russian Worlds in Vienna that I could broadly identify. *The first* one is exemplified by the Russian governmental and state-funded organizations, including the Russian Embassy in Vienna, the Russian Cultural Centre functioning as the local branch of *Rossotrudnichestvo*, and the Russian World Foundation that instituted Russian Language Centres in Innsbruck and Salzburg (Traxler 2017). These latter two are aimed at popularizing Russian culture and language, yet the local media suggest that the Centres also propagate specific ideas of the Russian World grounded in Russia’s imperial fantasies (Traxler 2017). The current head of the Russian Cultural Centre in Vienna, Jurii Zaytsev, was suspected by the Federal Bureau of Investigations of recruiting American citizens in 2010–2015, when he ran a similar Centre under the aegis of *Rossotrudnichestvo* in Washington, DC, in 2010–2015 (Redden 2013; Simpson 2013). As a result of the conducted investigation (Grigor’ev and Gal’perovich 2013), Zaytsev was relocated to a new diplomatic position in Cyprus, and in 2016 appointed the head of *Rossotrudnichestvo* in Vienna.

The *second* group is represented by the *Society of Austrian–Russian Friendship* (Österreichisch-Russische Freundschaftsgesellschaft (ORFG)), an influential public diplomacy organization with the head office in Vienna and local branches all around Austria. It includes about 4500 members representing the biggest Austrian and Russian business companies and political parties, including FPÖ’s Barbara Kappel, Johann Gudenus (the vice-mayor of Vienna), and public Ombudsman Peter Fichtenbauer (Weidinger et al. 2017, 23). The ORFG’s activity is supported by private financial sources and mainly aimed at boosting economic cooperation between the two countries through different projects amounting to 120 per year. In 2015–2016 the Society actively discussed the consequences of EU sanctions for Russian–Austrian relations, having as guest speakers the representatives of an international oil company OMV, Austrian politicians from SPÖ and FPÖ, the Russian Ambassador in Vienna, and others.⁷ According to findings of an

opinion poll conducted in October 2016 among adult Austrians by the Peter Hajek Public Opinion Strategies GmbH and commissioned by ORFG, 35 per cent of the respondents supported the idea of gradually lifting the sanctions against Russia, and 42 per cent have spoken for more active Russian involvement into EU geopolitical issues.⁸ On that basis, ORFG assumed “a positive reaction of Austrian people to the prospect of lifting the sanctions against Russia”.⁹

To this group I include also two alternative public diplomacy arenas in Russian–Austrian cooperation: the *Moscow Ball* and the *Russian Ball* in Vienna. The Moscow balls have taken place in the city since 2007 and were supported by ORFG and the Russian Embassy in Vienna. It is also accompanied by the *Gala Night for Russian Business*, and the *Viennese Ball* in Moscow, which have been co-organized by the Viennese entrepreneurs Elizabeth Smagin-Mellonic and Alexander Smagin. In 2017 the format of the Viennese Ball in Moscow was replicated in Riga (Malnach 2017), which might attest to their adaptability to the Baltic context as well.

The *Russian Ball* in Vienna has been held by Nathalie Holzmüller every year since 2006, who openly declares her pro-Kremlin and FPÖ sympathies. In 2014, in the Liechtenstein Palace, she convened a secret meeting of the European and Russian far-right groups, including the Russian ideologist of Eurasianism Alexander Dugin, the leader of the *Ataka* party in Bulgaria Volen Siderov, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen from *Front National* (a niece of Marine Le Pen), the Austrian right-wing politician Heinz-Christian Strache, and others. The event was financially supported by the Russian Orthodox oligarch Konstantin Malofeev (Lackner and Staudinger 2014). There were other Russian pro-Kremlin partners, such as the director of the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg Valery Gergiev with whom Holzmüller convened the second Russian Ball in Vienna in 2008 (*Sputnik* 2008) and who conducted the orchestral concerts in Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) after the Russian–Georgian war in 2008 and in Palmira (Syria) in 2016. The ball projects in Vienna seem to be aimed to reach different audiences and formally do not operate as elements of the state-sponsored Russian World, yet in the cultural and performative senses they do produce their own meanings of the Russian World.

The *third* group could be exemplified by the All-Austrian Association of Russian Compatriots, which acts as a coordinating council for at least 35 Russian-speaking cultural and social organizations registered in Austria. The board of the council includes 11 persons, such as the archpriest of the St. Nicholas Cathedral of the ROC in Vienna, an opera singer, a professor of Russian language, a representative of the IAEA, and others (Council of Compatriots in Austria 2016). The head of the Association, Irina Muchkina, is also the editor-in-chief of the “*New Viennese Magazine*” (*Novy Vensky Zhurnal*), the major Russian language media platform in Vienna she has directed since January 1996. In 2007–2014 she also published “*Expand the Circle!*” (*Shire Krug!*) magazine, partly supported by the Russian World Foundation.

Both media outlets clearly demonstrate the pro-Kremlin positions. Muchkina is a member of the International Council for Russian Compatriots established in 2001 as one of the pro-Kremlin pillars in the West. In 2008, the then president Dmitry Medvedev awarded her the “Medal of Friendship” for the “great contribution to development of cultural connections with Russian Federation and preservation of Russian language and culture” (Decree of the Russian President 2008).

The ROC in Vienna, as exemplified by the congregation of the St. Nicholas Cathedral and its head, the archpriest Father Vladimir (Tyuschuk), could be singled out in a separate – *fourth* – group in the archipelago of the local Russian Worlds. The parish organizes a Sunday school, an Orthodox child care centre, and an Orthodox family education and entertainment centre, all located at the territory of the Cathedral. The Father Vladimir was appointed to Vienna in 2002 from New York, where he served for 12 years, with the mission of “amicably settling local conflicts among the cathedral’s congregates”.¹⁰ As a result of his 15-year endeavours, the number of visitors of the Sunday Cathedral service has increased from several dozen up to five hundred. The Cathedral is a territorial neighbour to the Russian Embassy building and is supported by the Russian state, yet its clergymen prefer to keep some distance from Kremlin policy. However, the unanimous condemnation within the Viennese Orthodox community of an action in support of the Pussy Riot punk rock group, performed by two Austrians in the Cathedral in August 2012, has demonstrated how close the positions are of the Vienna-based ROC with the Kremlin (Saint Nicholas Cathedral 2012).

The *fifth* group consists of Austrian right-wing organizations, amongst whom the Suvorov Institute in Vienna plays the leading role. It was established in 2014 by Patrick Poppel and his wife as a reaction to the war in Eastern Ukraine, which was interpreted by them entirely from pro-Kremlin positions. The Institute may be found on the list of friendly organizations at the Russian World Foundation official web page (Russian World Fund 2017), as well as among participants of the recent “Street-Fest” event arranged by the ROC and the Russian Embassy in May 2017 in Vienna. Patrick Poppel practices the Orthodox religion and is a parishioner of the St. Nicholas Cathedral. He has close connections with FPÖ and the right-wing extremist group IPÖ (“Identitäre Bewegung”), sympathizing with the neo-Nazis and sharing some racist views (Weidinger et al. 2017, 33). Beforehand Poppel chaired *Rekos*, a party founded in Vienna by former FPÖ MP Ewald Stadler, known as one of the international “observers” during the so-called referendum in Crimea in 2014. In 2017 Poppel became an Austrian delegate of the Russian paramilitary Orthodox organization “*Sorok Sorokov*”, created by the Russian Patriarch Kirill, and also leaning towards radical ideas (Rudoï 2015). In June 2016, Poppel and other members of his think tank opened the first Russian Orthodox monastery in Austria (Suvorov Institute 2017). Poppel contributed to Alexander Dugin’s web portal *katehon.com*, and now cooperates with Yuri

Kofner, the chairman of the Eurasian Movement of the Russian Federation¹¹ and director of its European offshoot, the Munich-based think tank Center for Continental Cooperation (CCC), whose mission is “[t]he liberation of Europe from US hegemony in all sectors of society: the military, political, economic, cultural and media sectors, the resurgence of traditional European identity and culture, and the ending of ‘mass immigration’” (Weidinger et al. 2017, 36). The Suvorov Institute organizes Russian language classes, teaches the “martial arts of the Russian Cossacks” and produces video materials for the “religious YouTube channel” GloriaTV. Poppel is a member of the *Komitee für Frieden in der Ukraine*,¹² another radical organization, which has been actively organizing events in support of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk republics. Poppel’s religious career included affiliation with the *Freunde der Rudolfsheimer Kirche* (Friends of the Church of Rudolfsheim) and chairmanship in the *Bruderschaft vom heiligen Erzengel Michael* (*Brotherhood of the Holy Archangel Michael*), known as an ultra-conservative Catholic congregation dissolved in July 2016 (Weidinger et al. 2017, 36). Poppel was also among those who met in 2015 in Vienna the “Night Wolves” bike club, famous for its extremely radical nationalist and pro-Orthodox agenda and personal connections with Putin.

The religious “plateau” plays the role of a key connector for the Suvorov Institute in its liaisons with the Russian Worlds. Religious groups make possible, and also build, bridges with far-right, conservatives and nationalists organizations, thus tying together the two religious worlds, the Catholic and the Orthodox, which was legitimized by the historical meeting in 2016 in Havana of the Patriarch Kirill and the Pope Francis. The example of Poppel, who combines the positions in Catholic organizations with the linkages to the Orthodox Russian World, is an eloquent illustration of the broader trends bringing the two Churches politically closer to each other.

The Great Patriotic War narrative and weaponization of the Russian World

One could say that Austria relatively smoothly managed to deal with the consequences of the Soviet occupation trauma. Commemorative references are marginal in local political and historical discourses, and the urban spaces of Vienna only rarely become areas of memory struggles or conflicts (Zhurzhenko 2017, 92). Unlike, for example, the Bronze Soviet Soldier monument in Tallinn, relocated in 2007 from the central city square to a military cemetery, the Soviet War Memorial, erected at Schwarzenbergplatz in 1945 at the centre of Vienna, still plays a role as the locus of commemorative rituals of incoming Russians and Russian-speaking diaspora. The Soviet liberation of Vienna from the Nazi troops in April 1945 intertwines Austrian and Russian commemorative discourses with each other, though the two are differently articulated. Austria shares the transnational European paradigm of guilt and responsibility for Nazism and Holocaust, commemorating the

8th of May as Europe's Day, whereas Russians celebrate Victory Day on the 9th of May with the dominant emotions of triumph and glorification of the USSR – and very often personally Stalin – as the winner in the Great Patriotic War (Zhurzhenko 2017, 90).

The latter is particularly emphasized in the narratives of the Austrian–Russian Museum of Liberation of Vienna, opened in the former Second World War bunker in 2015, and in the exhibition “*The Nazi Crime. The Liberation Mission of the Red Army in Europe*” hosted by the Russian Cultural Centre at the Russian Embassy in 2017. The dominant idea here is that of liberation (Zolotov 2015) and the consequent “resurrection of free, sovereign and *neutral* Austria” (Zolotov 2015; my emphasis). The positive image of the Soviet Union includes its depiction as a country that experienced “all hardships of war at its own territory, and brought freedom to peoples of Europe”,¹³ and excludes other elements of history such as the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact or the Soviet occupation of Poland and the Baltic States.

The partial acceptance by Austrians of Russia's inherited self-perception as the successor of the “liberators of Europe”, as Zhurzhenko assumes, became possible due to the “deep gratitude of Austrians – yet not for the liberation itself, but rather for the withdrawal of the Soviet troops ten years later” (Zhurzhenko 2017, 104). For the Russian diaspora, she points out, the celebratory festivities at Schwarzenbergplatz on 9 May are rather more mnemonic than memorial events, since most visitors are not personally connected to those historical events. Thus, they come to Scharwzenbergplatz not to commemorate the Second World War, but to remember their own past in Russia or the Soviet Union, and to share their feelings with compatriots. Therefore, these annual ceremonies refer not to historical, but to cultural memory (Zhurzhenko 2017, 107). This pertinent observation could help to explain the growing number of participants of the “Immortal Regiment”, the march of descendants of the Great Patriotic War veterans launched in Russia in 2012 and organized at the Victory Day celebrations in Vienna since 2015.

The annexation of Crimea and the military conflict in Donbas have clearly articulated Russia's ambitions to appropriate a mission of the world liberator from fascism, which was transferred to the discourse of fighting against the alleged “neo-fascism” in the post-Maidan Ukraine. Starting from 2014, the Great Patriotic War-centred discourse on the Victory Day at Schwarzenbergplatz became weaponized through the active usage of the symbols of Russian military glory, above all the St. George ribbons and elements of the Soviet military uniform. The semantic borders of the Russian World, presupposing dividing “us” from “them”, became more solidified through drawing the direct semantic connection between accepting Russia's position on the conflict with Ukraine and belonging to the community of Russian speakers. Opponents of Russia's interpretation of the annexation of Crimea and the *Novorossiya* project were symbolically excluded from the space of common commemoration exemplified by the celebration of the Victory Day. As a result of this split, “we still sing

Ukrainian songs and are happy to see them [at our events] but not those whose brains were washed”, points out one of the organizers of the Victory Day in Vienna in 2017, referring to those Russian speakers with critical attitudes to Russia’s Ukraine policies. In fact, it is the Russian World community that symbolically – and visually – appropriated the urban space of the Soviet memory landscape in Vienna: on the 9th of May, 2017 there was only one Belorussian flag among numerous Russian flags decorating the Immortal Regiment march.

Drawing boundaries with Europe is another way of settling the Russian World discourses in Austria. The allegedly “common Slavic culture” and the Orthodox religion are among major nodal points of the widely understood (pan-)Russian World. Russia’s power inherited from the Soviet Union and revitalized by Putin’s regime serves as a background that cements the semantic construction of the Russian World edifice. As a delegate from the Russia-friendly Serbia pointed out at the Victory Day celebration in Vienna in 2017, “we have to emphasize that it is not only the Soviet Union, but Russia as well that won the Second World War. Our European partners should always respect Russia because it is a guarantor of peace and stability”.¹⁴

Another example of cultural bordering between the Russian World and Europe is the so-called “Victory Route”, a project launched by the pro-Kremlin biker club “Night Wolves” in 2015. Vienna was one of several cities in the itinerary of the days-long “patriotic” ride that started in Moscow and included also Minsk, Brest, Wrocław, Brno, Bratislava, Munich, Torgau, Karlshorst, Prague, and Berlin. Although the Polish and German authorities interpreted the action as a provocation and refused to issue visas to its participants, some members of the gang crossed the EU borders and successfully arrived in Austria, Slovakia, and Poland (Kronen Zeitung 2015). The Austrian government has kept a neutral position in this case, and the bikers were met by employees of the Russian Embassy in Vienna and by some pro-Russian Austrians. This neutrality, though, is not perceived by the local Russian diaspora as taken-for-granted. As one of its representatives points out, “I think that it is orchestrated from somewhere. It means that if they [Austrian Intelligence Service] who deal with the Russian World here, tomorrow get a message ... that the event is dangerous, then they [will stop assisting us]”.¹⁵

Russia’s historical role as the saviour of Europe from the world evil of fascism, and the consequent reproduction of this role identity through the anti-Maidan narrative, could be considered a semantic chain conjoining the different (rhizomatic) “worlds” that share the basic nodal points of the hegemonic narrative, and exclude the dissidents or critical thinkers. In the process of this world-creation, two aspects are fundamental. One implies splits and ruptures inside the spaces of the Russian Worlds in Vienna, both religious and secular. Another dimension is consolidation of pro-Russian World groups, which in particular could be illustrated by the activities of two pro-Russian organizations operating in Austria: the *Committee for Peace in Ukraine* and

the *Suvorov Institute*. It was Russia's conflict with Ukraine that decisively impacted upon both aspects.

Russian Worlds after Crimea: schism and solidarity

The annexation of Crimea, followed by Russia's support for military insurgency in Eastern Ukraine, triggered a tectonic alteration in identity structures inside the Russian Worlds in Vienna. The key marker defining the strategies of belonging to – and identifying with – the local Russian Worlds, or of exclusion from them, is the political identification with one of the sides in the conflict: either sharing Ukraine's national narrative, or supporting Russia's position. As a result of this normative dichotomy, both “Ukrainian” and “Russian” Worlds have gone through reconfiguration and consolidation. They both have actively articulated their identities in urban public spaces, organizing political and social actions devoted to the tragic events in Odessa in May 2014, the war in Donbas, or Putin's visit to Vienna in June 2014 (Council of Compatriots in Austria 2017; Zolotov 2014; Shire Krug 2014).

The local religious community, patronized by the ROC, was also split. A part of Ukrainian patriots, or “schismatics” in the vocabulary of the local ROC's congregates,¹⁶ has renounced the Moscow Patriarchate and joined either the Greek Orthodox Church or the Ukrainian autocephalous Church. ROC representatives, though, prefer to avoid sharp statements on the Ukraine issue; thus, no articles on the military conflict in Donbas appeared in 2014 in the ROC newspaper titled “Orthodox Austria”. In contrast with the strategies of individual members of the local Russian Worlds, whom the Russian–Ukrainian conflict has enforced to accentuate and clarify their sympathies and allegiances, the Vienna-based ROC keeps the lines of distinction intentionally blurred. According to an ROC priest, the Russian World as a space of the shared faith extends beyond state borders and transcends political conflicts, and thus should avoid the politics of taking sides. Seen from his perspective, there is no sense in drawing lines inside the Austrian Orthodox community in a situation of information war that complicates distinguishing facts from propaganda.¹⁷ “Initially, the project of the Russian World was planned as post-imperial, but due to the war in Ukraine it has discredited itself”, points out one of the parishioners.¹⁸

In the meantime, for those representatives of the local Russian World who articulated their support for the Kremlin anti-Ukrainian policy, it is no longer possible to play in “both camps”, because

you can try to be tolerant, but you have to choose. You can get foreign grants and love Russia ... but in a strange manner ... Some people say that the worse the better for Russia ... Ukrainians were with us before, but now they also say that it will be better if everything collapses! ... we are split now. The red line is NATO expansion to the east, and the [discrimination against] Russian language.¹⁹

Patriotism as a kind of unconditional love is declared as another semantic marker of belonging to the Russian World community. Russia's foreign policies, first of all in Ukraine and Syria, are intertwined into one chain of equivalences with the discourse of the Great Patriotic War and Russia's civilizational mission of the saviour of today's world:

Today's war is waged not only in Syria ... War is everywhere, even if it takes the form of information warfare. It means that we have to defend ourselves under the laws of war time. Isn't it time to pass a law against exultation on the occasion of tragic events in Russia? It will be probably the best we can do in commemoration of those who during all their lives were loyal to Russia and served not for money, fame or power, but for honour and dignity.

(Novyi Venskii Zhurnal 2017)

This discourse portrays Europe as a civilization deeply different from Russia:

The West always treated Russia as an unpredictable, semi-civilized country, worshiping the cult of vodka, the nuclear bomb and the bear ... The image of enemy became useful again ... This European racism may not be directly verbalized in the European legislation, but there are sufficient examples of its reification.

(Novyi Venskii Zhurnal 2016)

Russia's self-constructed role identities, as a safeguard of the European civilization and simultaneously a source of healing conservatism, are those semantic hubs that interlink discursive representations of the Russian Worlds with each other. It is the Russian Orthodoxy and Russia's civilizational (in a broad sense) specificity that constitute the background for the local Russian Worlds in Austria.

Such actors as the *Suvorov Institute* and the local "anti-fascist" organizations (as exemplified, for instance, by "*The Committee for Peace in Ukraine*" ("*Komitee für Frieden in der Ukraine, KFU*")) solidarize with Russia's geopolitical attitudes, and adopt them to the Austrian context. For Patrick Poppel, an Orthodox Monarchist, as he names himself, Russia appears to be an example of a "pure" and healthy conservatism, based on the Orthodox Christianity, a monarchist/imperial mentality and a multicultural social model, different from and irreducible to the Western patterns. It is the so-called "Russian spirit", the key feature of Russia as a civilization, which is neither European nor Asian, but is capable of being a model for the contemporary Europe enmeshed in a deep normative and mental crisis. In this logic, it is Russia's raising of grass-roots conservatism that Europe needs to adopt. Russia, the argument goes on, also embodies the idea of multipolarity and is able to challenge "globalism and monopolization of the world".²⁰ His personal story of acquaintance with Russia is inspired by the war in Donbas that motivated him to convert into the Orthodox faith.

The dramatic events in Russian–Ukrainian relations are also in the focus of the KFU. Since its establishment in 2014 it has organized several exhibitions addressing the “fratricidal war” in Ukraine (in particular, in Donbas and Odessa), which was interpreted from the pro-Kremlin positions, and delivered 22 tonnes of humanitarian aid to Luhansk (Valeev 2017). Their audiences and partners include representatives of a wider (pan)Russian World in Europe and Russia-loyal partners from Bulgaria, Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, Italy, and Slovakia (Valeev 2017).

These two organizations are examples of how the ideas of the Russian Worlds could penetrate to the local context, not necessarily because of shared or “common” culture and historical (Soviet/socialist) background, which are the key reference points for Kremlin’s cooperation with diasporas living in the post-Soviet space. As for Poppel, there are no *matreshka* [traditional Russian nesting dolls], *balalaika* [traditional string musical instrument] or *pelmeni* [Russian dumplings] and other “Russian stuff in my house, since I am Austrian”.²¹ For him, the Russian World project is a model for Europe due to its three pillars: the Orthodox religion, conservatism, and peaceful multiculturalism. The latter should remind Europe of its own past – the Roman imperial spirit, Christianity, and Greek philosophy. The imperial feelings, however, are reflected in Austria’s own tragic history of Nazism and Fascism: “I know what it means to have a grandfather who served in the SS division, I do not want to reveal it now”, points out Poppel. Yet by the same token he considers militarism as the key ingredient of the “Russian spirit”, which substantiates the far-right conservative agenda in today’s democratic Austria.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have made an attempt to take an analytical look at the Russian World not from the doctrinal viewpoint as it has been done many times before, but from the various perspectives of Russian-speaking and Russia-loyal communities in Austria. This outlook led me to conclude that the Russian World evades one single and linear conceptualization, and under close scrutiny fragments into a number of relatively autonomous – though evidently interconnected – spaces (or “plateaus”, in the categories of Deleuze and Guattari). It is my argument that the plurality of Russian Worlds in Austria might be taken as a lack of their conceptual consistency and coherence. Yet, in the meantime, the multiplicity of meanings inscribed into the broadly understood and discursively (re)constructed idea of the Russian World might be seen as a grounding of its resilience and endurance. Unlike top-down ideologies imposed from one single centre, rhizomatic structures are more flexible in adapting to the changing circumstances on the ground. They operate through the never-ending (re) generation of networked chains of semantic equivalences, thus expanding from one field of signification (for example, historical interpretations) to

another (for instance, religious normativity), and then looking for engaging with external clientele, including non-Russian speakers and non-Orthodox believers. This proliferation of meanings attached to one or another version of the Russian World blurs boundaries between the secular and the religious, history and contemporaneity, attraction and coercion, information and disinformation. This constant de-bordering appears to be a key condition of the existence of the phenomenon of the Russian World in the plurality of its forms, and its extrapolation beyond the Russian national political community.

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Notes

- 1 From his speech at the meeting of Russian Parliament members with compatriots in Austria at the Russian Cultural centre in Vienna, 19 December 2016. See *Russische Kultur Wien* (2016).
- 2 From the author's interview, June 2017, Vienna.
- 3 A meeting of Russian Parliament members with compatriots in Austria at the Russian Cultural centre in Vienna, 19 December 2016. See *Russische Kultur Wien* (2016).
- 4 FPÖ was the only European far-right party to conclude an official agreement on cooperation with the ruling Russian party, *Edinaja Russija* (United Russia) in 2016. See more about Russia's cooperation with SPÖ, ÖVP, and FPÖ in Weidinger et al. (2017).
- 5 The list of these events includes the exhibition "Nazism Crimes. Liberation Mission of the Red Army in Europe" (the Russian Cultural Centre in Vienna in May 2017), the Celebration of the Victory Day on 9 May 2017 at Schwarzenbergplatz; a reception at the Russian Embassy in Vienna on the Russian Independence Day on 12 June 2017; and a charitable exhibition of the arts of Donbas children, organized by the *Committee for the Peace in Ukraine* on 30 June 2017.
- 6 The list of covered sources includes issues of the "New Viennese Magazine" ("Novij Venskij Zhurnal", 1996–2017, available at <http://russianvienna.com>); 40 issues of the "Join the Circle!" magazine ("Shire Krug", 2007–2014, available at www.shirekrug.com); a magazine of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow and Viennese Patriarchy) in Vienna "The Orthodox Austria" ("Pravoslavnaya Avstrija", 7 issues, 2011–2014, available at www.nikolsobor.org/SITE/index.php/publikacii/2013-03-22-10-15-03); materials posted on the official web page of the Russian Embassy in Vienna (<https://austria.mid.ru/home>), of the *All-Austria Association of Compatriots*

- in Vienna (www.russianaustria.org), the *Russian Cultural Centre* in Vienna (<http://russischeskulturinstitut.at>), and others.
- 7 See www.orfg.net.
 - 8 “Ausspolitische Beziehungen zwischen der EU und Russland”, Pater Hajek Public Opinion Strategies, October 2016. Material of the poll is provided by the ORFG representatives, Vienna, June 2017.
 - 9 Data is provided by the ORFG representatives, Vienna, June 2017.
 - 10 From the author’s interview with Father Vladimir, June 2017, Vienna.
 - 11 See www.eurasian-movement.ru.
 - 12 See www.ukraine-frieden.org.
 - 13 V.I. Zabarosvkii, Director of the Central Museum of the Great Patriotic War in Moscow, foreword for the exhibition. Author’s materials, May, Vienna, 2017.
 - 14 From the greeting speech of the representative of a Serbian group at the celebration of the Victory Day, 9 May 2017, Schwarzenbergplatz, Vienna. Author’s material/participant observation.
 - 15 An interview with a representative of the Association of Russian Compatriots in Vienna, 16 June 2017, Vienna.
 - 16 From an interview with a parishioner of the ROC in Vienna, June 2017, Vienna.
 - 17 From an interview with a parishioner of the ROC in Vienna, June 2017, Vienna.
 - 18 Interview with a congregant of the St. Nicholas Cathedral in Vienna, a journalist, June 2016, Vienna.
 - 19 From an interview with a representative of the Association of Compatriots in Vienna, June 2017, Vienna.
 - 20 From an interview with Patrick Poppel, July 2017, Vienna.
 - 21 From an interview with Patrick Poppel, June 2016, Vienna.

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