



BULLETIN

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COMMENTARY

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Development of Public Diplomacy in Russia

by Jarosław Ćwiek-Karpowicz

President Dmitri Medvedev, on 3 February 2010, announced the formation of two institutions to amplify Russia's voice in a global debate on international issues: the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Foundation and the Russian Council on International Affairs.

Under a presidential edicts, the bulk of funding for both institutions will come from federal budget. They will be tasked with supporting foreign activities by Russian non-governmental organisations and the expert and academic community dealing with international affairs. Drawing up the charter of the Gorchakov Foundation and naming its governing bodies will be the responsibility of the foreign ministry, which will do the same job in respect of the Council of International Affairs, but this time in tandem with the education and science ministry.

The new institutions complement the previous efforts of state authorities to improve Russia's image abroad. In June 2007 a Russkiy Mir Foundation was set up to promote the Russian language and culture and, in September 2008 the Federal Agency for Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (*Rossotrudnichestvo*) was created within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Gorchakov Foundation will focus on backing Russian global-issues-oriented NGOs on the international market for ideas, largely by offering grants and facilitating contacts between Russian and foreign institutions. And the Russian Council for International Affairs is expected to initiate international research projects, hold courses for foreign researchers and act towards facilitating dialogue among politicians and experts specialising in Russia's foreign policy. The establishment of the Council indicates a changing form of the Russian government's cooperation with the NGOs and academic communities dealing with foreign affairs. So far, similar functions have been performed by the prestigious NGO Council on Foreign and Defence Policy, set up in the early 1990s by Sergei Karaganov. The new Council is expected to provide a better channel for communications between domestic politicians and researchers, as reflected in the fact that the elaboration of its statute will be handled not only by the MFA but also by the Ministry of Education and Science, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow State University, Saint Petersburg State University, Moscow State Institute of International Relations and Russkiy Mir Foundation.

Before the institutional formation process is completed, full with the approval of charters and appointment of governing bodies, it will not be possible to conclude whether the two entities only serve the Russian government as an instrument to pursue its immediate political goals and promote its vision of international relations, or whether they act as authentic partners for western institutions in intensifying academic and expert cooperation. Given the voices of dissatisfaction with Russia's present foreign policy, emerging within the Russian elites (such as e.g. a report by the Institute for Modern Development, linked to the president Medvedev), there are grounds to expect the new Council to include people interested in closer expert collaboration with the EU and the US. On the other hand, it has been speculated in the Russian press that the Russian Council for International Affairs may be headed by conservative political scientist Vyacheslav Tikhonov, the present director of Russkiy Mir Foundation. Such an appointment would indicate that the new institutions are treated instrumentally by the Russian authorities, with the propagandist functions getting the upper hand.