

Opponent review for Daria Korobkova, “Russian World? Protection of National Minorities Abroad as a Component of Russia’s Foreign Policy.” by Ekaterina Ananyeva, M.A.

In her master thesis, Korobkova looks at Russian state’s engagement with Russian minorities living abroad and their role in foreign policy. With the growing presence of this country globally, the topic seems most important. The questions she raises seek to provide more insight into the role of Russian minorities living abroad, the exact tool used by the Russian government, and the influence the concept of the Russian World holds in Russian foreign policy.

To answer these questions, Korobkova engages herself with primary and secondary data. For the former, she turns to *actual policy documents* (p. 12). This unfortunate formulation does not provide any information on what is meant under the *actual policy*. Given the importance of the primary sources and their value-added, some description of them would fit better in the introductory part rather than on p.20. Korobkova also turns to Russian-language literature for explanations of the concepts applied, as she argues, in Russian foreign policy. The majority of them stem from the 1990-s, just after the dissolution of the USSR, where no political science existed. As a result, some introduction of the authors and the context are missing (e.g., Shchedrovitskyi – is he labeled as an intellectual in this research?). Overall, when it comes to the choice of sources discussed mostly in the introductory part only, information regarding their choice (how they were chosen) or period of observation is missing.

The first chapter is devoted mainly to the concept of the Russian world. There, Korobkova carefully analyses the evolution of the Russian world concept since the 1990-s and presents her contribution to the existing periodization. In the subchapters 1.3.1. to 1.3.3., the author looks at the perception of the Russian World concept in Russian-language literature. Unfortunately, she does not use her differentiation of authors into academics and intellectuals used in the literature review. More inconsistency is brought by applying the concept of Russian idea as the milestone for the Russian World. Though the Russian idea is discussed in subchapter 1.2, its definition is limited to quotations rather than focusing on its features.

While talking about how the concept of the Russian World evolved, Korobkova mentions Putinism (p. 37 and p.41). Intuitively, there is a link between the two concepts, but some explanation would be helpful. In subchapter 1.5, the author discusses alternative concepts that could have been applied in Russian foreign policy. As her careful analysis of their

applicability suggests, the Russian World concept has a broader explanatory power. However, Korobkova does not provide sufficient explanation on the need for alternative concepts for her research. On the level of execution, the first chapter ends with the research design, though usually, this part is awaited to fill a separate chapter.

The second chapter relates to the research question on the role of the Russian diaspora for foreign policy. Korobkova starts with defining the concept and its main features. Yet, an extensive analysis is supported by long direct quotes, which could be shortened or paraphrased. She also distinguishes between the diasporas in the post-Soviet countries (constantly diminishing) and internationally (rising). While the analysis of their well-being, overall numbers, and influence draws a comprehensive picture of the role, the Russian diaspora has in all the observed countries. Yet, I missed the link between the diaspora and the Russian World concept that was indicated in the introduction to this chapter.

Then, Korobkova turns to the practical side –existing documents governing the relations with the Russian diaspora. In **the third chapter**, she carefully analyses the main documents existing in this sphere. As much as the use of primary sources is welcomed, some explanation behind their choice is missing. Also, more issues arise. Firstly, Korobkova mentions realism as concerning foreign policy (p.75), but is it realism in the sense of international relations? Secondly, while analyzing foreign policy concepts, the author looks at the Concept of 2016 and on p.78 mentions it as a reaction to the Dima Yakovlev law, but does not sufficiently explain the reasoning behind this link.

The author also looks at the organizations meant to support the Russian diaspora abroad actively. One of them is Foundation for the Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad, discussed in subchapter 3.3. After a careful look into the aims and functions of this foundation, Korobkova leaves almost no summary about its functioning in reality. In 3.4, she analyses military conflicts involving Russian minorities through the prism of, though rarely mentioned, the Russian World concept. There, she discusses two case studies – South Ossetia and the annexation of Crimea. While the use of the latter is argued sufficiently, the former raises questions regarding its relevance, given that the author mentions Russian citizens living in the area only in concluding remarks.

The overall conclusion of the chapter refers to the link constantly used in the Russian official rhetoric between the Kosovo events in the late 1990-s – early 2000-s and Russian military involvement in the post-Soviet area. Though the discourse might be known for some audiences, its broader description is missing.

From the document analysis, Korobkova moves to the actual foreign policy steps undertaken regarding the Russian diaspora or *compatriots abroad*. The concept of *compatriots abroad* was already used in 3.3 and 3.4, but a full definition is given only in 4.1.1. The definition given later than the concept usage brings inconsistency in the conceptual framework. **The fourth chapter** provides an exhaustive analysis of the existing relations between the Russian state (e.g., resettlement programs) and compatriots abroad.

There, the author talks about a broad range of programs for the promotion of Russian language and culture (e.g., Russian school program) – can these actions be labeled as soft power? Since the Russian diaspora is substituted there with the concept of compatriots abroad, their role in the organizations and programs under observation is still unclear.

Overall, this thesis draws a broad picture of how the Russian state engages itself with the Russian diaspora and the Russian World. The two concepts seem to be interconnected, but more discussion of their relations is desirable. Nonetheless, this study is among the few existing outside Russia, yet working with the Russian-language literature. Korobkova shows extensive work with primary sources and makes a valuable contribution to the periodization of the Russian World concept evolution.

I recommend 87% for the grade.