

STATEMENT

**Ms. Tatiana Smirnova
Chief Counsellor, Department for Relations with the Compatriots Abroad,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Russian Federation**

“STATE POLICY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN RESPECT OF COMPATRIOTS LIVING ABROAD”

Strengthening interaction with the 30 million Russian diaspora is one of the priorities for the Russian Federation. This is emphasized in the updated Foreign Policy Concept, approved by Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, on February 12, 2013. This is an immense and complex task, which Russia intends to pursue in a systematic and consistent manner, in close cooperation with our compatriots living abroad. During last decade a constant attention of the Russian government has been focused on the following four priorities areas:

- Promoting consolidation of compatriots' organizations, including preservation of ethno-cultural identity of the Russian diaspora and its links with the historical homeland;
- Promotion of the Russian language and culture;
- Creation of conditions for the voluntary resettlement to the Russian Federation of those compatriots, who would make such a choice;
- Protection of rights and legitimate interests of our compatriots living abroad.

Cooperation of the Russian Federation with compatriots living abroad is based on the Federal Law "On the State Policy of the Russian Federation in respect of compatriots living abroad." This Law sets targets to promote the consolidation of foreign Russian communities and to protect their rights and interests in accordance with international standards.

On the basis of this Law, the supreme representative body providing interaction of compatriots with Russian state authorities, has been established - World Congress of Compatriots, which meets every three years. Such congresses

are attended by Presidents of Russia and other leaders of the State. The IV World Congress, which took place in St. Petersburg in October 2012, was opened by the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov. In addition to world congresses every year a global thematic conference of compatriots is taking place in Russia. Next World Conference "Compatriots and Their Contribution to World Culture" is scheduled for this October. Preparation for it is well underway.

In accordance with the Federal Law mentioned above a harmonious system of organizations of Russian compatriots living abroad has been established. Coordinating country councils are the basis of this structure. Established by the end of 2005 World Coordination Board of Russian compatriots plays a key role in their cooperation with the historical homeland. This Board is composed of representatives of national and regional organizations of Russian diaspora. This April 18th meeting of the Coordination Board took place in Moscow. The work of this structure is open and democratic. Its final comprehensive document - about 180 pages- is placed in an open access on the websites of country organizations of compatriots aiming to stimulate discussion on various subjects.

Permanent cooperation with compatriots at the country and regional levels is established. 96 country conferences and 6 regional forums are organized every year. Governmental Commission on Compatriots Living Abroad plays important role in this process. It is formed in accordance with the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation and chaired by Sergey Lavrov.

This Commission is composed of representatives of the legislative and executive authorities of the Russian Federation and its subjects (including representatives of various ministries, the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation, the State Duma, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Moscow Government, the Government of St. Petersburg, the Administration of the Republic of Tatarstan, NGO involved in diaspora matters etc.).

Commission prepares recommendations for public authorities on the improvement of policy in the area of compatriots, develops links with organizations of compatriots, provides moral encouragement for compatriots for

their special contribution to the development of cooperation with Russia and the improvements of life of the representatives of Russian diaspora abroad. This Commission ensures support of compatriots abroad and supervises the use of funds allocated from the budget for this purpose. Particular attention is paid to the support and preservation of ethnic and cultural identity, development and dissemination abroad of Russian culture and Russian language. The promotion of self-organization of the Russian diaspora abroad is of particular concern for this Commission. Important role is given to the improvement of information work with compatriots. For example, Internet portal "Russian Century" is significantly improved and updated recently with the financial support of Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In 2005 the Foreign Ministry of Russia established the Department for relations with compatriots abroad. This Department is in charge of different issues, including development of cooperation with diaspora, covering a variety of questions in legal, social, cultural, educational, economic and other spheres.

According to the decree of the President of the Russian Federation a Foundation for the Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad has begun its actual work in January 2012. This is a new effective tool to protect in particular ethnic and cultural rights of our compatriots, including the right for education in their mother tongue. A key goal is to strengthen the position of the Russian language in foreign countries. To this effect a Federal Program "Russian Language" in 2011-2015 was approved. Work on a draft concept of a project "Russian school abroad" continuous. Foundation "Russian World" provides financial support (in the form of grants) to educational programs. This year we have celebrated June 6 - Alexander Pushkin's birthday – as a day of Russian language for the third time.

Special attention is given to our young compatriots and their organizations abroad. Since 2004, the Russian Foreign Ministry organizes training and educational trips for young people aged 14-19 to the historical places of the Russian Federation under the slogan "Hello, Russia!". The total number of

participants this year will be 1500 people from 46 countries from around the globe, and in just last ten years, more than 15 thousands boys and girls have visited Russia. Special attention is paid in order to increase the admission quota to compatriots in the Russian universities and vocational training institutions within the provisions of the federal budget.

The system of cooperation with compatriots established in Russia is formed on the basis of studying the positive experience of other countries working with their foreign diasporas. At present, we can say that we can share our own experience helpful to others.

We are interested in developing partnership with our foreign diaspora and will do our utmost to fully reveal its creative potential, increase its contribution to the innovative development and modernization of Russia.

We care about every compatriot and are proud of the leaders of Russian communities abroad. We appreciate the contribution that they are making for consolidation of the Russian diaspora. Our goal is a successful consolidated Russian diaspora, which maintains cordial friendly partnership with its historical homeland, living in peace and harmony with the surrounding world.

Our compatriots in recent years have seen the positive effect of the measures taken by the Russian Federation. Of course, not all problems are being solved. However, it is undeniable that our country will continue to protect the rights and legitimate interests of our compatriots, will assist them to maintain their mother tongue, culture and traditions, connections with their historical homeland.