

# Russian Think Tanks and Foreign Policy-Making

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**Author(s):**

Okunev, Igor; Graef, Alexander

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## RUSSIAN THINK TANKS AND FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING

### ■ ANALYSIS

Foreign Policy Think Tanks in Russia: Trends and Obstacles 2  
By Igor Okunev,  
Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University)

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Russia's RAND Corporation? 5  
The Up and Downs of the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI)  
By Alexander Graef,  
Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy (IFSH, University of Hamburg)

## Foreign Policy Think Tanks in Russia: Trends and Obstacles

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### Abstract

According to the findings of Prof. Ivan Tulin, a leading Russian expert on international relations, the last two decades have seen the establishment of an independent and politically neutral community of foreign policy researchers and analytical centers. However, a number of major works show that foreign policy expertise in Russia remains mostly theoretical in nature. Such experts have little interest in policy lobbying, so both politicians and civil servants continue to work without support from independent analytical centers. What is missing in the Russian foreign policy-making process is independent think tanks—an instrument that has become the rule of the day in Western political life. At the same time, most attempts to set up such institutions in Russia have either failed or led to the establishment of analytical centers whose activity and influence are very limited. This article examines the obstacles impeding the development of independent foreign policy think tanks in Russia.

The efficiency of public authorities in the modern world depends on their ability to rely on professional expertise. Advisory groups can shape foreign policy by assisting policy makers to set the political agenda, manipulate information, elaborate alternative courses of action, control the flow of information, filter out contradictory and non-supportive information and interpret incoming information in certain ways, as well as serving as gatekeepers.

There are very few laws or regulations in Russia covering the use of academic and expert communities in foreign policy planning. The Charter of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), authorized by Presidential Law No. 271 (14.03.1995, para. 10), claims that

*“[i]n order to develop specific proposals for the foreign policy of the Russian Federation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation is entitled to establish academic and expert advisory bodies. Their boards and provisions are approved by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Organizational and technical support for the activities of these councils should be provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.”*

This formulation grants the MFA enough freedom to develop foreign policy based on the input of independent expert institutions, as well as the expertise of their own advisory or expert bodies, whose activities enjoy the organizational (meaning also financial) and technical support of the Ministry. This means that the expertise shaping Russian foreign policy, at least on a number of issues, may come from open competition among independent think tanks, even including foreign think tanks and international institutions.

Foreign policy analysis is currently carried out mainly by the following types of agencies and insti-

tutions of different scales and legal structures: official structures and agencies, academic institutions, government-sponsored think tanks, independent think tanks with diverse sources of funding and international or foreign think tanks.

Evaluating the scope of Russian expertise on international relations (IR) is a challenging task. First, many think tanks (including institutes, departments and divisions of international relations) are involved in very few expert studies. Secondly, most organizations engaged in the study of politics, history and culture are in fact major stakeholders in the analysis of domestic affairs. A reference book published by the Russian Council for International Affairs, a hub for IR expertise that is predominantly funded by the MFA, lists 94 Russian organizations that fit the profile. These organizations can be divided into a number of categories.

The first category includes the institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences, which have their roots in the Soviet infrastructure of foreign policy analysis and prognosis. These can be further subdivided into three groups. Firstly, the institutions of IR, covering international politics and security as a whole (Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Institute of International Security). Secondly, the institutes of regional studies (Institutes of Europe, US and Canada Studies, Far East, Latin America, Africa, Oriental Studies and Slavic Studies). Thirdly, those social and economic institutes that include particular departments dealing with IR (for e.g. Institute for Scientific Information on Social Sciences, Institute of Social and Political Studies, Institute of Economics, Institute of Social Studies etc.). This latter group also includes the Russian Institute of Strategic Studies, which was established on the basis of the Research Institute of Soviet Intelligence.

The second category is a large group made up of leading universities and institutes that are engaged in both the educational and analytical support of decision-making. In IR, this primarily applies to two institutions that are directly accountable to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: the Moscow State University of International Relations (MGIMO) and the Diplomatic Academy. At the same time, MGIMO also has a special department that drafts analytical reports for the MFA and other affiliated organizations, called the MGIMO Institute for International Studies. In addition to the MFA-affiliated institutions, there are other important institutes dealing with foreign policy research in Russia. These include Moscow State University, St. Petersburg State University, the Higher School of Economics, the Russian State University for the Humanities and the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Service. Although regional universities specializing in IR are in general considered less significant than those in Moscow and St. Petersburg, there are excellent institutes located in Nizhny Novgorod, Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Vladivostok, Kazan, Perm, Tomsk, Arkhangelsk, Barnaul and Volgograd.

Thirdly, there are the non-commercial expert and research organizations. The most prominent ones include the Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy, the Russian Centre for Political Studies, and the International Foundation for Socio-Economic and Political Studies (Gorbachev Foundation).

Another perspective on the status of foreign policy think tanks in Russia is to consider how they are assessed by the Global Go To Think Tank Index Report 2018, compiled by experts from the University of Pennsylvania with the support of the United Nations. The University of Pennsylvania examines over six thousand research centers in the world each year, rating them based on a wide survey of representatives of the think tanks and almost five thousand journalists, politicians, experts from the public and private sectors that specialize in economic and political research. The ranking assesses how influential the think tanks are on global and regional levels, as well considering the scope of their research and any special achievements. Russia, with 215 centers, holds quite a respectful 7<sup>th</sup> position in the ranking by country, between Germany and France. Table 1 lists the 5 best Russian foreign policy think tanks according to this index.

All three categories of institutions producing foreign policy expertise and analysis have their advantages and disadvantages. Improving the overall quality of the analytics informing Russian foreign policy-making depends on an environment, in which all these distinct types of

**Table 1: 2018 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report**

1. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Moscow Center
2. Primakov Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO)
3. Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO)
4. Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies (ISKRAN)
5. Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC)

Source: McGann, James G., "2018 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report" (2019). TTCS Global Go To Think Tank Index Reports.

institutions have a fair chance to compete for funding and influence. Conversely, an underdeveloped environment is likely to reduce the open competition of ideas among the expert community and thus the quality of foreign policy planning will be degraded. Table 2 (on p. 5 sets out the various strengths and weaknesses of the analytical structure of each type of institution. The main variables impacting on their ability to produce high-quality analysis include the stability of funding, the network of experts (including international ones), the flexibility to work rapidly and cost-effectively, the capacity to carry out either large-scale comparative and multi-disciplinary studies or focus on one issue and develop specialized research expertise, and access to secret (i.e. linked to national security) information.

The table demonstrates that each of the types of institutions has distinct strengths in producing research and expertise on IR. To develop the best informed and innovative foreign policy, the government should, therefore, seek to engage equally with all the types of institutions and consider including their analysis in foreign policy planning. However, the lack of independent and international think tanks in contemporary Russia is leading to the poor quality of foreign policy analysis.

There are three groups of obstacles that are stunting the development of independent foreign policy think tanks in Russia:

**The first group** is linked to the overall political situation in Russia and the decision-making process in Russian foreign policy. The development of independent think tanks in Russia would require the government to organize an environment that facilitates the competition of ideas between analytical structures. Such an environment needs a more open and transparent decision-making process and a more welcoming attitude towards civil society from the government, because this would serve as the breeding ground for think tanks.

While foreign policy is a major interest for many Russians, official decision-making in this area remains mostly covert, even secretive. There is little notion that public opinion could impact on foreign policy, as ordi-

nary Russians take the decisions coming from the MFA for granted. This leads to a lack of public control over foreign policy and leaves the MFA the only de facto stakeholder in this process. In an environment in which the MFA is the solitary consumer of all foreign policy analysis, there is very little incentive to formulate a new, refreshing approach to any foreign policy issue, which is usually considered to be the function of independent think tanks. In the West, a diametrically opposed process is at play: think tanks can appeal not only to the MFA, but also to political parties, elite groups, businesses and finally to public opinion, which increases competition in the area and generates interest from the MFA to be the first to obtain the best analytics. To overcome the status quo in Russia, the MFA should encourage the development of public diplomacy and introduce public debate as an advisory component in the elaboration of its foreign policy.

Independent analytical centers require for the work of MFA to be more open and transparent. First, it is extremely difficult to work out any approaches and recommendations without full access to information and documents from the Ministry's website; secondly, in this case, an independent expert will have to use his personal contacts to reach the MFA. To increase the transparency of the MFA, it should adopt the Western practice of publishing most ministerial documents online, implement a system of open bids for advisory work, and openly list job vacancies. The latter would also intensify the exchange of experts between the MFA and think tanks, making a career in foreign policy more attractive for young analysts and the competition of ideas more intense as a result.

As already mentioned, creating a welcoming environment for establishing independent think tanks requires the government (primarily the Ministry of Justice) to take on a more friendly approach to civil society organizations. NGOs (including think tanks) operating in the West seldom report any legal problems pertaining to their operation. Unlike in Russia, the registration and reporting procedures for NGOs in the West are very simple and do not impede their development. A friendly approach also implies introducing favorable terms of taxation or at least tax exemptions on grants, as is the case in Russia. Finally, Western experience shows that in the initial stages of developing a civil society engaged with foreign policy debates, the assistance of international foundations are needed. Unfortunately, the fear of espionage and an unfavorable government policy prevents international foundations from providing broader support to NGOs in Russia.

**The second group** of obstacles relates to the think tanks cooperating with the MFA. There is no distinct form of cooperation between the government and ana-

lytical centers. Such interaction may include commissioning tasks under public procurement law, partnership agreements, establishing teams and working groups, and informal cooperation. In Russia, however, mutual trust between state authorities and independent expert communities is on shaky ground, as neither side is fully sure of how to enter into such cooperation. This is the result of a lack of dialogue between the state and society. Western experience shows that one way to support change is to promote outlets for joint decision-making, such as working groups, advisory councils, steering committees, etc. The closer the cooperation, the stronger the trust.

While overcoming stereotypes and outdated traditions would be unlikely to happen overnight, establishing a mediating structure would function to increase transparency in cooperation between the government and expert community. Launching the Russian Council on Foreign Affairs is one step in this direction.

**The third group** encompasses the internal obstacles that are tied to the structure and activities of independent think tanks. Analysis of Western success stories demonstrates that to ensure the sustainability of a think tank, it is essential to diversify its planning and funding. Think tanks with more and wider engagement with European and international expert networks and a reputation for providing unique or the highest-level expertise fare better in influencing government policy-making. Another recommendation for think tanks seeking to enhance their social capital is for them to pay more attention to media coverage and branding.

Last but not least, there are rarely ever enough professionals in Russia to draft and publish policy papers such as those that are widespread in the West, i.e. analytical documents encouraging change in government policies. Consequently, one recommendation for both the government and think tanks is to develop training courses in writing policy papers. In the foreign policy field, the MFA should consider incorporating such courses into the curriculum of its leading training and research institutions: the Moscow State University of International Relations (MGIMO) and Diplomatic Academy.

Russia is currently in the early stages of developing international think tanks, which with time are likely to improve the quality of Russian foreign policy planning. It is essential to learn from the experience of Eastern Europe, which has managed to overcome the obstacles in this process over the last twenty years. The diversification of sources of analytical support, mainly through adding the new types—independent and international think tanks—to the traditional list of government agencies, academic institutions and governmental think tanks, will make foreign policy analysis better, faster and cheaper.

The drive towards closer cooperation between the state and independent think tanks should come from both sides. The government should assist in establishing an environment to foster a fair and diverse compe-

tion of ideas, while think tanks should increase their capacities and become more competitive. If this mutual drive succeeds, one can hope for a qualitative change in foreign policy analysis in Russia.

#### *About the Author*

Igor Okunev holds a Ph.D. in Political Science and works as an Associate Professor at the Department of Comparative Politics and as a Senior Researcher at Center for European Studies, MGIMO University. He is also co-chair of the International Political Science Association Research Committee on Geopolitics.

**Table 2: Strengths and Weaknesses: Foreign Policy Analytical Structures**

	More stable funding	Better network of experts	More flexibility in time and expenses	Large-scale research	Focus on specific issues	Access to secret information
Official Structures	•					•
Academic Structures	•	•		•		
Governmental Think Tanks	•		•	•		•
Nongovernmental Think Tanks		•	•		•	
International Think Tanks	•	•			•	

## ANALYSIS

### Russia's RAND Corporation? The Up and Downs of the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI)

By Alexander Graef, Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy (IFSH, University of Hamburg)

DOI: <10.3929/ethz-b-000331035>

#### **Abstract**

For many years, the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI) has been almost invisible in public. Since 2014, however, its potential influence and political status have been the subject of much speculation. A policy document, published anonymously in February 2014, proposing concrete steps about how to proceed within Ukraine has been associated with RISI. In April 2017, US officials accused the institute of providing the blueprint for Russian efforts to interfere in the US Presidential elections. Indeed, under its long-term director, Leonid Reshetnikov, RISI substantially increased its public activities and its leadership openly pursued a nationalist, monarchist and religious-orthodox agenda. However, with the appointment of former Russian Prime Minister, Mikhail Fradkov as director in January 2017, RISI has undergone another period of institutional reform, replacing Reshetnikov's confidants and introducing novel research areas.

#### **Introduction: A New State Institute**

The Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI) has evolved in parallel with the history of post-Soviet Rus-

sian statehood. In late February 1992, President Boris Yeltsin signed decree no. 202 that established RISI as a new strategic research institution and appointed



counter-intelligence officer, Yuriy Stsepinskiy as its Director. Major General Stsepinskiy, a confidant of the head of the First Main KGB Directorate's (PGU) Lieutenant General Leonid Shebarshin, had spent his career mostly at the Central Economic-Mathematical Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences. After the failed coup in August 1991, he became Director of the PGU Scientific Research Institute for Reconnaissance Problems, which eventually provided the institutional basis for RISI. Nevertheless, RISI emerged as a novel state-sponsored institute, formally independent from the intelligence services.

Just one and a half years after his appointment, however, Stsepinskiy was forced to resign. In the conflict between Yeltsin and the Supreme Soviet, which was violently resolved in October 1993 in favor of the President, he found himself on the wrong side and was thus dismissed. Afterwards he re-joined Russian counter-intelligence, where he became a close associate of Sergey Stepashin, following him as a personal advisor to the Russian audit chamber in April 2000. At RISI, Stsepinskiy was replaced by Yevgeniy Kozhokin. In March 1990, the specialist of modern French history from Moscow State University (MSU) had been elected to the RSFSR Congress of Peoples' Deputies. In October 1993, he acted as a middleman between President and Parliament,<sup>1</sup> and afterwards joined the State Committee on National Affairs and the Federation, a position which he left due to personal conflicts with Minister Sergey Shakhrai. When Kozhokin arrived at RISI in April 1994, the institute was in a bad shape and had a mixed group of around 50 analysts, including former security officers and civilians. A considerable information department collected and analyzed open source materials. During his 15-year tenure as director, Kozhokin brought many new researchers to institute, established the study of the post-Soviet space as one of its profile areas and turned RISI into a respected institution.

Searching for new employees, he deliberately approached his own Alma Mater, in particular the Historical Faculty, from which he had graduated in 1977. For example, MGIMO Professor Oleg Barabanov, who currently serves as one of the Program Directors at the Valdai Discussion Club, started his career at RISI in 1997 after receiving his post-graduate degree from the Faculty of History of MSU. In addition, several researchers from the Institute for US and Canadian Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (ISKRAN) joined the new institute, including long-term RISI Deputy Director Vasilii Krivokhizha (left RISI in 2003) and Anatolii

Trynkov, who headed RISI's Research Department on International Security until 1998. In 2007, the institute employed approximately 70 researchers, working on international security, the near abroad, military-strategic questions, international economic security, and market economic issues.

### The Presidential Institute

In April 2009, President Dmitri Medvedev dismissed Yevgeniy Kozhokin and appointed Lieutenant General, Leonid Reshetnikov as Director. Reshetnikov had received his education at Sofia University in Bulgaria, where he specialized in the Balkan countries and Russian emigration to the region. After two years at the Institute for the Economics of the World Socialist System in Moscow, he joined the PGU, which eventually transformed into the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) in post-Soviet Russia. Here, he at last headed the Directorate for Information and Analysis. Coinciding with Reshetnikov's arrival was RISI's transformation into a federal scientific institution, financed by the state budget through the Presidential Administration, with the President of the Russian Federation as its funder. In consequence, the institute received new departments and more resources, and substantially increased its public activities.

First, the institute established several regional information-analytical centers within Russia and appointed contact persons abroad. Whereas under Kozhokin, the institute possessed merely one such center in Kaliningrad (since 1996), new representations were opened in Rostov, St. Petersburg and Ekaterinburg between August and November 2009. Moreover, in April 2011, Reshetnikov established another center for regional and ethno-religious studies in Kazan. After the annexation of Crimea, similar centers were installed in Simferopol and Sevastopol in April and September 2015, respectively. Furthermore, since March 2014, RISI has been represented in Tiraspol. Finally, over the course of 2013, RISI appointed individual representatives in Helsinki, Belgrade and Warsaw.

Second, the overall number of analysts at RISI increased to more than 120, with over 200 employees in total. In fact, an analysis of available biographical data (72) suggests that, of those researchers employed in 2016, most had joined RISI after 2009, sometimes directly from university. With an average age below 45 in 2016, the RISI staff is comparatively young. Reshetnikov himself added the Humanitarian Research Center as a new department under the leadership of Mikhail Smolin, with the aim to study "the contentious issues of

1 Igor' Kozhevnikov, "Nikto ne khotel ukhodit': 20 let tragicheskim sobytiyam oktyabrya 1993 goda" [Nobody wanted to leave: 20 years ago—tragic events in October 1993], Oct. 3, 2013, accessed Feb. 12, 2019.

foreign relations history and the role of the religious factor”.<sup>2</sup> He also brought several new personal advisors to RISI, including former diplomat Vladimir Kozin, who became a frequent commentator on questions of arms control and US missile defense, and historian Petr Mul'tatuli, who has been known for his support of the restoration of the Russian monarchy. In 2011, Reshetnikov supervised his dissertation (kandidat nauk) on the role of Czar Nikolai II as a military leader during the First World War at the Saratov Socio-Economic Institute.

Third, the renewed charter formally tied the research activities of RISI to the strategy and priorities formulated by the Russian President in his annual address to the Federal Assembly. It also obliged researchers to publish both academically and for wider audiences, establish contacts with scientific institutes in Russia and abroad, and take part in academic conferences. In late 2009, RISI began to publish the quarterly journal “Problems of National Strategy” and, in 2012, founded its own book series on religious-historical themes, in cooperation with the publishing house ‘FIV’, owned by Smolin. Likewise, under Reshetnikov the institute established its own TV channel (RISI TV) and since 2014 has shot several films, starting with “A different Ukraine”, “Russia and Crimea. 1000 years together” and “The history of Ukrainization”.

### Returning to Russia: Monarchy and Orthodoxy

Besides its increasing institutional capacity, RISI experts have been purposefully active in promoting the Kremlin’s new nationalist agenda in public. Since Vladimir Putin’s return to the Presidency in March 2012, references to the institute in federal print media in Russia has increased significantly and in 2016 reached an all-time high. The sudden rise in references to RISI in English-speaking media since 2015 is predominantly due to expert commentaries given by RISI experts to the Russian state news agencies Sputnik, TASS and Interfax, which together account for more than 50 percent of all references (see Figure 1 on p. 9).

From 2012 onwards, the political views of Leonid Reshetnikov and his closest advisors became decisive

for the work of the institute and its public appearance. Even before his appointment as director, Reshetnikov was well known for his religious convictions. To him, Russia constitutes a distinct civilization, the “civilization of Jesus Christ” that poses an alternative to the Western world. In November 2016, he defined the main task of RISI as facilitating a return to Russia’s “natural way of development”, from which the “parties of the devil” had successfully dissuaded the Russia people.<sup>3</sup> To him, the politico-military conflict in Ukraine has reached a religious momentum, aimed at the ousting of Russian orthodoxy. Since the “other side” wants to “kill, eliminate and, at the very best, expel”, peace is therefore impossible.<sup>4</sup>

In February 2014, RISI, together with the Center of Current Policy (CAP), published a report assessing the activity of eight Russian scientific institutions, networks and think tanks, including the PIR-Center, the Foundation New Eurasia headed by RIAC Director General Andrey Kortunov, the Institute of Sociology RAN, the Levada-Center and the Russian International Studies Association (RAMI), led by MGIMO rector Anatoliy Torkunov. Discussing the applicability of the law on foreign agents (N121 F3), the unnamed authors argued that “positions contradicting Russian state interests have become a sustainable premise of mass consciousness and thinking among a considerable part of the Russian expert community”.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the report proposed to expand the law to enable the inclusion of research organizations as ‘foreign agents’. Although it is difficult to establish a direct causal relationship, several of the organizations mentioned above were subsequently included in the registry, had to reduce their activities or were even dissolved. Main financial sponsors, such as the MacArthur Foundation and the Open Society Foundation, were declared ‘undesirable organizations’ and banned. The publication, therefore, had serious repercussions for the relationship between the Russian academic expert community based at MGIMO and the Institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the RISI leadership. Institutional links were cut, although cooperation with individual researchers continued. Reshetnikov’s academic reputation suffered tremendously.

2 Yevgeniya Pyadysheva, “RISI – 20 let. Analiticheskiy tsentr, izdatel'skiy dom i dazhe kinostudiya” [RISI—20 years. Analytical Center, publishing house and even a cinema], *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn'*, no. 2, (2012), accessed Feb. 13, 2019.

3 Leonid Reshetnikov, “Nam nado osoznat': Rossiya – eto osoboaya dukhovnaya tsivilizatsiya” [We must realize: Russia—this is a special spiritual civilization], Nov. 25, 2015, accessed Feb. 11, 2019.

4 Leonid Reshetnikov, “Rossiya vperyye voretsya na svyatoy zemle s voploshcheniyem satanskikh sil!” [Russia fights for the first time on holy ground with the embodiment of the devil’s forces!], Jan. 15, 2016, accessed Feb. 10, 2019.

5 Rossiyskiy institut strategicheskikh issledovaniy (RISI) and Tsentral'nyy politiki (CAP), “Metody i tekhnologii deyatel'nosti zarubezhnykh i rossiyskikh issledovatel'skikh tse ntrov, a takzhe vuzov, poluchayushchikh finansirovaniye iz zarubezhnykh istochnikov” [Methods and technologies of the activities of foreign and Russian research centers and institutions of higher education receiving financial support from abroad], Feb. 2014, accessed Feb. 13, 2019.



The foundation of the nationalist-monarchist channel Tsar'grad TV by businessman Konstantin Malofeev in April 2015, provided Reshetnikov with yet another media platform to promote his personal agenda. He became a frequent guest and also started to cooperate with the analytical center Katekhon, another project by Malofeev, which until spring 2017 has been headed by Aleksandr Dugin. In February 2016, Katekhon and RISI together presented the report "American ideology and US claims to global domination".<sup>6</sup>

### We Need To Be More Professional

In November 2016, President Putin dismissed Reshetnikov and simultaneously appointed SVR director and former Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov, who has led RISI since January 2017. There have been speculation about the reasons for Reshetnikov's dismissal, its significance for the work done at RISI, and possible political consequences. At least three different variants have been offered.

First, academics at the institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences interpret his dismissal as the direct outcome of a changing balance of power between different expert groups and a reaction to the report on foreign agents, published by RISI in February 2014. Second, RISI and Reshetnikov, via his contacts with Malofeev, have been suspected of being actively involved in undermining the accession of Montenegro to NATO and the victory of Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro in parliamentary elections in October 2016. Allegedly, the failed political campaign led to Reshetnikov's dismissal.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Reshetnikov's activities have also caused conflict with the Russian Foreign Ministry. Following an interview after his dismissal in November 2016, in which he called Belarus "a historical part of great Russia" and emphasized the "artificial invention" of the Belarussian language, Minsk issued an official protest statement and summoned the Russian Minister Counsellor, Vadim Gusev.<sup>8</sup> Influential Deputy Foreign Minister, Grigoriy Karasin, diplomatically conveyed that he was "quite astonished" by Reshetnikov's declaration.<sup>9</sup>

Third, at least two former RISI employees have argued that under Reshetnikov's leadership the insti-

tute started to produce poor-quality analyses and ideological materials. Arabist, Pavel Gusterin, for example, holds that Reshetnikov had reduced the entire institute to his "personal office," leaving no space for analytical work that contradicted his interests and monarchist convictions. Instead of profound analysis, Gusterin argues, the political leadership had received propaganda, and employees had started to participate in talk shows on Russian TV, instead of writing analyses.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, former RISI researcher, Aleksandr Sytin, who was dismissed in October 2014, has stated that Reshetnikov had formed an "orthodox-imperial commanding bloc" that provided the Presidential Administration with distorted information about the events in Ukraine.<sup>11</sup>

The institutional reforms launched in May 2017 by the new Director, Fradkov, support these general statements. They also highlight the dissatisfaction of the political leadership with the religious agenda promoted by Reshetnikov. Fradkov abolished the Center for Humanitarian Studies. Its director, Mikhail Smolin, and several advisors close to Reshetnikov, including Petr Mul'tatuli, left RISI and joined Tsar'grad TV, where Reshetnikov became head of the supervisory council. Together with Konstantin Malofeev, he established the organization "Double-headed eagle", promoting a return to traditional Russian orthodoxy and fighting the 'falsification' of Russian history caused by Soviet rule.

In parallel, the entire former leadership of RISI and all Deputy Directors, except for Aleksandr Panov, who remained responsible for the administrative department, were replaced. Moreover, Fradkov established a new Center for Research Coordination and split the Center for Euro-Atlantic and Defense Studies into the Center for Transatlantic Studies and the Center for European Studies. Several department heads were replaced by other or incoming experts. Fradkov himself hinted at the weak quality of the analytical materials produced by RISI, when he argued in the context of the reorganization that "we need to be more professional" and "do our work with high quality".<sup>12</sup>

6 "Dugin i Reshetnikov predstavili doklad v RISI" [Dugin and Reshetnikov presented a report at RISI], Feb. 19, 2016, accessed Feb. 14, 2019. Since spring 2017, Katekhon has ceased its public activities.

7 Christo Grozev, "Balkan Gambit: Part 2. The Montenegro Zugzwang", March 25, 2017, accessed Feb. 10, 2019.

8 Valentin Loginov and Igor' Kryuchkov, "Belorussiya trebuet ot Rossii ne trogat' yazyk" [Belarus demands from Russia not to mess with the language], gazeta.ru, Dec. 12, 2016, accessed Feb. 10, 2019.

9 "Karasin prokomentiroval zavayvleniye direktora RISI po otnosheniyam RF i Belorussii" [Karasin has commented on the statement of RISI director concerning the relations between the Russian Federation and Belarus], Dec. 23, 2016, accessed Feb. 10, 2019.

10 Pavel Gusterin, "Leonid Reshetnikov kak strateg" [Leonid Reshetnikov as strategist], Nov. 05, 2016, accessed Feb. 10, 2019.

11 Aleksandr Sytin, "Anatomiya provala: O mekhanizme prinyatiya vneshnepoliticheskikh resheniy Kremlya" [Anatomy of failure: On the mechanism of the Kremlin's foreign policy decision-making], Jan. 5, 2015, accessed Oct. 10, 2018.

12 "Strukturnaya reorganizatsiya v RISI" [Structural reorganization at RISI], May 2, 2017, accessed Jan. 5, 2019.

## Conclusion

Since the arrival of Fradkov, the public appearances of RISI have been changing. The religious and monarchist elements have been cut back, whereas the institute has started to set up a new pool of staff since summer 2018.

Those who have worked with Fradkov in the Russian Security Council emphasize his professionalism and interest in high-quality analysis. Whether these personal qualities will affect the position of RISI within the Russian expert community remains to be seen.

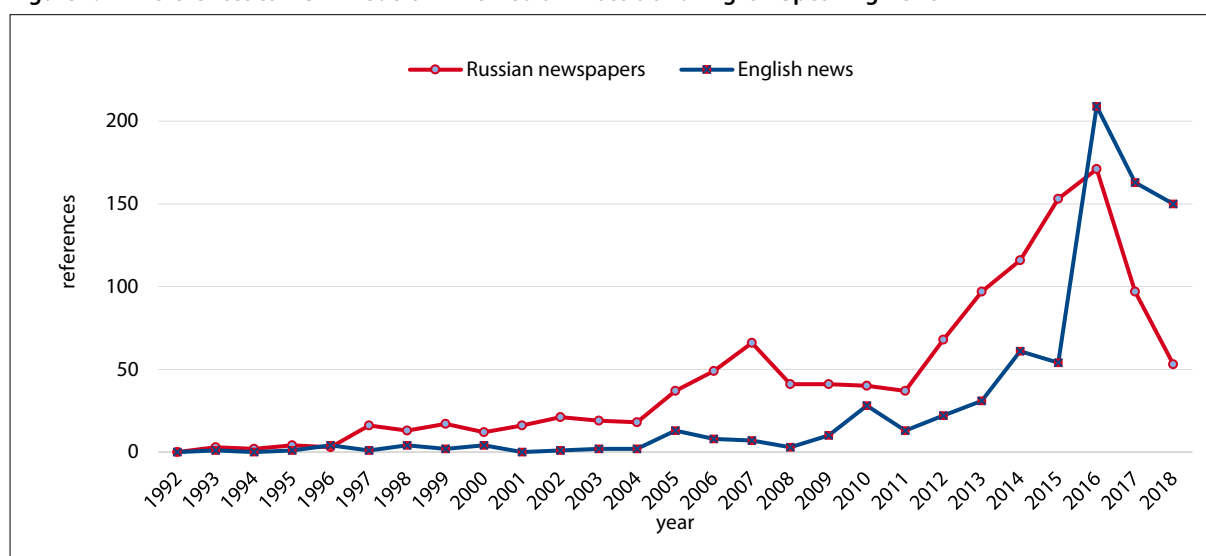
### About the Author

Alexander Graef is a researcher at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy (IFSH). In January 2019, he submitted his thesis titled “Foreign Policy Experts, Think Tanks and the Russian state: A field theoretical approach” at the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland. His research has been financially supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

### Recommended Reading

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**Figure 1: References to RISI in Federal Print Media in Russia and English-Speaking News**



Source: own compilation based on East View Information Services (UDB-COM) and Factiva

**ABOUT THE RUSSIAN ANALYTICAL DIGEST**

Editors: Stephen Aris, Matthias Neumann, Robert Ortung, Jeronim Perović, Heiko Pleines, Hans-Henning Schröder, Aglaya Snetkov

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Editors: Stephen Aris, Matthias Neumann, Robert Ortung, Jeronim Perović, Heiko Pleines, Hans-Henning Schröder, Aglaya Snetkov

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Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen • Country Analytical Digests • Klagenfurter Str. 8 • 28359 Bremen • Germany

Phone: +49 421-218-69600 • Telefax: +49 421-218-69607 • e-mail: [laender-analysen@uni-bremen.de](mailto:laender-analysen@uni-bremen.de) • Internet: [www.css.ethz.ch/en/publications/rad.html](http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/publications/rad.html)