

# **PUTIN'S COSSACKS**

## JUST FOLKLORE – OR BUSINESS AND POLITICS?

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## THESES

- **The rhetoric of social engineering is repeatedly used in the Russian narration on the Cossack nation. This social engineering has been served by historically-rooted slogans such as ‘the Cossack state’ and ‘registered Cossacks’. Terms such as ‘the Cossack state service’ and ‘the Cossack component’ are also functionally marked concepts. These appear in different contexts (the patriotic education of children and young people, the so-called civil society of Russia and its allegedly traditional conservative values, the creation of pro-defence attitudes, military reserves, a social factor combating the new threats posed by culture, information, illegal migration, etc.). Such concepts are the product of the Kremlin’s political technology - by shaping the military organisation of society and its confrontational attitude, it is not so much describing a reality as creating one.**
- **The legal status of the modern Russian Cossack nation, which is also referred to as ‘neo-Cossackdom’, situates it within the framework of the ‘third sector’, i.e. non-commercial organisations for the public benefit. This serves to emphasise its ability to organise itself. In fact, the Cossack military associations of today have little to do either with grassroots social initiatives or the non-governmental sectors, not to mention folklore or historical re-enactment associations. Their basic distinguishing features are their control by the Kremlin and the exchange of mutual benefits (they serve the Kremlin in exchange for concessions and contracts). This is the result of the Kremlin’s long-term policy, which has led to the conversion of a spontaneous social movement into a movement controlled from the top down.**
- **The favourable political situation at present (including the concessions the Kremlin has awarded the Cossacks in the**

field of small businesses) is swelling the ranks of Cossack organisations with officers from the security and defence sectors who are leaving to the reserves (these are the roots of the predominant part of the neo-Cossack elite); radicals who are hungry for publicity and influence; and random individuals who are looking for ways to resolve their financial problems. This has led to a change in motivation for the neo-Cossacks, especially the younger generation. For them, neo-Cossackdom has opened up a career path, because other options are blocked to them; it offers easier access to education and a stable income.

- The Cossacks' imprecise legal, political and social status allows the Kremlin to assign them to different roles: from paramilitary organisations that are intended to educate young people in the spirit of patriotism and obedience, via volunteer fire departments and forest guards, police reserves preventing crime, combating terrorism, extremism and illegal migration, up to the role of irregular forces in information warfare and the fight against illegal border crossings, civil defence and territorial defence forces. Their permanent incorporation into the security and defence system is guaranteed by their non-hierarchical organisational structure, the subordination of the Cossack troops to the President, as well as their ever-closer approximation to military standards. This is the main message of the *Strategy of policy towards the Russian Cossacks to 2020*.
- The implementation of this strategy is distinguished by the strongly bureaucratic system for managing the neo-Cossacks' development, as well as the Putin system's inability to generate new projects. Those currently being implemented under the banner of self-financing are merely replicating the old ones, preserving the pathologies of the Russian political & economic system. The Kremlin is

placing the burden of implementing its policy on the regional authorities: the 'self-financing' of the Cossack organisations mainly consists of them concluding more or less profitable contracts, financed by the regions.

- The new wave of Cossack-mania in Russia has coincided with a U-turn by the Kremlin away from its previously declared modernisation of Russia and in the direction of traditionalism, a transition which clearly accelerated after the events on the Maidan in Kiev. The Kremlin's ally in its Cossack policy is the Orthodox Church, and their platform for cooperation is the concept of 'Orthodox Russian civilisation', which among other things shapes an attitude of civil obedience. Both the state and the Church have exploited the image of Cossackdom as a 'free state', and they present the Cossacks as a model of civil society (which is also an argument for the existence in Russia of a subject society), as well as the bearers of conservative Orthodox values fighting the rot of the West, Islamic fundamentalism, the 'fifth column' and other threats to 'Russian civilisation'.

# INTRODUCTION

## The roots of contemporary Cossack-mania in Russia

The Russian Cossacks of today, also known as the neo-Cossacks (*неоказачество*), is in equal measure a product of a top-down Kremlin policy and a bottom-up nationalist movement. Cossack nationalism is clearly linked to a similar trend dating from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>. This was a random confluence of modernisation in the military sphere, conflict between the centre and the periphery, and tensions in the Russian Empire (Cossacks versus peasants; Cossacks versus non-Russians, the so-called *иностранцы*). Two competing projects of Cossackdom emerged at that time:

- 1) the ethnic variant, with the emphasis on the ‘Cossack’ nation as a separate ethnos, having the right to autonomy and the development of their own culture; and
- 2) the imperial variant, depicting the Cossacks as a pillar of the empire and the great Russian people, loyal in their service to the state and its Orthodox values, focused on strengthening Russian statehood.

The disintegration of the empire, followed by the ‘de-Cossackisation’ of the Soviet Union and the deportations under Stalin, completely prevented the Cossacks making any radical demands for many decades, but did not uproot these desires entirely. The need to strengthen the Cossacks’ newly conscious distinctiveness and ‘ethnicity’ re-emerged at the end of the existence of the Soviet Union, when the Don, Terek and other ‘Republics’ were

<sup>1</sup> Б. Корниенко, Правый и национализма идеология Дон (1909-1914), Издательство Европейского университета в Санкт-Петербурге, Sankt-Petersburg 2013.

proclaimed, and (in November 1991) the creation of a Union of Cossack Republics of Southern Russia was announced.

The Russian state's first reactions to Cossack separatism were chaotic, and more symbolic in nature than anything else. In July 1992 the Supreme Council passed a resolution on the rehabilitation of the Cossacks, supplementing an earlier resolution on the rehabilitation of the repressed peoples. Meanwhile, the local governments in southern Russia exploited ethnic tensions, politicising the Cossacks' efforts to overcome poverty and 'survive in the hostile environment' of southern Russia (i.e. by stressing their status as the 'host', as well as the specific laws concerning land use) in the struggle for material resources and power in the regions. However, the decree which Boris Yeltsin signed in 1995 on a state register of Cossack associations in the Russian Federation testified to the start of a new policy towards the Cossacks: it defined not only the challenge facing the state, but also its strategic objectives. Nevertheless, its implementation was only undertaken after the political changes at the turn of the century. Conditions to change the relationship between the state and the Cossacks became more favourable thanks to the centralisation of power, together with a change of emphasis in the direction of Russian imperial tradition. The idea of a state register of Cossacks took concrete shape in a law on the state service of Russian Cossackdom, which Vladimir Putin signed in 2005. This law also received a solid ideological foundation: the ethnological aspect of the Cossack community was pushed into the background, and its mission of state-building was emphasised. The Cossack associations were brought out of deep-freeze, reinforced with people from outside, and pro-Kremlin activists were placed at their head. However, the policy of 'statising' the Cossack community did not abolish the divisions existing within it. A more radical, though poorly heeded element still calls for the recognition of the Cossacks as a nation, and seeks to restore their autonomy and direct democracy under the rule of the atamans. However, the vast majority of people who declare themselves Cossacks believe that such demands are



unrealistic at the present time; they participate in the Kremlin's projects and political games, counting on the latter to protect the group's interests. Critics treat them as 'crossdressers' who support Putin. Terms such as 'a new type of Cossack' or 'the neo-Cossacks' are increasingly being used to describe this group.

The current wave of fashion for the Cossacks in Russia is primarily linked with the function assigned to them as a reserve body for the Armed Forces, and with the top-down imposition of traditionalism. Since 2012, in the official vision they have become the vanguard of an 'organic' Eurasian civilisation and the Orthodox conservative values of the 'Russian world'. The 'Cossack element' of Kremlin policy, as idealised in the state's narrative, is presented as an anchor of security and defence for the Russian Federation, a foundational element of civil society, and a symbol of national endurance. This policy has definitively moved beyond the local context of southern Russia, although in propaganda it is still being portrayed as a process of 'the rebirth of Cossackdom within its historical borders'.

## PREFACE

The process referred to as the rebirth of Cossackdom in Russia is complicated and has not been fully researched. Among Russian observers it arouses extreme opinions: some see it as a marginal social phenomenon, a kind of political folklore; others as the morally and physically healthy nucleus of the nation, the basis of modern paramilitary formations defending the national and cultural borders of the Russian Federation, as well as a basis of 'civil society'. Still others emphasise the opportunistic nature of the process, based on the influence of greedy radicals and careerists looking for concessions and handouts from the Kremlin.

This text attempts to interpret this question in terms of a socio-political process which has resulted in the transformation of a bottom-up, spontaneous movement into one controlled from the top. Regardless of this fundamental change, the Cossacks (more specifically, the neo-Cossacks) still define themselves as a cultural and historical community, with the aid of features such as their defensive, pro-Russian state mentality, their militarised lifestyle and service to the state, their Orthodox religion, and their distinct traditions and customs. In the first part of this work, the official narrative of the Cossacks is examined through the prism of certain key concepts. The concepts discussed (the Cossack state, the Cossack register, registered Cossackdom, the Cossack state service) currently bear heavy loads of misinformation, as a result of their being torn away from their historical context and relocated in today's Russian realities.

The second part of the text is dedicated to the Russian Federation's strategic policy objectives regarding neo-Cossackdom and the organisational system which has been set up to implement this policy.

The text concludes with a list of the functions assigned to the neo-Cossacks, that is, the Kremlin's long-term interests as linked to the community.

# I. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF COSSACKDOM IN RUSSIA: BASIC CONCEPTS

## 1. The 'Cossack state' in modern Russia

**The historical term 'Cossack state', which bears a certain propaganda load with it, fits well into the official narrative as it conceals the existence of neo-Cossackdom. At the same time, though, it causes a kind of cognitive dissonance: the anachronistic Cossack community is portrayed as a symbol of freedom on the one hand, and on the other as a pillar of Russian 'civil society' which is distinguished by its service to the state and its identification with a militarised way of life.**

**The concept of the 'Cossack state' remains obscure, something to which the various legal solutions have contributed. The Cossack state service today includes both the so-called 'native-born' Cossacks and the 'crossdressers' (as people 'working as Cossacks' are defined), who have little in common with traditional Cossackdom and its idealised and exalted values. The process of Cossackdom's rebirth in the reality of the Putin regime has led to its transformation into 'neo-Cossackdom', that is, an auxiliary part of the ruling power corporation, to which it is linked by its common corporate interests (service, business, politics). Even today, the division of the Cossacks into ethnic and imperial subgroups has not been overcome.**

Contrary to the official narrative, which deals with the Cossacks as a bastion of healthy traditionalism, they still share the problems of Russian society as a whole: passivity, corruption, atomisation, mutual distrust, conformism, susceptibility to manipulation by the government, widespread poverty accompanied by strong stratification in terms of property ownership, unemployment, and the outflow of youth from their traditional places of residence. The public image of the Cossacks, especially among the older generation, is still burdened by the policy of their discreditation

during the Soviet period, according to which the Cossack is still a barbarian with a *nahaika* (a traditional kind of whip), an alcoholic, a xenophobe, an extremist, an enemy of progress.

The grass-roots movement, which was very lively in the 1990s, improved its image by presenting itself as a 'repressed ethnos' and 'an ethnos of free people'. During the collapse of the Soviet Union's socio-political and economic regime, which was accompanied by a wave of ethnic tensions, the Cossacks who asserted their rights (in a xenophobic manner) to their historical homelands in the south of Russia were tolerated, and even somewhat pampered by the local administrations, as a social factor preventing ethnic crime (by Caucasian organised-crime groups), Islamic fundamentalism and extremism. The concept of the 'Cossack state', as it was then semi-officially introduced into circulation, was willingly taken up by the Cossacks themselves, who treated it as synonymous with the historical 'free Cossack state', and as a substitute for ethnicity. Paradoxically, this concept (albeit understood differently, as a pro-state and defensive mentality) was reinforced by regional officials, and also entered the political lexicon of the federal bureaucracy, which declared its support for the rebirth of Cossackdom in Russia.

The current popularity of this term is based both on its direct link to the imperial tradition, and on the obfuscation of those of its historical referents which do not fit into contemporary Russian reality. Historically, 'Cossackdom' refers primarily to a way of organising social life on a separate territory on the basis of military democracy, with the chieftain (*ataman/hetman*) being chosen in a free election. As a borderland community between the old Polish Republic and the Principality of Moscow, the Cossacks in fact lived outside the state societies of the time; they were only linked to the states of Poland and Moscow by the Cossack registry system, which guaranteed the Cossacks regular pay in return for their participation in the wars of that time. Cossack units, which in the days of the Russian Empire were organised into 11 'Cossack

troops', i.e. 11 separate territorial-military structures, participated in the conquest and colonisation of the empire's new territories, and also guarded its borders in the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Far East.

The historical terms 'Cossack state' and 'registered Cossackdom' as used today, which have been borrowed from the terminology of the First Polish Republic and taken out of their historical context, contain a sizable burden of misinformation. One abuse of these terms, for example, involves the discussion about the rebirth of Russian Cossackdom in its historical homelands. These 'homelands' were mostly located on the territory of today's Ukraine and Kazakhstan, whereas Cossacks have now appeared in places where they had not previously been: in the central part of Russia (in Moscow, they have exchanged their horses for motorcycles), in Karelia and Kaliningrad; in fact, they are represented in all the military districts and most of the federal entities of the Russian Federation, as well as in Russian-occupied Crimea<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> The Crimean Cossack Circle (*okrug*) appeared in 2015 (*Российская газета – Крым*, 4 June 2015). It was based on the Crimean hundred of the Terek Troops, which had operated for years under the direction of Vadim Ilovchenko (the local press named the circle as the Crimean Troops and Ilovchenko as its ataman). The hundred took an active part in the Russian separatist movement in Crimea as well as the so-called Crimean spring. The formal registration of this circle has still not been completed, as the Crimean Cossacks are still undergoing detailed examination by the FSB and the Interior Ministry with regard to their criminal record.

The association of the Cossacks of Karelia was registered in 2012. The regional authorities have adapted their laws to federal legislation (<https://mustoi.ru/kazachestvu-zaxotelos-v-karelii-gosudarstvennyu-podderzhku/>; [http://www.gov.karelia.ru/gov/News/2017/05/0503\\_16.html](http://www.gov.karelia.ru/gov/News/2017/05/0503_16.html)). The explanatory memorandum to the regional law on the Cossacks in the Republic of Karelia states: "The Cossack's experience will help to solve many problems related to the security of the region, the protection of borders, improving the criminal-pathological situation, and will improve the socio-economic stability of the region."

The social Baltic Cossack Associations group, which operated in Kaliningrad as of 2015, has become the registered Baltic Individual Cossack Circle. Its ataman Maksim Buga is trying to build up the image of the 'Baltic Cossack troops' as an important power structure in the Kaliningrad region, and has announced their close cooperation with the army and police. Buga par-

According to different estimates there are between 2 and 7 million Cossacks in Russia. The discrepancy is perpetuated by the Cossacks themselves, as well as by the Kremlin's official propaganda: by highlighting the scale of the phenomenon, the magic of numbers is intended to strengthen and promote the idea of Cossackdom. Contrary to the 'ethnicity' of the Cossacks propagated by the atamans<sup>3</sup>, who conducted boisterous campaigns before every census to encourage the population of southern Russia to grant them 'Cossack nationality', their ethnic identity remains poor. During the 2002 census, 140,000 people reported 'Cossack nationality'; in the next census in 2010, the figure was only 67,000. The vast majority of Cossacks are concentrated in the Rostov oblast. In addition, the results of the 2010 census highlighted the artificial and 'delicate' nature of the Cossack question. According to the adopted methodology, the 'Cossacks' were treated as an ethnographic group of the Russian ethnos. The figure included respondents who in addition to 'Cossack nationality' gave the Russian language as their mother tongue. If a Cossack gave Ukrainian as his native language, he was automatically assigned to the Ukrainian minority. As a result, for example in the Krasnodar krai, which is the nominal home territory of the 'canonical' Kuban Troops, compared to Russians (4,522,962 people, 88.25% of the total population), Armenians (281,680 people, 5.5%) and Ukrainians (83,746 people, 1.63%), 'Cossacks' are a marginal group (5899 people, 0.1%)<sup>4</sup>. In addition, according to the official statistics, 53% of Cossacks are city

ticipated in the events in Crimea in 2014 along with seven Baltic Cossacks (see <http://lawinrussia.ru/content/baltiyskoe-kazachestvo-perezhilo-no-voe-rozhdenie>).

<sup>3</sup> The nationality of 'Cossack' appeared under the 'nationality' heading on the census forms at the initiative of Viktor Vodolatsky, ataman of the Don Troops. There was a self-serving aspect to this demand: the atamans counted on grants from the federal budget which were given to official minorities. They enthusiastically drew upon the example of the Volga Germans, who at that time were being given special favours by the government because of their mass emigration to West Germany.

<sup>4</sup> Д. Куренов, Сколько на самом деле казаков в России и на Кубани, <https://www.yuga.ru/articles/society/7524.html>

dwellers<sup>5</sup>, which also calls the revival of Cossack traditions into question, as their natural habitats were the *stanitsa* (campsite) and the *hutor* (farmstead).

The distinguishing factor of the ‘neo-Cossack’ is not ethnic, but cultural (traditional clothes, Orthodox religion, rich folklore, traditions, military mentality). The Kremlin’s policy consciously obfuscates the Cossacks’ ethnic ambitions in any case, treating them as a healthy component of the Russian people. The traditionally pro-state nationalism and Orthodox religion of the Cossacks has today become part of ‘Russian conservatism’ and ‘Orthodox civilisation’; thus the ‘Cossack question’ has become part of the ‘Russian question’. According to the methodological interpretation of the First Cossack University, “Formally, a Cossack may be any citizen of the Russian Federation who identifies with Cossackdom and its specific way of life, who practices its traditions and ethical principles”<sup>6</sup>. The legal definition in the federal law from 2005 on the state service of Russian Cossackdom is equally vague; it states that “Russian Cossacks are citizens of the Russian Federation who are members of Cossack associations”<sup>7</sup>. According to the government’s Federal Agency for Nationality Affairs<sup>8</sup> “Cossacks are not a nationality, but a cultural-historical community (...); Kalmyks and Buryats have joined Cossackdom without renouncing their nationality”. The Agency estimates that modern Russian Cossacks

<sup>5</sup> In large cities the Cossacks prefer not to openly display their ethnic distinctiveness: during the 2010 census only 609 Muscovites declared Cossack nationality, and in St. Petersburg the figure was 34. See Н. Кучеров, Где живут казаки?, [http://kazak-center.ru/publ/novosti\\_kazak\\_inform/rossijskoe\\_kazachestvo/gde\\_zhivut\\_kazaki/153-1-0-1246](http://kazak-center.ru/publ/novosti_kazak_inform/rossijskoe_kazachestvo/gde_zhivut_kazaki/153-1-0-1246)

<sup>6</sup> Казачий компонент в высшем образовании, on the website of the Moscow University of Technology and Management: <http://mgutm.ru/kazachestvo/formation.php>

<sup>7</sup> Федеральный закон от 5 декабря 2005 г. N 154-ФЗ О государственной службе российского казачества, *Российская Газета*, 8 December 2005, <https://rg.ru/2005/12/08/kazachestvo.html>

<sup>8</sup> Агентство по делам национальностей: за последние 6 лет число казаков в России выросло в 4 раза, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/28156818.html>

include over forty nationalities, and over the past six years their numbers have quadrupled.

The above-mentioned Agency has confirmed that ‘neo-Cossackdom’ (the new Cossack community) is today made up of both descendants of the Cossacks of the Russian Empire and citizens of the Russian Federation, who have “joined it”. The reasons for doing so are various: some are governed by a romantic image of Cossackdom; others have come to expect concessions and privileges from the state; still others are looking for solutions to their financial problems through the possibility of additional income. The statutory conditions for admission to the military Cossack associations are not prohibitive: it is required to submit an application, testify to the Orthodox religion, to be without a criminal record, undergo a three-month trial period, and then there is a collegial decision by the General Assembly, i.e. the ‘Cossack circle’. Women may also join the associations<sup>9</sup>, although this is in violation of the Cossacks’ traditional social model. The predominant part of their elite is derived from the ministries of force. This state of affairs is favoured by law: the rank of Cossack can be assigned to persons serving or in the reserve of the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Federal Security Service, the Federal Security Service, the bodies of justice and the public prosecutor’s office. For native-born Cossacks, these ‘non-natives’ are treated ironically as ‘crypto-Cossacks’, ‘the self-proclaimed’, ‘crossdressers’. According to Oleg Gubenko<sup>10</sup>, a representative of the Terek Cossacks, descendants of native-born Cossacks now make up no more than 30% of the Cossack organisations’ members. Radical representatives of the nationalist-ethnic current commonly juxtapose the concept of ‘Cossack’ with the term ‘Cossackdom’, i.e. the ‘real Cossack ethnos’, in contrast with the ‘crossdressers’ who

<sup>9</sup> Р. Минеев, «Не только махать шашкой». Атаман рассказал о жизни современного казачества, [http://www.krsk.aif.ru/society/ataman\\_ravel\\_artamonov\\_zachem\\_kazakam\\_nuzhen\\_zakon](http://www.krsk.aif.ru/society/ataman_ravel_artamonov_zachem_kazakam_nuzhen_zakon)

<sup>10</sup> After Государство и казачество, *Казачество Москвы*, 28 August 2016, [http://казачествомосквы.рф/news/gosudarstvo\\_i\\_kazachestvo/2016-08-28-1184](http://казачествомосквы.рф/news/gosudarstvo_i_kazachestvo/2016-08-28-1184)



favour the imperial current (calling the latter ‘имперцы’, that is, supporters of the neo-imperial ideology)<sup>11</sup>.

## 2. The legal status of Cossackdom: the ‘Cossack state service’

**Neo-Cossackdom has little in common with the ethos of a ‘free people’: its supposedly ‘bottom-up’ initiatives are controlled from the Kremlin and subject to strict control. Moreover, crucial to the Kremlin are the Cossacks’ military/disciplinary features, which are covered by the term ‘Cossack state service’. This concept, which is of essential importance today in the official narrative, has supplanted previous considerations on the revival and rehabilitation of the ‘Cossack nation’ in the public debate. In the face of the authorities’ increasing demands of this service, the Cossack organisations have not been and still are not able to recruit the necessary number of Cossacks to it. This has led to the Cossack associations reinforcing their ranks with representatives of the armed forces and other government departments of force who have been dismissed to the reserves, as well as random individuals (including so-called freaks and radicals, often with criminal records), in a way which the current political situation favours. The legal regulations concerning the Cossack service have introduced a division of the Cossacks into ‘registered’ and ‘un-registered’ groups.**

The relevant legal definition is found in Article 5 of the above-mentioned act concerning the state service of Russian Cossackdom, which states that Cossacks will perform their military service in their own separate units of the armed forces, the National Guard troops, and in the FSB’s border troops. In accordance with

<sup>11</sup> See М. Струкова, Казаки-семь политических трендов, <https://rusmonitor.com/marina-strukova-kazaki-sem-politicheskikh-trendov.html>

this regulation, Cossack state service includes the following obligations:

- 1) participation of Cossack associations in keeping military records, in organising the military-patriotic education of conscripts and training the reservists;
- 2) participation in preventing crime and removing the consequences of emergencies and natural disasters, civil and territorial defence;
- 3) participation in protecting public order, ecological and fire-fighting protection, defending the state border and acting in the fight against terrorism;
- 4) other activities based on the Cossack associations' agreements with the military administrations, the federal bodies of executive power and their territorial organs, and also with the executive authorities of entities of the Russian Federation and the organs of the local government authorities.

In practice, Cossack state service takes many forms (military service by both conscripted and contract troops, self-defence units, sentries, patrols, volunteer teams for security at mass events, and lastly vice squads and cyber-volunteers). This is done within the community, or on the basis of contracts between the federal & local authorities and members of the registered associations. The procedure for transferring them to the state registry is determined by Article 6 of the above-mentioned act.

The problem lies not only in the fact that, according to the applicable provisions, the Cossack service does not have the basic attributes of state service, such as the status of a state worker, employment contracts, fixed salaries or social protection. This is partially a voluntary, social kind of service, and partially contractual within the framework of the Cossack associations. Such difficulties of

interpretation also arise from the legal status of these associations. In the civil code revised in May 2014 (Article 123.15), the Cossack associations are defined as “associations of citizens, recorded in the state register, formed with the aim of maintaining the traditional lifestyle, farming and culture of Russian Cossackdom, and also with other aims as provided for in the law on the state service of Russian Cossackdom, which voluntarily and in the statutory manner have taken upon themselves obligations in the field of service to the state or others.” The civil code unambiguously qualified the Cossack associations to the institutions of the so-called Russian ‘third sector’: non-governmental non-commercial organisations (for the public benefit). The manner in which they were entered into the state register is determined by the regulations of the Ministry of Justice, which maintains this register. Any application to join should include the following items: 1) the statutory objectives of the organisation (the maintenance of the traditional lifestyle, farming and customs of Cossackdom); 2) data concerning the size of the organisation’s membership (depending on the level: rural and *hutor* (farmstead) organisations should contain at least 10 members, municipal organisations 30, district-level 150, oblast-level 500, and a military Cossack association 1000 members; 3) the obligation of the association’s members to serve the state and others.

The Cossacks’ legal capacity is bound to the state register, although this does not mean that the ‘unregistered’ are of no interest to the Russian authorities. This is because in addition to the registry, many other organisations, clearly supported and entrusted with tasks by the Kremlin, are also in operation. Many of these – such as the Union of Cossacks, established in 1990 (i.e. still in the Soviet period), and led without a break since then by the ataman Pavel Zadorozhny – changed their status to registered associations in 2012 under pressure from the Kremlin. Registered and social Cossack associations have participated on an equal footing in military expeditions, and have performed various overt and covert missions. In 2014, Terek, Kuban and Amur Cossacks from Belgorod

made their presence in Crimea clearly felt, as did the unregistered ‘wolves’ hundreds’ led by Igor Girkin (a.k.a. Strelkov) and the local Crimean Cossacks, who at that time were citizens of Ukraine.

One spectacular example of an action by ‘unregistered’ groups is the so-called Cossack National Guard of the Almighty Don Army under ataman Nikolai Kozitsyn, which was formed in April 2014 to support the Russian war against Ukraine in the Donbas. Volunteers led by him occupied the towns of Antratsyt, Severodonetsk and others, where they “entered at the request of their Cossack brothers, who represent 80% of the population, and where there was a threat of a repetition of the events of the Maidan”<sup>12</sup>. This body came into conflict with the authorities of the Lugansk and Donetsk ‘People’s Republics’, and discredited themselves among the local population as a result of their drunken brawling, and at the end of the same year they withdrew. However, Kozitsyn still keeps the Ukrainian community under psychological pressure, scaring them with the guard’s still growing potential, which is based on the newly-created districts of the Almighty Don Army in south-east Ukraine (Lugansk, Donetsk, Kharkov, etc.)<sup>13</sup>. In January 2017 he announced a new call-up of Cossack volunteers to the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic. Ataman Kozitsyn is a knight of 28 state orders, including the Order of the Red Standard and the Red Star ‘For Personal Courage’ of Peter the Great and Alexander Nevsky, and also has awards from the Russian Orthodox Church. He also holds the rank of general of the Cossack troops, awarded by the President of the Russian Federation. He has had a typical career for a Cossack general: after completing Interior Ministry training in Kharkov in 1985 he worked in a penal colony. He was fired for professional misconduct, started a private enterprise, and was involved in the renaissance of the Don Cossacks.

<sup>12</sup> Атаман Николай Козицин и «Казачья национальная гвардия», <http://www.apn.ru/index.php?newsid=36029>

<sup>13</sup> М. Бондаренко, Донские казаки готовятся в поход, *Независимая Газета*, 3 February 2017, [http://www.ng.ru/regions/2017-02-03/6\\_6920\\_kazaki.html](http://www.ng.ru/regions/2017-02-03/6_6920_kazaki.html)

He participated in the Transnistrian conflict (1992), and fought on the side of the Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević, as well as with the separatist Abkhaz and Ossetian forces in Georgia (2008). He operates independently of the registered Don Troops, and has openly carried out missions entrusted him by the Kremlin (as he has stated, he is subject only to the Lord and to President Putin).

Examples can also be given of cases where a registered group has changed its status to unregistered. Since 2014 the Central Cossack Association has been headed by the ataman Ivan Mironov. His predecessor, ataman Valery Nalimov, currently runs the Central Cossack Troops' Interregional Social Organisation, and is continuing this group's activities in the Balkans. At his initiative, in 2011 the Saint Sava's Cossack *Stanitsa* was formed, which in turn resulted in the creation in 2016 of the Balkan Cossack Army based in Kotor, Montenegro, assembling 26 Serbian Cossack organisations<sup>14</sup>. Unregistered Cossack organisations are more useful when fulfilling the role of 'Russian fifth columns', as they can camouflage their ties with the Russian state more effectively.

The fluidity of the boundary between registered and unregistered Cossacks can be demonstrated by the fate of the Union of Cossack Troops of Russia and Abroad, which was registered in Germany in 1993 and led from the outset by the unregistered Don ataman Viktor Ratiyev. In Russia, this international organisation was delisted as part of the re-registration of Cossack associations ordered in 2012; its assets were taken over by an association led by ataman Viktor Vodolatsky, an active participant in the Kremlin's projects<sup>15</sup>. This new group, which was registered by the Ministry

<sup>14</sup> For example, see Россия создаёт на Балканах русское войско, <http://pol-expert.org/15763-rossiya-sozdaet-na-balkanah-russkoe-voisko>; Russia's Friends Form New 'Cossack Army' In Balkans, <https://www.rferl.org/a/balkans-russias-friends-form-new-cossack-army/28061110.html>

<sup>15</sup> Viktor Vodolatsky is the former ataman of the Don Troops, a former deputy governor of Rostov oblast, a member of United Russia, chairman of the Duma committee on the patriotic education of children and young people, vice-president of the Duma committee for the CIS, Eurasian integration and com-

of Justice in December 2014, adopted the name of the Union of Military Cossacks of Russia and Abroad (its Russian abbreviation remained unchanged). Officially the purpose of this re-registration process was to regulate and order the Cossack world, as well as the functions of the individual associations. However, the example of this one organisation clearly shows that the real idea was to subject the Cossacks in Russia and abroad to closer control, making it easier for the Kremlin to carry out its policies<sup>16</sup>.

### 3. The 'Cossack troops'

**Assigning the Cossacks to all the roles they perform - from paramilitary organisations that deals with the patriotic (and Orthodox) education of young people, through the fire brigades, forest guards, crime prevention, the fights against terrorism and extremism, the protection of public facilities, the defence of state borders, as well as participation in the civil defence and territorial defence organisations - falls within the competence of the Cossack associations' military staffs, which are currently being created or reconstructed. In the public space, these associations are called the 'Cossack troops'. These so-called troops, which, by virtue of the discipline prevailing within them, could only conventionally be classified as irregular troops, are treated in the official narrative as a permanent element of Russia's security and**

munication with compatriots abroad, a member of the Presidential Council for Interethnic Relations, and also holds other functions.

<sup>16</sup> The main statutory task of this organisation is to work with foreign Cossack associations (it is officially affiliated with Cossacks from 43 countries). Its First Great Krug was attended by representatives of the Presidential Administration, of the Rossotrudnichestvo agency, the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Situations, the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as Aleksandr Borodai, the first Prime Minister of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic, which proves the systemic support of the separatists. The agenda covered the Cossacks' participation in the preparation for mobilisation of the Russian Federation's Armed Forces. (Союз Казаков-Воинов России и Зарубежья. Перезагрузка началась, [http://kazak-center.ru/news/sojuz\\_kazakov\\_voinov\\_rossii\\_i\\_zarubezhja\\_perezagruzka\\_nachalas/2015-02-19-2934](http://kazak-center.ru/news/sojuz_kazakov_voinov_rossii_i_zarubezhja_perezagruzka_nachalas/2015-02-19-2934)).

**defence architecture. In fact, they are a form of territorial organisation for the Cossack associations. This is based on a principle of centralisation, that is, of the hierarchical subordination of the lower-level structures to the structures at the higher level.**

In Russia there are currently eleven military Cossack societies (*военные казачьи общества*, hereafter VKO) in operation; these are vertically structured associations of locally registered organisations in one or more regions (at the *hutor*, *stanitsa*, urban, district and oblast levels), with the supreme ataman at the top of the pyramid. Each lower-level structure is controlled by a higher-level staff. By a 1995 decree from President Boris Yeltsin, to create a state register of Cossack associations in the Russian Federation, ten VKOs appeared between 1996 and 1998. The last one, the Central VKO, was created by President Vladimir Putin in Decree No. 574 from 2007. As was announced back in 2012, these organisations were originally to have been merged into a single All-Russian Military Cossack Association, but as of now this has still not been established. These paramilitary associations, which draw upon historical traditions and are commonly referred to as the Cossack troops, have become the primary platform for the relationship between the state and Cossackdom. According to data from 2014, they include 506,000 Cossacks, numbering in the following regions<sup>17</sup>:

- Kuban – 146,000 (29%),
- Don – 126,000 (25%),
- Central – 75,000 (15%),
- Yenisei – 66,000 (13%),
- Terek – 30,000 (6%),
- Orenburg – 25,000 (5%),
- Volga – 14,000 (3%),

<sup>17</sup> The journalist Nikolai Kucherov, cited above, has drawn upon data from the Federal Agency for Nationalities' Affairs.

- Trans-Baikal – 6000 (1%),
- Siberia – 6000 (1%),
- Amur – 6000 (1%),
- Irkutsk – 4500 (1%).

The official data has been deliberately inflated. These numbers, as is apparent from statements by Nikolai Doluda, ataman of the Kuban Troops' VKO, cover both the Cossacks themselves and their families. In his annual report from December 2016, he stated that the formation he leads numbers 48,557 Cossacks (5392 more people than in 2015), and more than 160,000 people in total, along with their families<sup>18</sup>. The Kuban VKO consists of 555 organisations, including 9 at oblast level, 59 district and 487 at the municipal, *stanitsa* and *hutor* levels. Some sources have highlighted a tendency of 'aging' among the VKOs' members, resulting in a decline in their numbers. More realistic data is cited by the Kremlin propagandist Vladislav Gulevich<sup>19</sup>, who (probably while taking the age criteria into consideration) has estimated the potential irregular Cossack service at around 300,000. The Cossacks themselves are responsible for this informational chaos: for example, the Cossack Informational-Analytical Centre<sup>20</sup> states that the programme for developing the state/public partnership with the Russian Cossacks for 2017-2025 has been allocated 765 million roubles (US\$13m) in the state budget. The intended result of this is "an increase in the number of Cossack military association members from 180,000 people (2016) to 206,000 by the year 2025."

The Cossack military associations, which are obliged to keep records and provide pre-conscription training, as well as retraining for the

<sup>18</sup> Казачьей милиции нужно будет выдать оружие – главный казак Кубани Николай Долуда, <http://krasnodarmedia.su/news/572269>

<sup>19</sup> В. Гулевич, Казаки выйдут на службу, 23 October 2016, <http://www.segodnia.ru/content/180892>

<sup>20</sup> Вопросы финансирования казачества на федеральном и региональном уровнях, [http://kazak-center.ru/news/voprosy\\_voprosy\\_finansirovaniya\\_kazachestva\\_na\\_federalnom\\_i\\_regionalnom\\_urovnjakh/2016-12-03-3216](http://kazak-center.ru/news/voprosy_voprosy_finansirovaniya_kazachestva_na_federalnom_i_regionalnom_urovnjakh/2016-12-03-3216)



reserves of the Russian Federation's Armed Forces, are of particular interest to the Kremlin. In fact, they are subject to presidential jurisdiction: the President approves their statutes, appoints the atamans and gives them the highest ranks (Cossack generals)<sup>21</sup>. The atamans generally come from the ministries of force (the most recent nominations have come in most cases from the Russian Federation's Armed Forces), and make up part of the regional authorities (as a rule they are deputy governors, responsible for security and defence in the region). For example: ataman Doluda of the Kuban Troops, who at the same time is deputy governor of the Krasnodar *krai*, oversees issues related to conscription, the military records of the reserves, civil defence and territorial defence. In his spare time, he performs marriages, as he also oversees the local ZAGS (*Органы записи актов гражданского состояния*, the equivalent to the Civil Registry Office). It is difficult to see this system as being a fair substitute for the Cossacks' previous autonomy and democracy, when the ataman was elected at a general meeting (*krug*), although formally the custom has been retained: the President appoints the ataman at the request of the *krug*.

The mechanism for recruiting the elite neo-Cossacks, and the 'civilian' functions they perform, can be illustrated by the following summary:

<b>Ataman (degree)</b>	<b>Previous professional career and current administrative function</b>
Cossack General Ivan Mironov (Central Cossack Troops)	Reserve FSB general; deputy governor of Samara oblast
Cossack Colonel Viktor Goncharov (Don Troops)	Professional soldier; deputy governor of Rostov oblast

<sup>21</sup> <http://ввко.пф/legislation/orders-and-dispositions/225-polozhenie-o-poryadke-prisvoeniya-kazachih-chinov-kazakam-volzhskego-voyskovogo-kazachego-obschestva.html>

<b>Ataman (degree)</b>	<b>Previous professional career and current administrative function</b>
Cossack General Nikolai Doluda (Kuban Troops)	Professional soldier, deputy governor of Krasnodar krai
Cossack Colonel Gen-nady Privalov (Siberian Army)	Professional soldier; head of the military administration of the Omsk oblast
Military <i>starshyna</i> Aleksandr Żurawski (Terek Troops)	Professional soldier; head of the committee for nationalities of the Stavropol krai
Cossack Colonel Yuri Ivanov (Volga Troops)	Former head of department in the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Situations in the Samara oblast; head of the Ministry's Supreme Board in the oblast
Cossack General Pavel Artamonov (Yenisei Troops)	Professional soldier: no further information available
Cossack Colonel Gen-nady Chupin (Trans-Baikal Troops)	Former prosecutor in Chita; deputy governor of the Trans-Baikal krai
Cossack General Nikolai Shakhov (Irkutsk Troops)	Professional soldier: advisor to the governor of the Irkutsk oblast
Cossack General Vladimir Romanov (Orenburg Troops)	Former commander of the Interior Troops of the Ural oblast; deputy governor of the Sverdlovsk oblast
Cossack Colonel Vladimir Stepanov (Amur Troops)	Police colonel, former head of prison service delegation in Khabarovsk krai, head of department for cooperation with Cossacks in the administration of Khabarovsk krai

In addition, the 'Cossack troops' include the Independent Baltic Cossack District in Kaliningrad, headed by the military *starshyna*

Maksim Buga, and the Independent Northwest Cossack District based in St. Petersburg, led by the Cossack colonel Vitaly Martynenko.

Special attention surrounds the ‘Don Troops’ based in Rostov, the ‘Kubans’ (Krasnodar), and the ‘Central Troops’ (Moscow) because of their numbers, as well as their formal and informal duties. The Don military association owes its high status to its first ataman Viktor Vodolatsky (who is now a political activist in United Russia); the Kubans to the governor of the Krasnodar krai Aleksandr Tkachov (now minister of agriculture), and the Central Troops to their proximity to the Kremlin, which counts on the Cossacks’ support in crisis situations. The troops are covered by the patronage of the president, as well as that of local administrations (the grants for Cossack troops come out of local budgets). The lack of a local patron resulted in a decrease in the numbers of the Terek Troops’ VKO, which acquired a certain notoriety during the Chechen wars because of the ‘Yermolov battalion’<sup>22</sup>. Its participation in the Chechen wars, and in the Ossetian/Ingush conflict on the side of the Ossetians, led to this VKO being expelled from Chechnya and Ingushetia, and the liquidation of its district organisations (in Grozny, Sunzha, etc.). These events, as well as a series of subsequent schisms, reduced its numbers by more than half: leaving aside the reliability of the data, at the time of its registration in the 1990s it included 70,000 Cossacks, but currently that number is estimated at 30,000.

The parades of the ‘Cossack troops’ enjoy considerable public esteem. Spectacular changes of the guard are the speciality of the Kuban Troops’ VKO. It was also the only such group honoured by participation in the central victory parade in Moscow on 9 May 2015, albeit for mundane reasons: it is the only association

<sup>22</sup> Yermolov was a Cossack ataman, conqueror of the Caucasus. To the Cossacks this name had overtones of propaganda, and the Chechens took it as a provocation. The battalion was decimated in a series of ambushes.

maintaining a special honour guard which provides the setting for state and church celebrations, both in Moscow and in the regions. The Kuban Cossacks' participation in the parade was for propaganda reasons<sup>23</sup>, to emphasise the historical and contemporary merits of the Cossacks (during the events in Crimea in 2014).

By presidential decrees (no.s 168, 169, 170 and 171), since 2010 the VKOs have had unified uniforms and ranks; they have been obliged to introduce special Cossack IDs (a type of small military booklet in passport format, issued by the territorial military police for five years, with a possible extension for a further five years). These have made it easier for the Ministry of Defence to keep records of the military reserves. Most of the pages contain the term 'military service', wherein are entered the bearer's military rank (but not their Cossack rank; the latter is classed as an 'internal rank' for use within the VKO), his military speciality, as well as the training he has attended. The highest rank in the VKO, that of Cossack general, is awarded by the President of Russia, but the higher officer ranks, the so-called main ranks (such as *esaul*, *starshyna*, Cossack colonel, *sotnik*) are awarded by the President's representative in the federal oblast, while the lower ranks are conferred by the governor of the region. A separate decree regulates the possession of hand weaponry, sabres (*shashko*) and the traditional *nahaika*. Equipping the Cossack formations with small arms (which the Cossacks have long been clamouring for) is still a contentious matter for the government (although participants in special actions do receive them: some observers claim that ataman Kozitsyn withdrew from the Donbas when his Cossacks ran out of ammunition).

Discipline in these so-called troops is poor. According to the above-mentioned ataman Doluda, in 2016 the legally mandated annual

<sup>23</sup> Участие казаков в юбилейном параде официально подтвердили в Министерстве обороны РФ. Подробности, <http://www.vkpress.ru/vkinfo/uchastie-kazakov-v-yubileynom-parade-ofitsialno-podtverdili-v-ministerstve-oborony-rf-podrobnosti/?id=76219>

*krugs* for accounting and electing leaders were held in only 5 out of 9 districts of the Kuban Troops' VKO, and in only 15 of the 59 local organisations. The ataman also harshly criticised their military insubordination: 56% of the regional organisations' atamans failed to turn up for military field exercises. Cossacks participating in patrol duties often conduct themselves arbitrarily: they assault thieves and drug addicts with their *nahaikas*, put criminals in irons, conduct unlawful investigations, and so on.

'Military' discipline is also breached by atamans of individual troops. In September 2013, Metropolitan Cyril of Stavropol, the chairman of the Synod Committee for Cooperation with Cossackdom, imposed a clerical punishment (*epithymia*) on the atamans of the Terek (Sergei Klimenko<sup>24</sup>), Central (Valery Nalimov) and Trans-Baikal VKOs (Sergei Bobrov), on charges of separatist activities among the troops entrusted to them, which resulted in their dismissal from their duties. In the official press, the subject was taboo; from the Cossack forums<sup>25</sup>, in which the case raised a wave of criticism of the Church, it is known that the metropolitan's decision was agreed upon with Aleksander Beglov, the head of the Presidential Council for Cossackdom. The disgraced atamans were removed from the Council.

<sup>24</sup> Police major-general Sergei Klimenko was appointed by President Putin in 2012 as ataman of the Terek Troops with the rank of Cossack General (in the official narrative: he was chosen as ataman during the Great Krug). He came into conflict with the head of the Northern Caucasian Federal District, Aleksandr Khloponin and the authorities of the Stavropol krai, and then set the Cossacks against the authorities and each other. As mentioned, he demanded the transfer to the Terek Troops of the cognac factory in Kizlyar and the Kavkazminkurortresursy business responsible for managing the holiday resorts and mineral waters in the Caucasus, and took his demands directly to President Putin, bypassing the local authorities. Klimenko's removal deepened the split within the Terek Troops, as a significant part of his followers left the force and became more radical, publicly criticising both the authorities and the Orthodox Church.

<sup>25</sup> Кто и как сегодня правит казаками?, [http://kazak-center.ru/news/kto\\_i\\_kak\\_segodnja\\_pravit\\_kazakami/2013-09-23-2631](http://kazak-center.ru/news/kto_i_kak_segodnja_pravit_kazakami/2013-09-23-2631)

Penalties like the above-mentioned levelled against the Cossacks are becoming a more common manifestation of their punishment: in May 2017 in Krasnodar, the Orthodox Church imposed an *epithymia* on six Cossacks who had been working with the electoral staff of the opposition activist Aleksei Navalny. The Kuban Troops' VKO expelled one of its members for the same reason. The legal instruments used against the Cossacks are not discussed in the central media, although echoes of high-profile detentions persist in the local press<sup>26</sup>. It is also worth mentioning in this context the amendment passed this year to the law on the Russian Cossacks' state service, whose rapid approval by the Duma was announced by President Putin<sup>27</sup>. The amendment expanded all the limits and restrictions of the anti-corruption legislation to the atamans; they were deprived of the fees they had received for the Cossack associations' small businesses, and henceforth they must also submit an annual report about their own income, as well as that of their wives and minor children.

#### 4. The 'Cossack component' as a subject in education and state policy

**The essence of the state's new policy towards Cossackdom is found in the term 'the Cossack component'. This emphasises the allegedly colossal patriotic, spiritual, civic and economic**

<sup>26</sup> One example is the case of the ataman Anatoly Kuslivy, founder and director of the private Cossack cadet corps in Simferopol, which has been going on for more than a year. In April 2016 he was arrested on charges of paedophilia and exploiting the work of his cadets. The state media immediately distanced itself from the ataman, calling him a 'pseudo-Cossack' and a 'crossdresser', and announced the appointment of a state-run Cossack cadet school (М. Аванесова, *Ряженных нам не надо*, <https://gazetacrimea.ru/news/ryajenih-nam-ne-nado-22671>). Social media have in turn been used to organise pickets and posted petitions by the cadets' parents demanding the ataman's release (<https://vk.com/club52077285>). This incident has also proved to be an excellent contribution to the practice of the Kremlin's policy towards the Cossacks.

<sup>27</sup> Федеральный закон от 1 мая 2017 г. N 82-ФЗ О внесении изменений в статью 5 Федерального закона "О государственной службе российского казачества", *Российская Газета*, 3 May 2017, <https://rg.ru/2017/05/03/kazaki-dok.html>

**potential of the Cossacks, who in the official narrative has become a model for Russian society, its economic enterprise and its pro-defence activity. The Cossacks, as a kind of ‘healthy’ grassroots organisation of society, innately opposed to oppositionist organisations, constitute the most important argument for the existence of a civil, subjective society in Russia. Like the concept analysed above, the term does not so much describe reality as creates it.**

**The new wave of Cossack-mania in the national narrative has coincided with the return of the previously announced ‘modernisation of Russia towards traditionalism’, which clearly accelerated after the events on the Maidan in Kiev. ‘Faith’ in the national narrative has been strengthened by the Orthodox Church, which stresses that the Cossacks have always stood in the defence not only of Russia’s borders, but of the Orthodox faith.**

The term ‘the Cossack component’ appeared in the context of the patriotic education of children and youth as the name of an individual school subject. The textbooks and methodological guidelines were prepared by the Razumovsky State University of Technology and Management in Moscow, which since 2014 has acted as the First Cossack University. By a decision of the Presidential Council for Cossack Affairs, this institute became the methodological centre and the headquarters for implementing innovative technology in Cossack enterprises and farms. The choice of this institute was justified by the lack of qualified management personnel in the agricultural regions of compact Cossack residence, which makes it difficult for them to organise their own agricultural processing plants. The Cossack University educates 150 such professionals per year (10 at the University of Moscow, the others in 18 regional branches). The University stresses the importance of the Cossacks as a substantial part of civil society<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Казачий компонент в высшем образовании, <http://mgutm.ru/kazachestvo/formation.php>

According to education minister Olga Vasileva<sup>29</sup>, the Cossack component is one subject in the continuous education which 90,000 children and young people in 4000 institutions (kindergartens, schools, Cossack classes and Cossack cadet corps, vocational training centres and universities) are undergoing. They are inculcated with a coherent system of patriotic education based on Cossack traditions, as well as comprehensive military-patriotic programs, including drills. The subject also includes civic education, shaping the philosophical and ethical attitudes in the spirit of Orthodoxy, the protection of regional cultural heritage, etc. Minister Vasileva presents this project as a kind of assistance for Cossacks in the field of vocational training and economic education, placing it – in accordance with the spirit of the national narrative – in the context of the Cossack associations’ self-financing programme. This is one element of a broader plan for the patriotic education of children and adolescents, based (among other elements) on the unified standards for historical and cultural education introduced in 2014. This has borne fruit in the return of ideology to schools, as these standards promote an ideology of a perception of the world through the prism of the ‘Russian world’ (*русский мир*), that is, a civilisation based on traditional, spiritually Orthodox values. These educational activities are actively supported by the Orthodox clergy, who have expanded this topic to include discussions of religious security, that is, the ability to resist pressure from foreign cultures<sup>30</sup>.

Since 2016 the ‘Cossack component’ school subject has also included training in cyber-warfare. This is confirmed by increasingly numerous reports of Cossack cyber-volunteers. Their tasks

<sup>29</sup> From a report of the meeting of the Council for Cossack Affairs for the President of the RF on 16 November 2016: Состоялось заседание Совета при Президенте Российской Федерации по делам казачества, <http://ввко.рф/news/632-v-moskve-sostoyalos-zasedanie-soveta-pri-prezidenterossiyskoy-federacii-po-delam-kazachestva.html>

<sup>30</sup> Практическая лекция: „Религиозная безопасность”, <https://ok.ru/mgu-tuim.ru/topic/66111008394087>



allegedly include searching for prohibited content on the Russian internet, unmasking criminal social networks that promote extremism and terrorism, and combating informational aggression by the West, etc. These cyber-volunteers, groups of which have appeared in different regions, are required to swear the Cossack oath<sup>31</sup>. At their rally at the First Cossack University in April 2017 – which was attended by representatives of the Presidential Council for Cossack Affairs, the head of the government agency for supervising Internet communication Roskomnadzor, the head of the Secure Internet League, and Father Timofey (Chaykin), who has been appointed by the Church to the students' pastoral care – their role as defenders of the virtual and cultural boundaries of Russia was emphasised, as were their special merits. As stated, within just six months the Cossack cyber-volunteers' missions led to the blocking of 26,000 portals promoting 'terrorism and extremism' and 'radical Ukrainian propaganda'.<sup>32</sup>

The above-mentioned development of 'Cossack' economic potential can be interpreted on the one hand as a modern variant of the exchange of military service for relief and concessions, which is familiar from history; and on the other hand, as a reproduction of the process from the early 2000s when there was a massive influx of *siloviki* into the economy, and when senior representatives of the security structures took up managerial positions in companies and on their supervisory boards, leading to the renationalisation and concentration of the state's economic assets. In the present case, this process has come down to the regional level, and now involves regional security elites. As the new administrators of allotments from the state land fund, they are supposed to

<sup>31</sup> The Kaliningrad Cossack Institute of Technology and Design, which is a branch of the First Cossack University, has already trained and sworn in two internet teams (И. Марков, В Калининграде начнется формирование казачьей кибердружины, *Комсомольская Правда*, 16 March 2017, <http://www.kaliningrad.kp.ru/online/news/2685452>).

<sup>32</sup> М. Лемуткина, Казаки нашли в интернете дьявола и объявили ему войну, *Московский Комсомолец*, 12 April 2017, <http://www.mk.ru/social/2017/04/12/kazaki-nashli-v-internete-dyavola-i-obyavili-emu-voynnu.html>

guarantee the technological leap forward of Russian agriculture, to develop the production of organic food, agro-tourism, horse stables, equine therapy, etc.

By presenting neo-Cossackdom as the management of the agricultural and food production sector, the official narrative emphasises the Cossacks' role in ensuring Russia's food security and the self-sufficiency of Russian agriculture, which has been of interest to the Kremlin since the introduction in 2014 of Western sanctions on food imports to Russia. Sensing an opportunity, the Cossack associations have begun to offer their mediation in the food trade<sup>33</sup>. This economic entrepreneurship, in addition to the self-financing of the Cossack troops, is additionally intended to lead to the settlement of Siberia and the Far East, the safe supply of food to strategic consumers (the armed forces, the State Reserves Committee, Rosatom, the Russian railways, Gazprom, Rosneft and others), as well as state control over food prices, both wholesale and retail. This narration, as it shapes reality, is being disseminated by the atamans: the 'Cossack troops' they control produce food and gain a competitive advantage, namely broad access to strategic consumers. It seems significant that this public discourse has completely failed to take the principles of the market economy into account. This discourse contains no information on the sources of any funding for such projects, making it difficult to forecast not only their effectiveness, but also whether they can even be implemented.

Another potential source of cash flows for the Cossacks is their paid security service. This business is a tried and tested way of funding security departments outside the state budget. In the case of the neo-Cossacks it is seen as almost a necessity: the military Cossack associations have been obliged to appoint and register security companies. This is a short-term solution, subject on the one hand to a political climate which favours expanding

<sup>33</sup> <http://kuban24.tv/item/kubanskie-kazaki-zapustili-internet-yarmarku-dlya-sel-hozprodukcii-179511>

business opportunities to the more broadly understood ‘corporations of force’, and on the other to objective economic conditions and the state of the national budget.

The problem is that the market for security services was divided up long ago, and the new service providers have to face powerful competition. The nature of this competition, and of the competitive advantage the ‘Cossacks’ have, can be indirectly seen in an incident which took place at the end of 2015. After cuts to positions in the Russian Interior Ministry (which mainly affected posts outside the ministry itself), the ‘Cossack Guard’ Private Protection Enterprise in Moscow signed a contract with the Moscow city authorities to protect 34 Moscow courts. After it was revealed that the contract had been signed without a public tender procedure, the Cossacks withdrew from the service. Such ‘oversights’ are to be eliminated thanks to a draft amendment to the law on the Russian Cossacks’ state service – presented to the Duma on 11 October 2016 and apparently prepared by the Russian National Guard, by a decree from the Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin – which states that the Cossacks will be more widely involved in protecting essential state facilities of federal importance without the need to undergo a tendering procedure<sup>34</sup>. However, the project has still not been submitted for consideration in the Duma.

The supervision of such protection of important locations, special transports, routes and installations, as well as the protection of the property of natural and legal persons, is the responsibility of the above-mentioned Federal Service of the National Guard Troops, founded in 2016. It also exercises supervision (‘federal state control’) over private protective undertakings, and over

<sup>34</sup> Росгвардия предлагает казакам охранять министерства и прокуратуру, *Аргументы и Факты*, 12 October 2016, [http://www.kuban.aif.ru/politic/details/rosgvardiya\\_predlagaet\\_kazakam\\_ohranyat\\_ministerstva\\_i\\_prokuraturu](http://www.kuban.aif.ru/politic/details/rosgvardiya_predlagaet_kazakam_ohranyat_ministerstva_i_prokuraturu); Казаки могут начать служить в Росгвардии, 22 March 2017, <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/kazaki-mogut-nachat-sluzhit-v-rosgvardii/28384551.html>

arms in civilian circulation<sup>35</sup>. The National Guard has expressed interest in increasing the Cossack contingent in its service by means of conscription, as well as in broadening the scope of the Cossack protective service, which presents itself as a necessity due to the vast territory of the Russian Federation and the density of strategic locations in areas of low population density, especially in Siberia and the Far East.

The Russian National Guard, together with the Ministry for Civil Defence and Emergency Situations and the Ministry of Defence, has officially expressed its optimism by stressing the importance of the cooperation between the Cossacks and the territorial bodies of the military administration. Moreover, the registered Cossacks have been involved for a long time in the protection of public order and public facilities (mainly Orthodox churches, schools and kindergartens). Before the National Guard was established, the conditions for joining this type of activity were not prohibitive: it was enough to complete a 'local assistant's course'<sup>36</sup>.

The currently observed boom in the 'business of force' (including the Cossack security companies and the private military companies, which are only in the initial stage of legislation<sup>37</sup>) can be interpreted in different ways, including as a transition to Cossack self-financing. We should also note that this applies to the formally registered Cossacks, who have been reinforced by soldiers sent to the reserves, and by officers of the structures of force, for whom the Cossacks have always been a brand-name, a commercial trademark offering specific services. The Kremlin has always treated the 'business of force' not only as a way to solve the problem of what

<sup>35</sup> According to the government newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (5 July 2016) there are half a million private security guards working in Russia, and more than 7 million weapons of various calibres in private circulation.

<sup>36</sup> А. Бойко, Росгвардия прирастает есаулами и атаманами, *Комсомольская Правда*, 11 October 2016, <http://www.kp.ru/daily/26592/3608699/>

<sup>37</sup> С. Шишкин: Казаки за создание ЧВК, [http://казачествомосквы.рф/news/ataman\\_sergej\\_shishkin\\_kazaki\\_za\\_sozdanie\\_chvk/2017-01-20-1382](http://казачествомосквы.рф/news/ataman_sergej_shishkin_kazaki_za_sozdanie_chvk/2017-01-20-1382)

to do with people sent to the reserves, but also as a reserve for the armed forces which is in a constant state of combat readiness. Calling it a foundation of civil society and of the state/public partnership seems to be an abuse: expanding the security and defence sectors translates in fact to an expansion of the use of violence as a regulator in the relationship between the state and its citizens.

One spectacular element of the authorities' policy regarding the Cossacks is the propaganda of the state, which uses all the forces and means at its disposal to this end. Every day sees the use of slogans and symbols, as evidenced by the terms discussed above, which are common in official narratives. These are reinforced by a series of recurring images: parades, changes of the guard, and a 14-episode television series based on Mikhail Sholokhov's *And quiet flows the Don*, which was retold in 2015 in the form of a soap opera. Cossack folklore plays a role which is difficult to overestimate, as it has in fact been promoted by professional state song and dance ensembles such as the Kuban Cossack Choir, the ensemble of the Don Cossacks from Rostov, the Stavropolye group, and the 'Cossacks of Russia' from Lipetsk. Their international appearances are effective PR for Russia<sup>38</sup>.

The role of the 'Cossack component', as a morally and physically healthy reserve of the armed forces of the Russian Federation, is stressed in military propaganda<sup>39</sup>. The Ministry of Defence, which had previously been strongly opposed to the wider involvement

<sup>38</sup> Here is how the performances by the 'Cossacks of Russia' were advertised in Poland: "The Cossack show will take place as part of a tour around Polish cities. The Polish audience (...) will be able to see them for the first time on the Polish stage. And all of it enveloped in an impressive staging, enriched with colourful folklore costumes, decorated in a style of the songs, somewhat contentious, but very characteristic of the 'Cossack' regions. Another characteristic feature of the show is also the breath of freedom that the spectators can sense, which after all, is an integral attribute of Cossack life." (<https://zabrze.com.pl/i,oszalamiajacy-wielki-balet-kozacki,200274,29932.html>).

<sup>39</sup> Д. Сергеев, Оседлать Т-80: на что способны российские казаки, 13 November 2016, ТВ Звезда, <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/forces/content/201611130847-y6uz.htm>

of the unskilled Cossacks in defence tasks<sup>40</sup> and turning it into 'a kind of army', is now (at least declaratively) changing its approach, placing the emphasis on giving the Cossacks military training as an organisational base for territorial defence. According to Nikolai Makarov, the main ideologue of Russia's military reforms, chief of general staff of the Russian army, and currently an advisor to Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu, the Cossacks will form the core of the reserve and contract services in the army. As part of the official narrative, the general has stated that the General Staff will gradually create 'Cossack troops' with the aim of creating at least one Cossack brigade in each military district<sup>41</sup>.

According to General Konstantin Sivkov, Vice-President of the Academy of Geopolitical Sciences, "the Cossacks may prove useful as a protective force and as defence of facilities and roads, in times of both peace and war, against the actions of the enemy, his sabotage and terrorist attacks, and at the moment of a declaration of a state of war, as a force for its security." The general also speculated<sup>42</sup> upon the creation of territorial forces of the National Guard on the basis of Cossack troops.

This idea was eagerly received by some atamans, who argued that the existing legislation already assigned the Cossacks territorial defence capabilities (defending a state of emergency and martial law, protecting public order, protecting important state, industrial and military facilities, fighting terrorist and bandit groups, the additional protection of Russia's borders, removing the consequences of natural disasters and humanitarian disasters, etc.). The responses by the atamans as posted on the websites

<sup>40</sup> Министерство Обороны Российской Федерации недовольно отношением казаков к военной службе, <http://kazak-center.ru/news/1/2012-02-06-1827>

<sup>41</sup> Е. Созаев-Гурьев, Генштаб увеличивает число казачьих частей, *Известия*, 3 August 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/532117>

<sup>42</sup> К. Сивков, Казачество как новый род войск. *Вечерка*, 15 April 2014; <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/19450>

of military Cossack associations<sup>43</sup> serve as a natural extension of military propaganda. They also serve an informational function (by spreading the idea of Cossackdom, explaining its strategic role, giving introductory notes, etc.).

The tone of this propaganda has been set by the Kremlin. For example, during Putin's presidential election campaign in 2012, he made a statement concerning the strategic importance of the Cossacks — a 'great group, numbering of millions of Russians'. The President clearly emphasised that the Cossacks are under the care of the Kremlin, because "after the revolution of 1917, the Cossack community fell victim to the brutal repression, which was a *de facto* genocide. Despite this, the Cossacks survived and preserved the memory of their own culture and customs. The state now has a duty to help them, to involve them in military service and activities organised for young people, provide them with assistance in bringing them up in a spirit of patriotism, offer them military training<sup>44</sup>."

'Faith' in the state's narrative has been boosted by Patriarch Cyril, who has ascribed 'the opportunity for a real revival of Cossackdom' to its moral regeneration, meaning closer cooperation with the Orthodox Church. During a meeting with the atamans of 'the Cossack troops of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus', the patriarch expressed the mission of the Orthodox Church in broad terms: "The Russian Orthodox Church, on whose canonical territory the Cossack state appeared, bears responsibility for its spiritual service around the world<sup>45</sup>." But the clergyman has also complained that "the Cossacks, like many of their countrymen who were brought up in Soviet reality, find it very difficult to live the life of the Church." He thus recommended that particular attention be paid to the young generation

<sup>43</sup> See for example [www.don-kazak.ru](http://www.don-kazak.ru); <http://vko-ckv.ru>; <http://slavakubani.ru>; [www.terkv.ru](http://www.terkv.ru); <http://www.allcossacks.ru>; <http://вво.рф>; <http://звко.рф>; <http://казакисибир.рф>

<sup>44</sup> Высказывания о казачестве, [http://rkouva0.ru/?page\\_id=368](http://rkouva0.ru/?page_id=368)

<sup>45</sup> Патриарх Кирилл: Воцерковление казачества – единственный путь его возрождения, 5 December 2012, <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/57905.html>

of the Cossack state, who should be brought up in the spirit of the Orthodox tradition; the patriarch assigned the Cossack state the role of “the vanguard of the Orthodox brotherhood of battle” and of “the spiritual, cultural and social forces of the Russian world.”<sup>46</sup>

Television propaganda is directed at both foreign and domestic audiences. At the end of 2016, RT announced a project to resettle Cossacks in Russia’s border regions<sup>47</sup>. By a decision of the Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin in 2017, a pilot programme was introduced to defend the country’s border in the Far East (the borders with China and Japan will be guarded by Cossacks from the Ussuri and Trans-Baikal Troops) and the European part of Russia (the border with Poland and Lithuania is to be protected by isolated units of Cossacks from Kaliningrad). Around 3000 persons are to be involved in this programme, which is to be self-financed by the participants. It provides for the allocation of Cossacks who are active and proven in service to areas of land where they will be engaged in cultivation and breeding livestock. Over time, as announced, the experiment is to be extended: the entire Russian borderland is supposed ultimately to be protected by Cossacks.

The propaganda aimed at the Cossacks themselves carries a message of persuasion and education, as seen in a report<sup>48</sup> about a forthcoming draft law in the Duma regulating the issue of Cossack uniforms and distinguishing marks. As stressed, the right to wear them will be denied to members of the Cossack social organisations. The official media are thus suggesting that the Kremlin, as it works for formal uniformity within the Cossacks, will not

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Patriarch Cyril’s speech at the opening of the 5<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Cossacks in Novocherkassk, 14 October 2015 (<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4245143.html>).

<sup>47</sup> Казакам доверяют охранять границы России с Польшей, Литвой, Китаем и Японией, RT, 18 October 2016, <https://russian.rt.com/article/326739-kazakam-doveryat-ohranyat-granicy-rossii-s-polshei>

<sup>48</sup> Запретить карнавал: ряженных казаков могут объявить вне закона, RT, 25 November 2016, <https://russian.rt.com/russia/article/335504-ryazheniye-kazaki-vne-zakona>



tolerate unregistered, 'self-proclaimed' organisations that harm the image of the 'real Cossacks'. This has little to do with the situation in reality, as can be demonstrated by the activity of ataman Kozitsyn in Ukraine, or the growing number of attacks on the Kremlin's political opponents (the attack in Sochi on members of Pussy Riot, the assault on the Sakharov Centre in Moscow, two attacks on the opposition politician Aleksei Navalny, and proliferating cases of radical activities by Cossacks such as the breakup of marches by Hari Krishna groups and demonstrations by gay people, the ostentatious destruction of forbidden food imports in supermarkets, etc.) carried out by arbitrary, self-proclaimed Cossacks. The perpetrators of these incidents, as Russian human rights defenders have regularly reported, are under the protection of the Kremlin, and have never borne any legal consequences.

Above all, however, the official propaganda deploys a sense of threat from the West, as well as pride in the new territorial 'conquests'. This is mainly due to the past experiences of the Putin regime: one effective tool for consolidating both society and the government is to mobilise them in the face of threats from terrorism, extremism, foreign culture, a 'Russian Maidan', etc. As they displayed their joy after the annexation of Crimea, the Cossacks collectively insisted on their merits; they even started bragging about 'Baltic neo-Cossacks'<sup>49</sup>. This means that they have joined in the game imposed on them by the Kremlin, and at present they are clearly presenting themselves as the guarantors of its policy.

<sup>49</sup> Ю. Каменский, Балтийское казачество пережило новое рождение, Политобразование, 29 October 2016, <http://lawinrussia.ru/content/baltiyskoe-kazachestvo-perezghilo-novoe-rozhdenie>

## II. THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF THE COSSACK QUESTION

The alleged values of Cossackdom as portrayed by the state and the Orthodox Church (loyalty, patriotism, observance of the ethical standards of Orthodoxy, the traditional model of a large family, and above all a militarised lifestyle) coincide with the objectives of the Kremlin, for whom a 'statified' Cossackdom is equivalent to its use as a model group of so-called civil society. For that reason, the Kremlin has been placing emphasis in its official state documents and programmes on the patriotic education of Cossack youth, reinforcing the sentiment of state service, and preparing Cossacks for military service and the defence of public order, including expanding their repressive functions (breaking up opposition demonstrations and harassing opposition activists). Transforming the Cossacks into a systemic element of the state's security and defence architecture will lead to the regional authorities bearing the costs of this process.

### 1. The Kremlin's strategic objectives

The Kremlin's vision of the Cossacks is manifested in the documents dedicated to them. The first such document was the *Concept of the Russian Federation's state policy towards the Russian Cossacks*, from 2008. It is characterised by great vagueness, although it did give the Cossacks' activity the direction of development desired by the Kremlin, by laying the emphasis on their state service. A more precisely defined document, which fits in with the Kremlin's overall plans for ensuring the state's internal and external security, is the *Strategy for the development of the Russian Federation's state policy towards the Russian Cossacks to 2020*<sup>50</sup>, which President

<sup>50</sup> Стратегия развития государственной политики Российской Федерации в отношении российского казачества, <http://state.kremlin.ru/council/16/news/16682>

Putin approved on 15 September 2012. As stated in the preamble, the Kremlin intends to achieve its policy objectives in the following manner:

- by creating economic conditions which would involve the members of the Cossack associations in the service of the state;
- developing the spiritual bases of the traditional lifestyle and unique forms of culture of Russian Cossackdom;
- increasing the Cossacks' role in the education of young people in a spirit of patriotism and love for the homeland, as well as a readiness to serve it, in which the Cossack cadets' corps are intended to play an important role;
- developing and intensifying contacts between the Cossacks in Russia with Cossacks in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

This strategy commits the federal bodies of state power, the bodies of power of the Russian Federation's republics, and other local government authorities to implementing a coherent policy towards the Cossacks which should take the following questions into account:

- organising the Russian Cossacks' state service;
- improving the relationship between state power & the local administrations and the Cossacks;
- supporting the Cossacks' economic development;
- protecting and developing Cossack culture, as well as working with the Cossack youth, its patriotic and military education, its physical and spiritual/religious training;
- supporting the international activities of the Russian Cossacks;
- protecting the heraldic livery of the Russian Cossacks' activities (i.e. standardising the distinguishing marks, uniform designs and regalia of individual Cossack troops), as well as defending their historical heritage.

The vague wording, along the lines of ‘strengthening the role of the Cossacks in resolving the state’s and local tasks’, ‘the maximum use of the potential of Cossack organisations and communities in harmonising inter-ethnic, inter-religious and inter-confessional dialogue’ and ‘management of the border areas and other poorly inhabited or uninhabited territories of the Russian Federation’ does not conceal the basic objective, which is to consolidate the still divided and diffuse Cossack organisations. This strategy has underpinned the long-term goals associated with the development of neo-Cossackdom by including it into the following spheres:

- the security and defence system of the Russian Federation, through direct service in the armed forces of the Russian Federation, serving in the military formations of so-called ‘other troops’, and in the reserves of the Armed Forces;
- the public security system;
- the system of protection against environmental and fire hazards, and of removing the consequences of emergencies;
- the system for defending the state border.

These aims are not new. Since 1992, Cossacks have been protecting the residence of the Patriarch and Cossack border guard regiments, as well as volunteer militia patrols, had already been created in the days of President Boris Yeltsin. The military Cossack associations’ manner of operation and the signing of contracts with them were regulated in 2009 by then-Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in Government Order no. 806. However, the development of the Cossacks and the reinforcement of their status as a militarised community were underpinned with quantifiable privileges and concessions in an official document for the first time, which was justified by moving the Cossacks to a self-financing model. Another innovation was the scale of the project, which covered the whole territory of the Russian Federation (including all the military districts), as well as the specific mechanisms for implementation. These were spread over three stages:

<p>Stage 1 (2012-2014)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The creation of a central database of Cossack organisations through their duplicate registration; issuing their members new Cossack IDs;</li> <li>• The creation of a legal basis for the transition of Cossack organisations to the self-financing model (the establishment of private protection companies, the assignment to Cossack communities of agricultural allotments from the state land fund);</li> <li>• Development of Cossack education (the ‘Cossack component’);</li> <li>• Securing the state’s information policy (Cossack websites; book series, sociological studies)</li> </ul>
<p>Stage 2 (2015-2018)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving the federal and local legal bases for the Cossacks’ state service;</li> <li>• Recruiting ‘Cossack’ military units to 80% capacity;</li> <li>• Signing contracts with members of the military Cossack associations for their voluntary participation in the reserves, to be called up during states of emergency and at the outbreak of war;</li> <li>• Appointing private protection companies for all Cossack troops;</li> <li>• Adopting regional and municipal programmes to support the development of the Russian Cossacks;</li> <li>• Implementing programmes for creating/reconstructing the military headquarters of Cossack associations.</li> </ul>
<p>Stage 3 (2018-2020)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transferring all Cossack associations to the state registry, ensuring that 100% of their members hold the new Cossack IDs;</li> <li>• National service to be carried out by at least 35% of the military Cossack associations’ members;</li> <li>• Cossack military associations are to be self-financing organisations (on the basis of their contracts with local authorities, their private businesses and farms);</li> <li>• Members of military associations are included in the records of the reserves of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, to be called up during states of emergency and the outbreak of war;</li> <li>• In the Southern Military District, an experiment is being carried out to call up the organisational reserve of one or two Cossack military associations;</li> <li>• Extending continual Cossack education programs for Cossack youth in the CIS countries, as well as establishing a network of summer camps for patriotic and civic-military education for young Cossacks within the CIS.</li> <li>• The organisation of a World Forum for Cossack Orthodox Youth and a World Congress of Cossacks.</li> </ul>

The main executors of this strategy are the ministries and government agencies, and the ‘subcontractors’ are the local authorities of the Russian Federation’s entities. Initially the government approved the annual series of plans for 2012 and 2013. However, the plan for actions to implement the *Strategy of the state’s policy towards the Russian Cossacks* in the period 2014-16, which had been confirmed on 29 July 2014, was criticised as being ineffective at eliminating the divisions among the Cossacks<sup>51</sup>. The government confirmed the plan of actions for the last stage of implementing the *Strategy* on 17 February 2017 (by Decree no. 285-p), obliging the governments of RF entities to participate in its execution and prepare their own plans for implementation<sup>52</sup>. These will be supervised by the Federal Agency for Nationality Affairs, which will report to the government on the current status twice a year, in February and August.

Due to centralisation, and the federal centre holding the exclusive right to monitor the security and defence sector, the local authorities’ role is limited to performing the tasks imposed by the centre. The list of these tasks is growing: according to an amendment to the law on the mobilisation and mobilisation preparations made in February 2017<sup>53</sup> the governors and heads of the regional and local authorities will be personally responsible for the preparations and implementation of the mobilisation upon a declaration of war. In this way they will ease the burden on the Ministry of Defence, which manages the mobilisation system, activates the training of the reserves, and assesses the state of mobilisation preparedness. From the ministry’s point of view, these evaluations have not been successful. One proposed remedy is an experiment involving the signing of short-term contracts (for 3 to 5 years) with those Cos-

<sup>51</sup> Чтобы вместо консолидации казачества не происходило его разъединение, [http://kazak-center.ru/news/vmesto\\_konsolidacii\\_kazachestva\\_proiskhodit\\_ego\\_razedinenie/2017-01-16-3246](http://kazak-center.ru/news/vmesto_konsolidacii_kazachestva_proiskhodit_ego_razedinenie/2017-01-16-3246)

<sup>52</sup> <https://government.consultant.ru/documents/3716066>

<sup>53</sup> Федеральный закон от 22 февраля 2017 г. N-19-ФЗ, *Российская Газета*, 27 February 2017, <https://rg.ru/2017/02/27/mobilizaciya-dok.html>

sacks remaining in the reserves of the Russian Federation's armed forces<sup>54</sup>. This solution, as may be assumed on the basis of the public discussion, is in the interest of both the local authorities and the Cossacks.

An analysis of these executive documents leads to the conclusion that this policy has been subject to extreme bureaucratisation. For example, the Ministry of Justice is supposed to have developed a timetable to add the Cossack organisations to the State registry; carried out an analysis of how the local authorities apply the legal acts concerning the Cossacks; and drawn up and introduced the adoption of new laws, including the law on the Cossacks' development. A significant part of these laws are also purely formal in nature. For example, the Federal Security Service is committed to employing the Cossacks to defend the borders (as they have done since the 1990s); the National Guard is to expand the Cossacks' service in its own units and defend state locations (this is a statutory obligation for both the Cossack forces and the National Guard); and the Interior Ministry is to include Cossack military associations in the defence of public order (which they have done for a number of years).

This bureaucratic inflation can be seen in the wording of similar plans for the individual local authorities of the Russian Federation, which have been obliged to make such preparations. Also, each of the projects mentioned in the plan in the Rostov oblast<sup>55</sup> will be subject to reports (twice in the reporting year).

<sup>54</sup> Минобороны ищет пути по сокращению фактов уклонения резервистами от прохождения военных сборов, *Военное Обозрение*, 6 October 2015, <https://topwar.ru/83755-minoborony-ischet-puti-po-sokrascheniyu-faktov-ukloneniya-rezervistami-ot-prohozheniya-voennyh-sborov.html>

<sup>55</sup> Об утверждении плана мероприятий по реализации в 2017-2020 годах Стратегии развития государственной политики Российской Федерации в отношении российского казачества до 2020 года в Ростовской области, <http://www.donland.ru/documents/Ob-utverzhenii-plana-meropriyatij-po-realizacii-v-2017-%E2%80%932020-godakh-Strategii-razvitiya-gosu->

In accordance with the legal provisions, the state's policy towards the Cossacks will be funded from both the federal and local budgets. Due to the lack of comprehensive, reliable data, the expenses for this purpose are difficult to estimate; from the residual information available, it appears that it is mostly the regional authorities which have to bear these costs<sup>56</sup>. For example, it is known that in 2017-2019 Rostov oblast will spend more than 2 billion roubles (US\$33.9m) on the Cossacks. The expenditure of Krasnodar krai on implementing the 'Kuban Cossacks' programme in 2014-2016 amounted to 3.1 billion roubles (US\$52.5m). The largest sums from this programme have been spent on organising the state service of the Cossacks (1.8 billion roubles, or US\$30.5m), the Cossack cadet corps (730 million roubles, or US\$12.4m), the activities of the Kuban Cossacks' state company (458 million roubles, or US\$7.8m), and on military/patriotic education (64 million roubles, or US\$1.1m). The Crimean Cossacks, to whom the 2017-2020 plan has allocated 37.6 million roubles (US\$640,000), are financed as part of a programme entitled 'The development of civil society and the creation of conditions to ensure national consent'. The greater part of this amount has been allocated to the development of the Cossacks' state service. The structure of regional expenditure is thus a part of the more general upward trend in spending on security and defence at the expense of social spending. Moreover, it is known that individual projects involving the Cossacks have also been financed from the presidential grants' fund<sup>57</sup>, as well as from sponsorships that are initiated by the state and the Orthodox Church.

darstvennojj-politiki-Rossijskojj-Federacii-?pageid=128483&mid=134977&itemId=24908

<sup>56</sup> Вопросы финансирования казачества на федеральном и региональном уровнях, [http://kazak-center.ru/news/voprosy\\_finansirovanija\\_kazachestva\\_na\\_federalnom\\_i\\_regionalnom\\_urovnjakh/2016-12-03-3216](http://kazak-center.ru/news/voprosy_finansirovanija_kazachestva_na_federalnom_i_regionalnom_urovnjakh/2016-12-03-3216)

<sup>57</sup> This refers to presidential grants to third-sector organisations for projects in the areas of 'preserving historical memory', 'the protection of health, propaganda of a healthy lifestyle', 'the patriotic education of children and youth' and others. See <http://президентскиегранты.рф/Project/View/13166>



These stated commitments to supporting the Cossacks' socio-economic development (which some columnists have claimed is a break with the Cossack philosophy of poverty) have been accompanied by the Kremlin's tried and tested methods of granting concessions for a wide range of 'businesses of force' run by the Cossack troops, and announcing the extension of the programme allocating them land from the state land fund. The costs for the development of the Cossacks' military service are borne by the local budgets. The 'self-financing' of the Cossack troops mainly consists of the local authorities signing more or less profitable contracts with them. This has raised scepticism among some observers, who recall that in the past, similar mechanisms led to the criminalisation of the regions and the transformation of the Cossack regiments into the local authorities' private militias, and the creation of murky connections between politics and the economy. Today too, as has been emphasised, the territorial delegations for the administration of security and defence of the country share more economic interests with the local authorities than with the federal centre. In this context, the weakness of the Cossacks' private and cooperative ownership were confirmed by the fate of 42,000 hectares of land allocated to Cossack associations in Stavropol krai in the 1990s; these lands were re-appropriated by the then leaders of the Cossack revival<sup>58</sup>.

## 2. The institutional system for governing the Cossacks

**The bureaucratic mechanisms for the development of Cossackdom built into the *Strategy for the development of the Russian Federation's state policy towards the Russian Cossack to 2020* are being implemented by the structures for 'cooperation with the Cossacks' created for this purpose. These have appeared in most central government departments, in all the federal districts, as well as in those local administrations which have**

<sup>58</sup> А. Мащенко, Мы – рыцари России. Парадоксы возрождения казачества в России, *Ставропольская Правда*, 13 January 2017, [http://www.stpravda.ru/20170113/paradoksy\\_vozrozhdeniya\\_kazachestva\\_v\\_rossii\\_99509.html](http://www.stpravda.ru/20170113/paradoksy_vozrozhdeniya_kazachestva_v_rossii_99509.html)

**been obliged to adopt separate legislation on the development of the Cossacks' state service compatible with federal legislation. At the top of this hierarchical and bureaucratised pyramid is the Presidential Council for Cossack Affairs.**

The government's policy towards the Cossacks assumed a systemic nature with the creation in 2009 of the Presidential Council for Cossack Affairs, which was interpreted as an extension of the personal patronage of the President to the Cossacks. In principle it has advisory and consultative functions; it prepares presidential legal acts and strategy papers on the development of Cossackdom. It is currently composed mainly of troop atamans and other 'registered' Cossack organisations, as well as representatives of the state administration; it was approved by Presidential Decree No. 414 of 20 December 2016. The council is headed by Aleksandr Beglov, the plenipotentiary representative of the President in the Central Federal District; and its presidium includes three vice-presidents (the deputy prime ministers Aleksandr Khloponin and Dmitry Rogozin, and the acting secretary of the Council & head of the Presidential Administration's committee for internal policy Andrei Yarin). The composition of the presidium was expanded to include the Council of the Cossack Troops' Atamans, chaired by Nikolai Doluda, and the Expert-Consultative Committee led by Murat Ziazikov, who is responsible for inter-ethnic relations in the Presidential Administration. The President of the Council is directly subordinate to the committees for the development of Cossackdom established in all federal districts, and to the structure for cooperation with Cossackdom in the individual entities of the Russian Federation.

The work of the Council is carried out by 15 permanent committees, which serve at the same time as coordination bodies:

- the committee to improve the organisation of state service and other affairs (headed by Ivan Mironov, ataman of the Central Cossack Troops);

- the committee for cooperation between the Ministry of Defence and the Cossack associations (Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation);
- the committee for the protection of forests and wildlife (Aleksandr Panfilov, deputy head of the agency for forestry Rosleskhoz);
- the committee for the improvement of cooperation with Russian Cossackdom (Timur Prokopenko, former head of the Young Guard movement, deputy head of the Presidential Administration's Committee for Internal Policy);
- the committee for cooperation with Cossack social organisations (Andrei Yarin, head of the Presidential Administration's Committee for Internal Policy);
- the committee for the development of state policy towards the Cossacks (Igor Barinov, head of the government's Federal Agency for Nationality Affairs);
- the committee for normative legal acts (Maxim Travnikov, deputy minister of justice);
- the committee for supporting the Cossacks' economic development (Aleksandr Petrikov, deputy minister of agriculture);
- the committee for the development of the Cossacks' education system (Olga Vasileva, minister of education);
- the committee for scientific research and cooperation with the media (Vasily Shestakov, President of the International Sambo Federation);
- the committee for the development of Cossack culture (Aleksandr Zhuravsky, deputy minister of culture);
- the committee for the foreign activity of Russian Cossacks (Oleg Vasnetsov, Director of the MFA's department for Cossacks);
- the committee for Cossack cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church (Leonid Pokrovsky, a.k.a. Cyril, Metropolitan of Stavropol);
- the committee for Cossack heraldry (Georgi Vilinbakhov, the head of the Heraldic Council of the Russian Federation's Presidential Administration);

- the committee for supervision and monitoring (Andrei Kulba, deputy head of the Presidential Administration's Control Board).

The committees are usually chaired by a federal official, while the deputy is usually a representative of the Cossacks. For example, the committee for culture<sup>59</sup> consists of 26 members, including the directors of artistic ensembles with the status of state-owned enterprises (such as the Kuban Cossack Choir, the Cossacks of Russia, the Trans-Baikal Cossacks), the ministers of culture of the federal entities, representatives of departmental culture committees, and the media world. The Commission is chaired by the deputy minister of culture of the Russian Federation; his deputy is Vladimir Romanov, ataman of the Orenburg Troops. The Kremlin's projects are also carried out by members of the council who are not included in the above-mentioned committees. For example Sergei Pospelov, a member of the Council and president of the Russian Youth organisation, was the initiator of the Cossack Youth Circle forum (May 2016) which 'decided' to create the Cossack Youth Union. (The co-organisers of the Circle were the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, the administration of the Rostov oblast and the First Cossack University)<sup>60</sup>.

This extensive organisation of cooperation between the state and the Cossacks is reminiscent of the old command-and-distribution system. Separate cells dedicated to this area of state policy have appeared in individual ministries. Platforms for cooperation with

<sup>59</sup> <http://culture34.ru/news/%D0%A1%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%B2%20%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%B8.pdf>

<sup>60</sup> As reported by Kuban TV on 22 March 2017, the First Assembly of the Kuban Branch of Cossack Youth, which was formed on the basis of the Cossack classes and Cossack cadet corps, will take place in September 2017 (more than the year after it was created!). This can be interpreted as bureaucratic sluggishness in a region usually regarded as a leader in supporting the Kremlin's top-down initiatives. <http://old.kubantv.ru/kuban/kazachyu-molodezh-kubani-obedinyat-v-soyuz/>

foreign Cossack organisations within the Russian Foreign Ministry include a department for cooperation with Cossack associations and a separate committee supporting the development of Russian Cossackdom's international activities<sup>61</sup>, which periodically acquaints Cossack organisations with their plans for international activities.

The implementation of the state projects is supervised by a government-run Inter-Agency Committee for the Implementation of the *Strategy for developing the Russian Federation's state policy towards Russian Cossackdom to 2020*. Since November 2016 the 'official' chairman of the Committee has been Igor Barinov, the head of the Federal Agency for Nationality Affairs, who is a member of the Council for Cossack Affairs. Local administrations, in addition to individual departments for cooperation with the Cossacks, have set up state enterprises, such as the Cossacks of the Kuban, the Cossacks of the Don, and the Cossack Centre for State Service in Volgograd<sup>62</sup>, which employ Cossacks and implement these projects.

Contrary to its earlier pledges the Ministry of Defence, which is the main beneficiary of this policy, has not set up a separate structure for the collaboration with the Cossacks, although they work together on a daily basis, as evidenced by the detailed instructions issued by the Main Organisational and Mobilisation Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Federation's Armed Forces<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Материалы комиссии по вопросам казачьих обществ, [http://www.mid.ru/materialy-komissii-po-voprosam-kazac-ih-obsestv/-/asset\\_publisher/aLRfN6MT9msV/content/id/185558](http://www.mid.ru/materialy-komissii-po-voprosam-kazac-ih-obsestv/-/asset_publisher/aLRfN6MT9msV/content/id/185558)

<sup>62</sup> Создано государственное казенное учреждение Ростовской области «Казачи Дона», 5 February 2014, <http://www.donland.ru/news/Sozdano-gosudarstvennoe-kazennoe-uchrezhdenie-Rostovskoj-oblasti-Kazaki-Dona?pageid=92218&mid=83793&itemId=51298>; О государственной программе Краснодарского края «Казачество Кубани», <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/430655711>

<sup>63</sup> Организация учета членов казачьих обществ, [http://www.atamanovko.ru/official\\_documents/methods/organizatsiya-voinskogo-ucheta-chlenov-kazachikh-obshchestv/](http://www.atamanovko.ru/official_documents/methods/organizatsiya-voinskogo-ucheta-chlenov-kazachikh-obshchestv/); Приказ министра обороны Российской Федерации, [http://www.ataman-ovko.ru/official\\_documents/executive/](http://www.ataman-ovko.ru/official_documents/executive/)

concerning the keeping of records, pre-conscription training and retraining for reservists, common projects in the field of patriotic education for young people, etc. According to the plan, the ministry reserves certain units for Cossack military associations in which their representatives participate in military service (usually in the vicinity of the troops' place of residence; for example, conscripts from the Central Cossack Association's troops are deployed in the 4<sup>th</sup> Cantemir Armoured Brigade in Naro-Fominsk<sup>64</sup>; conscripts from the Donetsk Troops go to Unit 45767 in Kamensk-Shakhtinsk, and those from the Kuban Troops go to the Cossack unit of the Air-Landing Troops in Novorossiysk).

Since 2012, the cooperation between the Cossacks and the General Staff has occurred within the context of the territorial defence (OT) of the Russian Federation<sup>65</sup>. The closer ties between these bodies have been demonstrated by partial reports about a series of groups of mobilised Cossack reserves. It is also known that, in accordance with the provisions of Presidential Decree No. 370 dated July 2015 on the creation of personal armed forces of the Russian Federation's mobilised reserves<sup>66</sup>, the defence ministry has signed contracts with the Cossacks for them to remain in the reserves of

prikazy-ministra-oborony-rf/prikaz-ministra-oborony-rossiyskoy-federatsii-745-.php

<sup>64</sup> See Военная служба в Вооруженных Силах Российской Федерации как один из видов несения государственной службы казаками Центрального казачьего войска (<http://ckwrf.ru/>).

<sup>65</sup> This coincided with the amendment to Article 22 of the law on the defence of the Russian Federation, which was extended to include a definition of territorial defence (OT). This will operate at the outbreak of war and consists of two elements: (1) to protect and defend important state facilities and (2) to combat the assaults and sabotage of the enemy. The OT organisation, as part of the state's military system, will be controlled by the Ministry of Defence at the military district level. So far, the Ministry of Defence has not created a separate OT command, but since 2013 elements of it have been successively introduced into the scenarios for the announced exercises and unannounced tests of combat readiness.

<sup>66</sup> Указ Президента Российской Федерации о создании мобилизационного людского резерва Вооруженных Сил Российской Федерации, <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/acts/files/0001201507170019.pdf>

specific military units. These form a base for the gradual retraining of reservists. Towards the end of April 2017, the territory of the Alexander Nevsky Guards' Engineering Brigade of the Southern Military District, located in Kamensk-Shakhtinsk, saw an exercise by OT soldiers supplemented with Cossacks from the Don Troops. In accordance with the plan, in 2017 troop musters lasting three days will take place once a month<sup>67</sup>.

There are also signs that training is currently proceeding in individual, non-barracked conditions, at times which are convenient for working reservists; this training presents itself as a pilot programme for supplementing OT units with reserve troops. This programme was tested during the Kavkaz-2016 exercise, during which, as has been reported, the 47<sup>th</sup> OT Division was created in Sevastopol. For the most part it was made up of reservists from outside Crimea – from Rostov (the territory of the Don Troops) and the Krasnodar krai (the territory of the Kuban Troops) – who were transported to their assembly points by air. This means that the OT unit was set up without regard to the principle of the local nature of territorial defence. In this context, it cannot be ruled out that the Ministry of Defence's plans regarding the neo-Cossacks go beyond the OT. In Crimea in 2014, Cossacks were used as part of the occupation forces, and were also used for special actions. It is enough to mention the actions of the unidentified Cossacks who interrupted the joint naval exercises between the US and Ukraine in 2006, and removed the Ukrainian national flag from the top of a mountain near Sevastopol in 2009<sup>68</sup>, not to mention the reports by the Ukrainian Security Service of Cossack trolling brigades on the internet<sup>69</sup>.

<sup>67</sup> Боевая учеба казаков-резервистов, [http://kazak-center.ru/publ/novosti\\_kazak\\_inform/naibolee\\_vazhnye/boevaja\\_ucheba\\_kazakov\\_rezervis-tov/174-1-0-4283](http://kazak-center.ru/publ/novosti_kazak_inform/naibolee_vazhnye/boevaja_ucheba_kazakov_rezervis-tov/174-1-0-4283)

<sup>68</sup> І. Лосев, Україна. XXI століття. Козацтво. Але чие воно?, <http://www.3republic.org.ua/ua/ideas/11498>

<sup>69</sup> В Украине зафиксированы три типа фейковых громад за которыми стоят российские спецслужбы – СБУ, 112.ua, 23 May 2017, <https://112.ua/>

A distinct place in the system supporting the Cossacks' state service is held by the Synod Committee for Cooperation with Russian Cossackdom, which was formed in March 2010 by a decision of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Committee, under the leadership of Cyril, Metropolitan of Stavropol<sup>70</sup>, has its headquarters in the Don Monastery in Moscow. This is also the Metropolitan's official residence, as it is for the corresponding committee on the Presidential Council which it also directs. Since 2011 the monastery has been protected by 11 registered Cossack troops in rotation.

As we read in the statutes of the Synod Committee, its objectives include the following:

- dissemination of the fundamentals of the Orthodox faith among the members of individual Cossack communities and organisations;
- coordination of the activities of the clergy working with the Cossacks both within Russia and beyond its borders;
- organisation of traineeships and training for clergy ministering to the Cossacks;
- carrying out the continual supervision of Cossack communities with regard to their religiosity;
- dissemination among the Cossacks of religious literature and scientific/methodological materials;
- the development of the publishing business and presentations of information and documents relating to the mutual support between the Orthodox Church and the Cossacks<sup>71</sup>.

obshchestvo/v-ukraine-zafiksirovany-tri-tipa-feykovyh-gromad-za-kotorymi-stoyat-rossiyskie-specsluzhby-sbu-391522.html

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.skvk.org/>

<sup>71</sup> <http://www.skvk.org/dokumenty/ustav-sinodalnogo-komiteta-povzaimodejstviyu-s-kazachestvom>



In 2010, the Committee also adopted its own strategy. A document entitled *The fundamental directions of spiritual/educational work with the Cossack communities* underlines the importance of the Cossack/Church partnerships, of creating an organisational structure for work within the Cossack environment, of preparing the Orthodox 'hard-core' believers in the world of culture, as well as in the civic-patriotic education of Cossack families, promoting the cultural-historical Cossack traditions among children and young people, as well as broadening the circle of economic partners in the work of spiritual and civic-patriotic education of the Cossack community<sup>72</sup>.

As is apparent from the documents cited, the spiritual ministry of the Cossacks has taken on an unambiguously pro-state dimension, confirming the alliance between 'the altar and the throne'. The Church's official position clearly demonstrates the loyalty of the Church hierarchs. And not only that: like the Kremlin, the Church is playing the Cossack card and strengthening its position in society by doing so. The platform for the co-operation between the State and the Orthodox Church is the concept of 'Orthodox civilisation' which forms the basis of the civilisational paradigm of the Russian government's policy, according to which international relations is a space for either competition or cooperation between civilisations. Orthodox civilisation, with Russia at its head, stands as a counterbalance to 'degenerate' Western civilisation. Both the Church and the state have defined the boundaries of their interests in this way; this is why they deem it so important to maintain the integrity of the territory covered by the administration of the Moscow Patriarchate, to which its foreign activities have been subordinated.

<sup>72</sup> <http://www.skvk.org/dokumenty/osnovnye-napravleniya-duhovno-prosvetitel'skoj-raboty-v-kazachix-obshhestvax>

As Metropolitan Cyril recently stated on a website addressed to Ukrainian Cossacks<sup>73</sup>, the Synod Committee's press service is conducting a wide-ranging information and propaganda campaign among Cossacks in Ukraine, Belarus, Serbia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany and others. According to the Metropolitan, "the Church is a centre of attraction for the communities of compatriots abroad. They are seeking to preserve their national identity, and to unite in order to maintain a unified spiritual and cultural space in the CIS countries and further abroad."

The foreign dimension of the Synod Committee's activities is well portrayed in the forums for Orthodox Cossack youth. At its initiative, the First Eurasian Cossack Youth Forum took place in July 2016 in St. Petersburg (with the support of the Foundation for the Development of Cossackdom and the local authorities). This year, the Second Eurasian Forum 'Cossack Unity 2017' took place in Sevastopol, with the support of the authorities of Sevastopol and the Republic of Crimea<sup>74</sup>.

<sup>73</sup> [www.pravkazak.org.ua/materialy/novosti-otdela/434-intervyu-mitropolita-kirilla-po-itogam-raboty-sinodalnogo-komiteta-po-vzaimodejstviyu-s-kazachestvom-v-2016-godu](http://www.pravkazak.org.ua/materialy/novosti-otdela/434-intervyu-mitropolita-kirilla-po-itogam-raboty-sinodalnogo-komiteta-po-vzaimodejstviyu-s-kazachestvom-v-2016-godu) (no access).

<sup>74</sup> [www.skvk.org/44044](http://www.skvk.org/44044)

## **SUMMARY**

### **NEO-COSSACKDOM AS A SYSTEMIC, ALL-IN-ONE TOOL OF THE KREMLIN**

In the recent history of Russian Cossackdom, two periods are usually highlighted: (1) the exuberant movement launched at the end of the Soviet Union, and (2) the 'statified' movement subject to strict control by the authorities of the Russian Federation. Whereas the first period was characterised by the Cossacks' focus on their own problems and their struggle for their own image as a social force in the complex ethnic and political situation in southern Russia, the second indicates the Kremlin's fear that the Cossacks may become an independent political force, another hotbed of separatism and ethnic conflicts within the Russian Federation. The Cossacks started to emerge into the limelight thanks to Yeltsin's 1995 decree on the registry of Cossack organisations. The division into registered and unregistered (social) Cossacks was established by a federal law on the state service of the Russian Cossacks in 2005. The formal, highly bureaucratised and Kremlin-controlled Cossack military associations were a let-down to a substantial part of the Cossack community, and led to their gradual abandonment of these groups.

The current stage is characterised on the one hand by a declared desire to overcome these divisions, and on the other by the authorities' awareness that modern Cossackdom will not of itself transform into a civil society capable of self-organisation and self-governance. Obstacles to implementing this scenario have been systemically cleared away (by legal and organisational means); In addition, there is no room in Russian political culture for the agency of society. The Cossacks' superficial 'self-organisation' is controlled and maintained from the top down, and supported economically and ideologically by the Kremlin. The instrumentalisation of the Cossacks' militarised life style, their colourful cultural symbolism, and their aura of power are accompanied by the

granting of special rights to them (such as the right to a separate mode of military service, easy access to grants land from the state land fund, the Cossack schools, additional opportunities to make money in private protection, civil and military companies) which are not available to other citizens. Similarly, the Kremlin-ordered re-registration of the Cossack associations is intended to provide an infrastructure for the desired model of development for so-called civil society in Russia.

Neo-Cossackdom, which the Kremlin regards as a systemic auxiliary element in its security and defence architecture, is still presented as ‘the free Cossack state’, the bearer of ‘military democracy’. Since 2012 it has also become a carrier of conservative Orthodox values, fighting with the degenerate West and Islamic fundamentalism, etc. This is a clear nod to the historical memory of the Cossacks, highlighting their cultural distinctiveness and military-defensive way of life. This memory has mainly been used instrumentally in the military-patriotic education of children and young people, as well as in implementing the Cossacks’ military functions (in the reserves, in civil and territorial defence). The Cossack experiment, as tested in the south of Russia, has now been extended to the entire territory of the Russian Federation. It is an inflated political-military project of the Kremlin, mobilising society in the face of alleged new threats (illegal migration, extremism, terrorism, cultural threats, cyber-crime, the fight against informational aggression by the West).

The political, social and legal status of neo-Cossackdom remains undefined. Its organisations and associations have little to do with either the ‘troops’ or the NGO third sector, or the folklore and re-enactment societies with which they are sometimes associated. Their basic distinguishing marks are their control by the Kremlin and the exchange of mutual benefits (in exchange for concessions and contracts). Paramilitary associations are being organised from the top down, which has changed the neo-Cossacks’ motivations, including those of the younger generation. For them,

neo-Cossackdom can open up a career path, because the other alternatives are blocked off; it can also provide a stable income. The favourable political situation also attracts radicals; these can be used to accomplish various objectives of the Kremlin, which can always cut them off if necessary.

In this series of political-military, business, historical and social projects, the neo-Cossacks have been cast in the role of auxiliaries to the ruling corporation of power. They have become instrumentalised as a multi-functional tool for the Kremlin. Their features are listed in the following table:

Function	Method of implementation
military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the organisational base of the civil and territorial defence of the Russian Federation;</li> <li>• reserve personnel, in a state of permanent standby;</li> <li>• auxiliary formations of the border patrol;</li> <li>• volunteer forces in armed conflicts which Russia does not officially participate in;</li> <li>• cyber-warfare and informational warfare;</li> </ul>
law & order and repression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• volunteer auxiliary police teams;</li> <li>• private security services for state and municipal facilities;</li> <li>• security at mass events, Olympics and soccer championships;</li> <li>• interventions during opposition meetings;</li> <li>• checks on supermarkets for the sale of forbidden food imports;</li> </ul>
economical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• relieving the federal budget for security and defence by means of self-financing Cossack military associations;</li> <li>• production of food for the armed forces and other strategic consumers;</li> <li>• ensuring the food security of the Russian Federation;</li> <li>• Cossack entrepreneurship as a screen for businesses run by the institutions of force when not involved in combat;</li> </ul>

Function	Method of implementation
political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strengthening Russian statehood;</li> <li>• disciplining national minorities;</li> <li>• a tool to fight the opposition;</li> <li>• supporting the special services in their active engagements;</li> <li>• outposts of the ‘Russian world’ in countries of the ‘near and far abroad’;</li> </ul>
social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the militarisation and military organisation of society;</li> <li>• the government’s social infrastructure;</li> <li>• the patriotic upbringing of youth and society in a spirit of service to the state;</li> <li>• the social factor in the fight against new threats (Islamic fundamentalism, extremism, illegal migration, etc.);</li> <li>• volunteer patrols of the civil militia;</li> <li>• preventing drug addiction, work with pathological and dysfunctional families;</li> </ul>
cultural/ ideological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shaping a new civilisational identity for Russian society;</li> <li>• strengthening neo-imperial ideology (Cossacks as the vanguard in Russia’s Eurasian ideology);</li> <li>• an instrument of ‘defence’: the fight against Western values and the dissemination of so-called traditional conservative values, based on Orthodoxy;</li> </ul>
decorative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participation in parades on Red Square and state celebrations (this mainly applies to the Kuban Honorary Troops);</li> <li>• support for regional initiatives and patriotic celebrations;</li> <li>• providing security for the Orthodox Church and monasteries, including the seat of the Patriarch;</li> <li>• dignifying the religious services of the Russian Orthodox Church;</li> <li>• Cossack folklore as PR for Russia, e.g. national song and dance ensembles: the Kuban Cossack Choir, the Song and Dance Ensemble of the Don Cossacks of Rostov, the Stavropolye group, the Cossacks of Russia from Lipetsk, and others.</li> </ul>

At the end, it is worth emphasising that the present relationship between the state and the Cossacks is characterised by the legal and organisational solutions which have been imposed on the latter. At the propaganda level, it is distinguished by an ability to cooperate in strengthening the military organisation of the state and society. The Cossacks' militarised lifestyle is an excellent background to spectacular informational activity. The structure and shape of the so-called Cossack troops, together with their ever-closer approximation to military standards, allows their systemic integration into the security and defence systems, which is the main message of the *Strategy of the Russian Federation's policy towards the Cossacks to 2020*. However, the question of how well the development of the neo-Cossacks is managed, as well as the Putin system's ability to generate new projects and corrective mechanisms for them, remains problematic. Those currently being implemented, with regard to the new strategic objectives, are merely replicating the old ideas, and thus preserving the pathologies of the Russian political-economic system.

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