Information about interviewee:

Anonymous source at the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Interview conducted online through email correspondence.

R= Respondent – Anonymous source at the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

I=Interviewer – Sam Wrighton

I: What is Russia’s goal with regards to the ‘Compatriot Policy’?

R: The “Compatriots’ policy” is one of the tools to achieve Russia’s foreign policy goals. Additionally, Russia widely uses “soft” power tools as the Russian Orthodox church, different foundations as Russian World Foundation (Russkij Mir), the Gorchakov Foundation, Federal Agency Rossotrudnichestvo etc. Through the years we have certain difficulties in our bilateral relations because of historical and political reasons, including the necessity to provide alternative for Russia’s so called ‘Compatriot Policy’ that has significant impact on people-to-people contacts.

I: How would you describe the relationship between Latvia and Russia?

R: Russia’s aggressive foreign policy and constant efforts to destabilise the West has become a long-term pattern. Russia has fuelled continuous aggression in Eastern Ukraine which severely damages the Russian global outlook and prospects for meaningful cooperation. So far, we have not seen constructive engagement from Russia in the de-escalation of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and in the implementation of the Minsk agreements. Even worse, in November 2018, we observed the Russia’s aggressive actions against the Ukrainian vessels in the international waters near the Kerch Strait.  Constructive relations are desirable, but progress is not possible while Russia does not show any willingness to establish a rule based international order. Currently, we do not see a possibility of resetting relations with Russia in terms of returning to ‘business as usual’. Consequently, Latvia’s bilateral relations with Russia are determined by the current EU two-track policy that includes a dialogue at the diplomatic level and EU sanctions.