Vologda State University Conference “Russian North – Global South: Advancing Russian Public Diplomacy”

27.03.2026

From March 19 to 21, 2026, the international scientific and practical conference "Russian North – Global South: Advancing Russian Public Diplomacy" was held at Vologda State University (VSU) with the support of the Government of the Vologda Region.



The main goal of the conference was to develop practical recommendations for the development of international cooperation and the strengthening of Russia's position on the world stage.

The participants discussed a wide range of issues related to identifying ways and mechanisms to strengthen Russia's position as a center of public diplomacy and "soft power" through the development of new meanings, narratives, and technological solutions for effective interaction with the countries of the Global South.



The conference began with a roundtable discussion titled "An Outside View: Brainstorming for International Guests on the Image of Russia," moderated by D.V. Dvornikov, Acting Rector of VSU. The discussions at the roundtable allowed for an exchange of opinions on how Russia is perceived by international students and partners, and helped identify what exactly matters to them in the image of Russia.



The second day of the conference began with a plenary session. The speakers included:



Stepan Kuzmenkov, Deputy Director of the Department for Multilateral Humanitarian Cooperation and Cultural Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia

Maria Semenova, First Secretary of the Representative Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia in St. Petersburg



Issa Togo, Honorary Consul of the Republic of Mali in St. Petersburg and Associate Professor at the Higher School of Hydraulic and Energy Engineering of the Institute of Civil Engineering at Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University (SPbPU)



Alla Mazina, Head of the Project Office of the Russian-African Network University and Deputy Head of the International Cooperation Office at SPbPU.



The head of Rossotrudnichestvo, Evgeny Primakov, welcomed the participants and organizers of the conference "Russian North – Global South: Advancing Russian Public Diplomacy." In his welcome address, Evgeny Alexandrovich noted: "The name of the event is metaphorical and accurately conveys its essence: the Russian North, with its rich heritage and openness to the world, and the Global South, which is rapidly gaining political weight — both regions understand the value of sovereignty and distinct identity. [...] Rossotrudnichestvo is convinced that international dialogue is built not on the transmission of stereotypes, but through open dialogue, study, and analysis of the perception of Russia abroad. Russian Houses in various parts of the world are actively embodying this approach. They are present in many countries of the Global South, providing vast opportunities for partnership with the region."



The Russian-African Network University (RAFU) co-organized the section "Russia and Africa – The Underestimated Potential of Relations," moderated by Natalya Sergeevna Smirnova, Associate Professor of the Department of History and World Politics at VSU, and Alla Lazarevna Mazina, Head of the Project Office of the Russian-African Network University and Deputy Head of the International Cooperation Office at SPbPU. Representatives from other universities that are members of RAFU also took part in the work of the section: RUDN University (Peoples' Friendship University of Russia), Russian State University for the Humanities, and Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov.





The conference brought together leading experts, scholars, and practitioners ready to discuss current issues of public diplomacy and develop new approaches to Russia's interaction with the international community.