

Competing of Civic and Ethnic Forms of Identity in Russia (Based on Regional Empirical Studies)

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Abstract: This article discusses the process of interaction of civic and ethnic identity in the context of the formation of a new Russian identity. It is shown that civic identity in Russia is an important form of self-identification and social categorization, but it is mostly a symbolic-referential character, as opposed to ethnic identity, which is a real element of social interactions. The article is based on empirical data from several surveys conducted in the Rostov region. This is one of the regions of the South of Russia, similar to the majority of ordinary Russian regions, as it is dominated by the Russian-speaking population. On the other hand, the proximity to the North Caucasus, makes visible the ethnic and cultural factors.

Key words: Russian identity • Civic identity • National identity • Ethnicity • Regional community

INTRODUCTION

When Western researchers say about the special Russian identity, they mean, first of all, the efforts of the Russian elite to form a geopolitical strategy [1] and defend the national interests of Russia on the international arena by the identification patterns [2]. However, the problem of Russian identity is deeper: in spite of the long history of the Russian state, the current Russian state as a set of political institutions that unites citizens in the political nation is a relatively young form [3]. The establishment of the post-Soviet Russian state corresponds to the societal problem of the formation of Russian civic nation and the common Russian identity, that unites together such ethnic groups as the Russian (more than 110 million people), Tatars (about 5.5 million people), Ukrainians (about 2 million people), Bashkirs (about 1.5 million people), Chuvash (about 1.5 million people), Chechens (about 1.5 million) and still more than 190 ethnic groups.

In late 2012 President Vladimir Putin signed a decree approving the “Strategy of the State National Policy of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2025” and in 2013 for the implementation of this strategy the federal target program “Strengthening the unity of the Russian nation and the ethnic and cultural development of the peoples of Russia (2014-2020 years)” was adopted. These documents are the first to formalize the concept of the Russian nation as a supra-ethnic community formed by

the multiethnic population of Russia. For the Russian state policy in the sphere of national relations and the process of nation-building that term has meant a serious conceptual step forward, which was caused by the real challenges [4].

As is known, the collapse of the Soviet identity, which was of supraethnic character, has led to an “explosion of identities” in Russia, many of which determined disintegrating processes [5]. For Russia the loss of Soviet identity was particularly dramatic, because, unlike the citizens of other Soviet republics (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan etc.), residents of the Russian Federation did not have a strong dual identity and they mainly identified themselves as citizens of the Soviet Union [6]. The development of a new political construct by the scientific community and the political elite has lasted for twenty years, although in the early 1990s looking for a new Russian identity was understood as a vital issue by many intellectuals [7].

However, similar scientific and political debate continues to be relevant for many countries that have complicated structure, or are trying to make sense of his policy of integration in the frameworks of international blocs and alliances. So Samuel Huntington, reinterpreting and making more problems the base of the American nation, says about the erosion of identity under the impact of migration waves, about the devaluation of citizenship and the “denationalization” of American elites

[8]. A number of studies are devoted to the search for cultural bases [9], the institutional specificity and a philosophy of Canadian civic identity [10]. Specific attention to the formation of a collective identity and supranational identity is given by European researchers [11].

The Main Part: Civic identity is a socio-political category, in fact of construct, which is to facilitate the integration of society on the basis of common values and symbols. However, in practice, Russian identity exists as a multi-layered construct - it is differentiated into several components: civic, regional and ethnic. Therefore it is necessary to bear in mind that there is the question of the relation of the different semantic references in the functioning of civic identity. Below we compare the results of several regional studies (conducted by the authors in the Rostov region) on the problems of formation of regional, ethnic and civic identity in order to answer the question about relations of various forms of identity in the public mind. Rostov region is, on the one hand, typical of the region dominated by the Russian-speaking population (over 88%). On the other hand, it is a region of intense ethno-cultural contact, as it is located close to the North Caucasus.

Table 1 contains a hierarchy of identity statuses; it was built on the basis of quantitative data collected by the method of ranking. Respondents were asked to rank some form of identity by degree of importance, then general rating was made by aggregation of the individual ratings. Such generalized ratings were compiled for different social groups, depending on the purpose of a study. Table 1 shows the synthetic hierarchy of identity statuses which based on the results of several regional studies [12, 13, 14]. As the data show, the importance of civic identity for the majority of respondents is very high. In fact, civic identity becomes dominant status, winning in competition with family-related and gender statuses

and other self-categorizations. But we must bear in mind that this model is based on data obtained using the technique of closed questions, when ready-made answers were offered to the respondents. Thus certain picture of the world imposed to them.

Data obtained with a different methodology show that the civic identity in today's Russia is increasingly an "identity-construct". Table 2 summarizes the data obtained with the use of techniques of open-ended questions. In this case respondents were asked five times in a row the same question (repeating of answer was excluded): "Who am I?" - "First of all, I am..., secondly I am... etc." [15].

The main conclusion to be made from the data presented in Table 2 is that civic identity is an important and common form of self-identification and social categorization. It is a leader among a set of population identities in the multi-ethnic city. However, this form of identity is by no means dominant, it is much inferior to its relevance and prevalence of such forms of identity as a family-related and socio-professional statuses. In a word, civic identity can be attributed to the identities of the lead group, but to its second echelon. The overall prevalence of this type of identity can be estimated at 40-45% (i.e., for each second that identity is significant), whereas, for example, family-related roles and statuses are relevant for approximately 90% of the respondents.

The very civic identity can be rightfully attributed to a broader category - a set of socio-political statuses and roles, including such self-categorizations as a voter, a part of the state, a citizen, a citizen of Russia, etc. It seems that such assessment of the importance and prevalence of civic identity and associated categorizations is closer to the actual state of the individual and social consciousness, rather than a hierarchy, obtained by the technique of closed questions with suggested rigid variants of the answer.

Table 1: Approximate hierarchy of identification statuses in mind of residents of the Rostov region (obtained using the technique of closed questions by the aggregation of individual ratings)

| Type of identity | The formulation of identity suggested to respondents | Position in general rating |
|------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Civic | Russian citizen, a citizen of the Russian Federation | 1 |
| Family-related | Son (daughter), brother (sister), father (mother) | 2 |
| Gender | Male / female | 3-4 |
| Ethnic | Russian, Cossack, Tatar, Armenian etc. | 4-3 |
| Professional | Student, worker, employee | 5 |
| Local | Rostov resident, Azov resident, Taganrog resident etc. | 6-7 |
| Religious | Christian, Muslim, Buddhist etc. | 7-6 |
| Settlement | Townsmen, villager | 8-9 |
| Macro-regional | Southerner | 9-8 |

Table 2: The hierarchy of identification statuses of residents of Rostov-on-Don (obtained using the technique of open-ended questions)

| Identification category | Put to the first position, % of respondents | The weighted frequency, taking into account the balance of all positions |
|--|--|---|
| 1. Family-related statuses and roles | 12,0 | 87,0 |
| 2. Socio-professional statuses and roles | 11,2 | 79,9 |
| 3. Gender roles and statuses | 15,8 | 43,5 |
| 4. Social and political statuses and roles, including civic identity | 8,3 | 43,2 |
| 5. Human values | 23,7 | 33,8 |
| 6. Relationships with people | 4,6 | 27,6 |
| 7. Position in life (e.g., "active person") | 3,6 | 23,4 |
| 8. Territorial identity | - | 20,1 |
| 9. Hobby | 1,5 | 16,4 |
| 10. Moral traits | 3,3 | 13,6 |
| 11. Philosophical categories | 2,0 | 12,6 |
| 12. Psychological traits | 5,6 | 10,4 |
| 13. Ethnic status | 2,3 | 10,3 |
| 14. The ideological identity | 3,4 | 9,6 |
| 15. External features (such as "beautiful") | 1,1 | 6,2 |
| 16. Religious status | 1,3 | 4,5 |
| 17. The names of their own | 0,3 | 2,6 |
| 18. The economic and consumer status | - | 0,4 |

Table 3: Distribution of answers of the residents of Rostov-on-Don to the question: "To what extent do you feel proximity with the following categories of people?"

| Identification category | Feel the proximity to a large extent, % of respondents. | Feel a closeness to a small extent, % of respondents. | Do not feel proximity, % of respondents. |
|---|--|--|---|
| Citizens of Russia | 76 | 16 | 7 |
| People of the same views on life ad you | 56 | 31 | 13 |
| Fellow countryman | 52 | 33 | 15 |
| The inhabitants of your town, village | 52 | 32 | 15 |
| People who strictly keep the law | 48 | 33 | 17 |
| People of the same ethnicity as you | 46 | 36 | 19 |
| People of the same profession, as you | 35 | 45 | 20 |
| People of the same wealth as you | 35 | 42 | 23 |
| Europeans | 21 | 37 | 42 |

Table 4: Distribution of answers to the question: "Remember the examples of other countries: the French - the French nation, Americans - the American nation, etc. Do you agree with the fact that the citizens of the Russian Federation - are the Russian nation?"

| Possible answers | Frequency, % of respondents. |
|---|------------------------------|
| Yes, I do. | 20 |
| To be so, take a few more years. | 6 |
| This will require decades or years. | 18 |
| A united nation cannot arise in Russia. | 39 |
| Hard to say. | 17 |

Table 5: Distribution of answers to the question: "Without denying your ethnicity, could you also say of himself: 'My nationality is Russian [Rossianin]?"

| Possible answers | Frequency, % of respondents. |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Yes, I could. | 52 |
| Yes, if I am in another country. | 15 |
| No, I could not. | 18 |
| Hard to say. | 15 |

Another possibility of matching the information obtained with the technique of closed questions provided by handling data of Table 3. This table shows the distribution of answers to the question about which the social group the respondents have the strongest referential communication with.

As seen from the table, the identity is actually split into two parts. The first is that there is some internal categorization: what the individual has to say about himself, of who he or she is. The second component is the phenomenon of "contact identity". It shows the degree and potential of solidarity of one or the other (mostly

symbolic) community. That is when respondents try to estimate the second component they highlight such socio-political category as citizens of Russia. So we deal with an interesting social phenomenon - a significant gap in the popularity between civic identity and other fundamental identities. Civic Identity in Russia and in particular in the big city with a multi-ethnic structure is mainly symbolic-referential character, while the real life in the world and the totality of daily routine are occupied by somewhat different social roles and status (family-related, social, professional, gender etc.).

Based on data from surveys conducted in the Rostov region and the city of Rostov-on-Don in 2011-2012., it can be argued that in the mass consciousness of local communities with a high level of ethno-cultural contact are present significant elements of latent ethnic and cultural conflicts that prevent the formation of a united civic nation. We asked respondents about possibility of arising of united nation in Russia that is similar civic nation in France or the United States and only 20% of respondents answered that it is possible, 6% indicated that it will take several years and 18% said that this will require decades of years. Thus, in total a little more than 40% of the respondents believe in the possibility of the united Russian civic nation. And about the same number (39%) of respondents say that the united nation cannot arise in Russia.

Table 5 provides data on the willingness of respondents to replace their own ethnic identity by the civic and political identity "Russian" [Rossianin]. It is known, that in the Russian language the word "Russia" [Rossija] (the country or state) has a root different from the word "Russian" (the ethnic status). It was established since the time of Peter I the Great (1672-1725), when he expanded the empire, along with ethnically Russian had united many other nations. In English, this semantic nuance is not transferred and it is used the same word to denote the ethnic Russian and other ethnics living in Russia. But in reality the acceptance of civic identity "Russian" even by the ethnically Russian means a certain extent the rejection of their ethnic identity. The data show that more than 50% of the respondents are willing to replace their ethnic identity by civic and political and about 15% can do it if they are in another country. The share of them who categorically rule out such possibility is 18%. If we compare the distribution of answers with the data of Table 4, we will arrive at the conclusion that there are differences between the essential component of the ethno-national identity (sense of belonging to a nation as a real community) and terminological component ("I am Russian" that means to be a citizen of Russia).

CONCLUSION

In a period when social relationships and such status as a "Soviet man" have been complete deconstructed, identities based on the most robust social-role complexes have come to the forefront. Upon completion of the transformation of Russian society the association of individuals with primary social groups (identification which is supported by everyday experience) will be replaced by constructional identification, identification with the abstract generality - the Russian people, the Russian state. Russian [Rossianian] identity in this sense is a form of civic identity and it facilitates the integration of society on the basis of shared values and, symbols. Observations show that Russian civic identity has become quite attractive category of self-identification for the majority of residents of the North Caucasus. At the same, it is often used instrumentally, not in opposition to one's own ethnic identity, but in opposition to ethnic Russians' claims to a special status in Russian state. On the other hand there is a reverse trend among ethnic Russians. Factors such as increasing of migratory pressure, especially on the part of peoples of traditional culture and the weakness of the national policy of cultural integration actualize and first of all for the inhabitants of large cities - who have relatively modernized culture, the question of the relationship between the concepts of "Russian civic identity" and "Russian ethnic identity".

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