

## On the Matter of National Identity in Russia and Germany (Russian Identity Compared to the Significant Other)

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**Abstract:** There is no stability in today's globalizing world. Many countries in Europe, the USA, South American and East-Asian countries are currently at a breaking point. Russia and Germany are not an exception to these processes at all. Studying the problem of national, civil and political identity in Russia led to the idea to study this matter in a comparative way, in the context of identity of some significant Other. For example, Germany feels like such a significant Other to us, with our historical unity-confrontation, with radical mental differences, with mutual influence in various areas (from music to mechanical engineering) and often with shared fate of residents of the two countries considering the near lack of assimilation.

**Key words:** Identity • Significant other • Multicultural processes • Titular nation • Globalization • Crisis

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### INTRODUCTION

The study of the issue for the national, civil and political identity in Russia led us to the idea to research it in comparison with the context of the identity for some Significant Other. For example, Germany looks like this Significant Other for us. Historically we had common interests and confronted each other; our mental difference is radical and our mutual influence in various spheres (from music to machine building) is significant and the absence of assimilation separates the destinies of the residents of the two countries.

Our reasoning is based on the fact that Russia is a multinational country with Russian ethnos forming the state, while Germany is the country of a single nationality. The difference is essential but it is more interesting to look at some points in these circumstances. Yu.P. Zaretsky notes in his work that the difference begins when we define the concept of "nation". In Germany, like everywhere in Europe, it means society and state. In Russia it means people (ethnos). For our analysis it is essential to mention the fact from the article of Zaretsky that the ideas of "nation" and "nationality" themselves came from the German science of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century [1].

The notion of "identity" is relatively recent although there have appeared quite a lot of different opinions whether the category of identity is established. We accept the point of view of those researchers who suppose that any identity, as well as the national one, changes, permanently broadens under the influence of many conditions and factors; the only thing is that it must be. For example S. Huntington clearly says that "... the national identity is not a constant" [2]. The author of the term "identity" E. Erikson attributed it strictly to the personality and speaking about "group identity" meant only the identification of a certain personality with a certain group [3]. Next development of the term led to a considerable confusion of notions that is spoken much about nowadays (V.A. Tishkov [4] and others). But we cannot help recognizing that the discussion of the national or state and political, or, if you want, social and state identity has been brewing in spite of the diversity of its terminology.

It appears that most people who are interested in the problem of identity understand that here in Russia we are not going through the period of changes and additions. Since the Soviet Union breakdown we have experienced the stage of "destruction" and we are far from its completion. The idea of considering civil nation and

Russian people as the whole historically stipulated notion was expressed by both authorities: V.V. Putin when he was President during his first term and by President D.A. Medvedev. But in spite of it and regardless of the similar opinion of the majority of the Russian scientists the question “Who are we?” (according to S. Huntington, [2]) ranks the second for us after the question “What are our grounds?”.

Russia is a multinational country with a strong and, we should even say, with predominating identity of its citizens by ethnic principle. Subject to the diversity of ethnos, this issue must be regarded as essential, complicating by many times the mechanism of state and political identification. The true idea was given by Professor P.K. Grechko at the Round work table “National and personal identity in the global world” held in the editorial office of the magazine “Tsennosti i Smysly”. He said that it would be better if the citizens of Russia identified themselves first as the Russians and only then by their ethnic membership [5]. It is right but now it is only a kind of wishful thinking.

The history of the development of the Russian state during a long time with its imperial, hegemonistic policy, the birth of a “new” (it is better to say, an attempt to create the other) Russia after the disintegration of the Soviet Union brings peculiar features to the formation of identity and identification of the citizens with their country. Such aspects as age, civil experience, nationality, the place of ethnos in the new country, personal destiny and prospects after the Soviet Union breakdown play the most important role in it.

Meanwhile it is exceptionally important to “reformat” the position about our national identity and to define the place of the new Russia in the new conditions. It is necessary here to proceed from our origins and myth-building, from our recent experience, because basically the Soviet people were positioned as the civil nation in the Soviet Union. The result of such positioning (taken as only one factor; there were the others like state ideology and rigid interior policy) was easing of ethnic and national contradictions and absence of intensive national clashes. Today it could positively influence both comprehension of the place of the state in the world policy and positive self-identification of the citizens of the country. It is necessary to proceed with the political development of this position that has already been expressed by the authorities. We think that only this step is correct in the circumstances of blowing up the ethnic nationalism by the detached forces connected with the world terrorism.

What can we say about the identity in Germany? Its national, political and state identity passed the same difficult way, since the united Germany appeared not so long ago, in 1871 during the governing of Chancellor Bismarck. Identity in Germany used to be subjected to term, for example, in the near past. But the defeat in the World War II with the subsequent sense of guilt, the re-allotment of the country – re-division into two Germany on the map of the post-war Europe, mass migration of the representatives of different countries and nations and entry into the European Union, - none of these factors has brought to the destruction of the national identity [6]. Germany takes any victories and ordeals as the German state and the citizens of the country accept them as the Germans. Beyond the borders of the country the Germans are always the Germans. Inside the country they are always the Germans but they distinguish themselves with their special features: they are the Saxons, the Bavarians, the Westphalians, the Swabians etc. The regional difference is quite strong in Germany and it is reflected in the language (different dialects of the German language), in their cuisine, in the way of their life as a whole. They were caused by the peculiar history of the creation of the united German state [7]. Today, judging by the actual state of the economy and social sphere of Germany, its regional specificity is rather positive for the nation than directly opposite.

The problem of the national identity in Germany breaks up into the several ones: the national identity of the titular ethnic group in different historical conditions; German national identity within EU and the processes of globalization; the national identity of the Germans who migrated from Russia and other countries to Germany.

Today Germany is the biggest EU country for its population and the most successful one from the financial viewpoint. Germany’s particular mission in the EU, accompanied by the lowering of the US influence, in the fair opinion of S. Biryukov [8], promotes the growth of the national self-identification in Germany. It sounds good, but it is not true.

The Germans are not always happy with their membership in the EU, especially when their role of the main lender and lifesaver for the less successful neighboring countries of the EU often causes emergency conditions inside the country and loosens its political system. Special difficulties arise both because of the considerable number of migrants (about 9% of the population) and existing till now the “border” between the “western” and the “eastern” Germans.

German researchers are anxious about some problems. The first one is connected with the Germans who came from Russia and CIS countries and their influence upon the national identity. The second issue becomes apparent in self-identification of the newcomers who do not identify themselves with the Germans in Germany while the native Germans for their part do not recognize them in such a way [9]. It is not by chance that people who came to Germany either from Russia or from Ukraine, Kazakhstan etc, are called "Russian". Generally they speak Russian. But that Russian language the immigrants from Kazakhstan speak in the "Russian community" in Baden-Baden is hard to be called the real Russian. Their German is supposed to be the same poor. Very often their resettlement was connected with economic conditions firstly rather than search for their spiritual community with the native land, with indigenous Motherland. They grew up in the other environments, in the other mentality and most of those people don't accept as legitimate ("their own") the rules of life and morality of the German citizens, their mind to live according to the law and order, their strict regulations. Generally they feel like strangers towards the involvement into the affairs and the policy of Germany if it is no concern of theirs. The newcomers usually live clannish, have their own mass media, use their own information sources trusting their neighbors' words rather than the official information.

This situation doesn't leave the native Germans indifferent and the abundance of the programs favoring the "implication" into the German life speaks for itself. But this process is long and complicated. The newcomers should not only start living in Germany, get a job, begin to study, enjoy rights of the German citizens; they should change their psychological identity. Here we concern the other programs, the other training influencing profound structures of personality.

This problem needs solving concerning almost critical amount of the newcomers to Germany from the other countries in relation to the native population. Some researches suppose only next generations of the newly arrived to be able to adapt in Germany and to change their identity [10]. Thus it is necessary to understand this task as a project with all the ensuing consequences to develop its goals and mechanisms of its solution at the government level. The project is complex and very interesting on scientific and practical target. It is connected with the formation of the civil positions, actualization of the native relation with the German people, more advanced learning (and not living in a separate "reservation") of the cultural and linguistic space

of the new country, with the civilization identification. And all this should be taken as a complex base serving for the change of personal identity [11].

Certainly these are difficult tasks and some of them may seem mutually exclusive at a glance. But it's not true; the point lies in approaches and mechanisms. It is important not only for immigrants but for the whole Germany so that the current situation would not turn into destabilizing factor of state and political identity of Germany.

Today's threats influencing the enquiries of the national, state and political identity are quite serious and diverse. The condition of the world-building today is rather unstable, we are overflowed by the wave of crises both economic and of some other origin [12]. The financial and economic crisis itself, in our opinion, is generated by the geopolitical situations and moral erosion that corrodes the world society. Globalization, information boom, dangers of anthropogenic and natural disasters, speculative political technologies of hegemonistic sense, consciousness of mineral wealth finiteness, future world reorganization on the basis of racial, political and religious if it is anything to go by, but economic and geopolitical approach indeed – this is an incomplete list of external challenges for the national identity of any country.

Many European countries, the USA, South-American states and the nations of East-Asian region face the crisis, Russia and Germany also being included in this list. The question is: how to find the way out from this situation. Are there any rules to be followed? The national identity, as well as geopolitical and economic rank of the country in the world, "keeping face" and the territory depends on it that eventually means preservation of the state.

Here it is necessary to mention specially that the processes of identification that have begun in the European Community influence Germany stronger than Russia. On one hand multicultural processes and immigration destroy the identities of the certain European countries, but in whole they further the process of single identity; Buchanan described it in the most appropriate way in his "The Death of the West". Many scientists, however, suppose adaptive mechanisms to work [13] and therefore the prediction about the death of West European civilization seems to be overstated. And these processes, not very "beneficial" for Europe and Germany, in particular, may appear to be useful for Russia. And not because they will weaken European countries, there are a number of other reasons: they will attract attention to the problem of identity in Russia; they will direct the efforts

of the state and political authorities to the necessary course and will give a priceless experience to choose the right direction. And at last they will create the new conditions where Russia will not forfeit but gain after losses and retreat during the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

We should take into account one thing. Obviously here, in Russia, we long for the West, but we cannot raise our credit because we try to find ourselves where historically we didn't have basic origins and background. If we pay attention to the religious component it becomes clear what we speak about. It is important for us to determine our own position, to understand that our belonging to the other (not West-European) history and religion doesn't make us worse or better, but it allows us to abandon the position of the younger brother. An example with the religion shows: domination of both Catholicism and Protestantism influenced Europe as well as the New World. Titular ethnic group in Russia follows another historical path connected with East-European civilization, with Byzantine origins and Orthodox Christianity, the path, which is comparable for its significance and rich history, which is not the secondary branch line of the high road of the European history [14]. By the way if we keep on discussing the historical truth, we should recollect our history or rather the view of it not from the period of the Great Patriotic war but much earlier and the modernity and the 20<sup>th</sup> century must be portrayed in full measure. Russian school textbooks not always show modern historical ethnographic regional studies and results of archeological excavations. Not always the achievements of the country at the modern and the newest time are represented there in full. In the country which lost a big part of its territories and its might at the modern period it is necessary to help its citizens not to lose the feeling of involvement to the great history and great heritage. For Russia high morale is an immense chance to undergo many severe trials, even the trials of prosperity.

Germany with its more stable identity and Russia with its unsettled problem of the national identity apparently will cope with this challenge and these threats differently. But what does it mean – to cope with? In this case it means to remain as a state and a nation.

It is clear that the state will hold out, or more precisely put, the nation will preserve its statehood when it possesses general, not so much national as state and political identity. How to form it in Russia and not to destroy it in Germany?

We would like to complete the article on an optimistic note although in this case we can speak about optimism only in historical outlook: today serious efforts should be applied for it.

The German authorities understand the difficulty of the situation and steps are taken in the necessary direction; we mentioned it above.

Concerning Russia we also spoke about it earlier. We must agree with S.V. Kortunov [13] who following V.I. Lenin mentioned three countries: China, India and Russia as having, we would say, a “safety factor” that allows withstanding in the process of globalization grinding even cultural cores of the national identities.

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