

## Applied Aspects of Politics in Russia

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**Abstract:** For Russia of XXI century, the problem of forming the so called “Russian identity” is topical. Within the framework of renewing the civil society, the modern variant of the national issue topic enters the discourse. According to the researchers, the modern-day problems of inter-ethnic relationships should be tackled from the “culture-centrist” viewpoint. In modern Russia, internal and external policy relationships are being transformed as well as the character of inter-ethnic and inter-confession conflicts. A network information society has been formed. In the conditions of a new crisis, the inter-ethnic problems can only be solved if the civil awareness has established with a new culture inside which the state can be the nucleus for a renewed social existence highlighting the development of man and would harmonically unite traditionalism with modern post-industrial development trends. For social sciences, the task for renovation of the Russian nation is a serious intellectual challenge. Politicians and authority structures need to regard that the objective of modern “political discourse” should be not the self-assertion of power but development of a future society its cultural and human values.

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**Key words:** Nation, culture-centrism, political discourse, social contract, Russian identity, public policy

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### INTRODUCTION

The problems related to forming a “political nation” has been the focus of attention from prominent Western (Deutsch, 1966; Gellner, 1983; Smith, 1998, 2008; Anderson, 1983, 2005) and Russian scholars.

In general, the existing viewpoints can be divided into three conventional groups. The first one, mainly related to the Marxist tradition gives the main attention to economical issues. It is considered that the social, spiritual and accordingly, political unity is conditioned by the economical unity. Let us name this paradigm the “economy-centric” (Przeworski, 2014).

Another view reduces the political unity directly to stable political factors the state, management, ideology. Within this view, the politics is self-consistent and it defines the forming and development of other social sphere phenomena. Correspondingly, we will name this point of view the “politics-centric” (Baumgarten and Voltmer, 2010; Thissen and Walker, 2013).

Finally, the third attitude relates all the social structural changes to the metamorphoses of mind and evolution of culture in the wide sense of the word. The researchers of the present work share this

“culture-centric” view. The general development of culture affects the politics in general as well as the political culture, in particular (Evans, 2003).

We think that forming of modern-day Russian nation is directly conditioned by the social search of the all-inclusive response to the issues of the historical social self-identification and the actual demands of the time (Deutsch, 1966). The process of forming a “political nation” needs to be accompanied by an elaborate cultural policy. The authorities and the society are facing the urgent issue of “enculturating” the public conscience. We cannot afford the people to barbarize or provoke conflicts in the sphere of international, inter-ethnic and inter-confession relationships.

Forming a “political nation” means dominance of culture that is oriented towards the prevalence of conscience and basing on the ethics of personal responsibility. Institutionalization of such nation presupposes establishing general values both in the sphere of upbringing and education and in the sphere of communication (Anderson, 2005). This study is devoted to determining the possible orbit of values to become the basis of a new social contract and ways of its institutional operationalization.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The object of this research is discussion of the current changes in the sphere of national-state relationships in Russia that reflect the process of forming new social-political reality of the XXI century. The authors' concept assumes inclusion of the ethnic policy into the wide context of political communication perceived as the relationship between the man and the society, the person and the state (Baltovskoj and Belous, 2013; Baltovskij *et al.*, 2014). In other words, the sphere of the politological research is not the power proper but the wider field of culture the cultural changes directly impact the social being and managerial decisions.

The object of the research ethnic-political processes taking place in Russia. As regards the methodology, either of two contradicting approaches can be used to study the national issue.

In one case, the nation is viewed upon as an ideal, the final objective of development for the society during a particular historical stage. In the other case, the nation is regarded as an entity that is reproduced in a new way for every other generation. The researchers propose to combine these two approaches. They regard the forming of the Russian nation as a topical social-cultural task to solve it, we need to model a new "social contract" (ideal). From the viewpoint of the temporal logic, the national entity can be viewed as the product of idealization of the, actual political and ethnic "substance" existing "here and now" at the same time, nation is also a proto-phenomenon developing in the historical-political process. The epistemic grounds for studying the Russian nation are the genetic and the structural-functional methodological approaches as well as the known thesaurus of ethno-politology revised from the viewpoint of the current requirements of the political science.

An obvious symptom of the current crisis of culture in the sphere of theoretical social studies is that the list of categorical meanings has come to an end. In practice, this means that the scientific humanitarian conscience can hardly discover or formulate anything really new. The present-day Russian science is still appealing to the experience of the past using the stereotypes of the Soviet (Marxist) or Western (primarily based on the structural-functional and partly, neo-institutionistic approaches) ethno-politology or merely using ideological clichés. The synthetic variant in relation to the objectivistic-speculative and subjective-instrumentalist approaches can be the combined idea of the nation as both a structure and a function.

The main flaw of "structuralists" is that the elements composition of the structure, its internal ties and

configurations are regarded as invariants that are not changing with time. Correspondingly, the study approach to the national entity is that we should represent this structure as a set of variables the varied elements changing over time.

### **The main part**

**The problem of national entity:** The nation is the invention of the recent past. The XVIII century was the period when not only nationalism flourished but also when religion declined. The idea of nation partially replaced religion as the backbone of the society oriented into the future and forming a unity. During some periods in history, nations invariably come to solve their identity. Urgent political problems of national self-determination have been a painful issue for almost all the European countries in the early XX century (including the Russian Empire). Modern Russia is still suffering the aftermath of the USSR collapse in 1991. The need for political contemplation is doubled at the historical moments when ready answers are no longer satisfactory for the public mind (Laruelle, 2010).

Kjellen in 2013 directly stated that political thought turns back to its own problems, tasks and the initial points, the issue of the meaning of existence is put forward in special, crisis situations. In comparison with the well-known crisis of the early XX century, the modern state of the culture, thought and life gives the politologists as many reasons for contemplation about their job and the events they are participating in.

Among the pre-requisites for nation forming, it is important to note the change in perception of time. The time running on its own even when nothing is happening, vacant and endless and therefore, open into the future carries a new perception of the present as a combination of simultaneous events. It has materialized in new cultural artifacts newspapers and novels. Book-printing has become the source of the most important aspect of the national self-awareness written language which later becomes the national language (McLuhan *et al.*, 2011).

Correspondingly, each historic age and each country has its own political discourse (Lakoff, 2008; Joseph, 2006; Young and Soroka, 2012; Perloff, 2013). Comparing them, we can draw the conclusion about the direction where the Russian history is moving. Comparing the contemporary Russia with the era 100 years ago seems illustrative and revealing. In the Russian reality of the early XX century (1905-1917) which many contemporaries comprehended as crisis in the specific conditions of acute ideological struggle and party propaganda, the political discourse fulfilled its applied function through political journalism forming political public conscience. The public

character of political activity which was something new for that time presumed that the corresponding political texts will be directed not towards a relatively small audience of followers as before but towards a most general public performing a new role of the “electorate”.

The function of the ideological and literary articulation was taken up by leaders of social movements and political parties. The political struggle in Russia of the beginning of the last century put forward the requirements to the political elite for their capabilities for literary formulation of their political intentions. It is noteworthy that many representative of opposition in Russia of the time identified themselves as writers, i.e., professional men of letters (Baltovskij and Belous, 2013). A significant part of politicians of the time regarded the political discourse not as a form of a subjective personal opinion but as an objective truth that has to be adopted by the public. That is why, the widely published political texts were directly related to the “party principle” as they call it (Bochenski, 1964; Ignatow, 1988).

The ideology of the new times is no longer formed by widely-known writers but by anonymous talkers political strategists (which is why it is naive to relate the means of the political expression only to the “official language of the authorities”) (Belous, 2011). Today, the very marking of the political activity (“politologist”) is associated either with serving the authorities or with self-actualization of some media-person. No one talks of the “party principle” anymore. The entire field of ideas is now divided into “friend or foe”. In Russia, the illustrative example of the loss of meaning of the political discourse is the so-called “new thinking” declared by M. Gorbachev in the late XX century, an obvious sign of how the very power of the political word is depleted, how the communist rhetoric of the past which used to seem unshakable for the soviet conscience, vanishes into nothingness (Woodby and Evans, 1990; O’Connor, 2006).

The main feature of modern political texts is that most of them are published over the Internet. If we look at the modern political community, the set of the political texts proper (those written by politicians, on their behalf or anonymously) is markedly decreasing, whereas the number of politics-related texts, i.e., the texts inspired by the current situation is rapidly growing in the blog community, thus expanding the political realm (Nguyen *et al.*, 2010). In political texts, new terms are now widely used such as “the network”. However, many people who use this term have a vague idea about its meaning and its consequences. A person who gets into this “network” is no longer the author of the text but its user avatar (Franchi, 2013).

The perspectives of the positive movement of modern Russia are conditioned, on one hand by the

process of modern globalization. It is a new type of society developing on special principles that are structured and historically determined in the relationships of production, experience and power. Communication of all the messages in this system induces the integration of all the types of messages in the common cognitive structure. All the manifestations of culture, from the best to the worst, from the elite to the commonplace are combined in this digital universe. The huge historic upper-discourse combines the manifestations of notions from the past, the present and the future (Castells, 2002, 2011, 2013).

On the other hand, there are processes of division by sovereignty and by regions, separation and putting the national states into the foreground. Political texts and speeches play a major part in forming national conscience and self-awareness of the intelligentsia that undertakes the role of prophets of the national idea where the state fails to promote it. It is now becoming important to develop the format of the future national State in general and of the Russian State in particular.

The problem of national self-determination in XXI century was put forward by the President of the Russian Federation in his speech for the international discussion club “Valdai”. Here, in particular, the issues of the identity crisis of the modern Russian society were addressed. It was declared that answers must be found to the questions related to national self-awareness: “who are we?” and “who do we want to be?”

The identity crisis signifies a new crisis of culture which means, first of all, destruction of political thinking stereotypes of XX century. The future of Russia as a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional country is directly related to deep transformations of the modern world which is especially obvious in comparison with the previous century. The crisis of the modern culture consists in the fact that the humankind is facing new circumstances of social development, unprecedented civilization challenges. The man wanders in the circle of consumption, in the labyrinth of statuses and roles having no target perspectives or reference values.

Traditional institutes and values are radically changing and a new network reality is taking shape. The parameters of the information society need thorough contemplation. All these symptoms of crisis have a negative impact on modern conscience, inside which the international relations and ethnic-social processes take up the connotation that is mainly conflict-related. However as we have stated before, most researchers stick to the stereotypes of the “economy-centric” or “politics-centric” models. In order to overcome the general crisis of culture, it is necessary to radically change the political way of thinking itself.

**About the “culture-centric” component of national politics:** While researching the crisis of modern society, the political science cannot follow the theoretical paradigms and methodological instruments of the past. Problems of modern international, inter-ethnic and inter-confession relationships needs to be directly related to the concept of the “political context” as a process having the target function of culture morphogenesis.

The “political context” shall be considered as a sum of task-oriented and meaningful changes in the society, whereas the “culture” is viewed as a fundamental pre-requisite of the social development and a most important condition of the ethnic-cultural integration of the society and forming the nation. The political process is developing in the general context of the historical-cultural process.

It is this meaning that we shall give to the statement that politics is a product of the social-cultural development. The political process functions through interaction and change of various paradigms, primarily the ideological ones which can be based on traditions of their own. Culture is such a sphere of social life that is the basis of the social and political development. Even though, it has to follow the politics as it is subject to control and financing but it not on the same level with the politics as a form of human existence.

The scheme of relationships between the culture and politics can be called historical-genetic. The political sphere is one of the most important products of human culture formed at a certain stage of social development. In the historic-genetic context, the politics becomes an essential characteristic of culture, its motor. The culture, in its turn, adds spiritual content to the politics because otherwise the politics can exist merely as the technology for the authorities with all the practical consequences. The historical-genetic context combines the culture and politics into the category “tradition” (Hobsbawm, 2012).

The historic tradition is the basis of any national culture. The political tradition is a must have for the existence of the state and the people. At the same time, culture never stops developing, so, the tradition is also subject to development. Culture is nothing but a process based on inheriting traditions between generations.

The notions described above can be called with the term “culture-centrism”. The history of Russian political thought of the early XX century, offers an illustrative example of following the principle of monistic priority of culture over all the other spheres of social life including the politics. Such attitude was a distinctive feature of the political doctrine of the then-popular party of constitutional democrats (the Party of People’s Freedom).

The constitutional democrats placed their stake at long-term strategy (reform, education, evolution, etc.) but they were on the losing side in the day-to-day tactics which presupposes political power for its own sake. The central topic of that party, namely; the topic of “political freedom” was seen as dependent on the adequate balance of politics and culture. He task of creating conditions for free political development was treated as a means, whereas the cultural renaissance was seen as the strategic objective.

One of the ideological leaders of the party wrote: “Politics can never replace culture, let alone turn it into its servant; the more tense the political struggle becomes, the more important it is that this struggle does not turn into clashes of petty interests and private passion; all the parties need to acknowledge the priority of cultural values, the steady moral base that shall never be sacrificed for anything” (Kotlyarevsky, 1906).

Culture was perceived by that party’s ideologists as a fundamental basis of social and political development. It is no coincidence that the party of People’s Freedom was the first to set the historic task of forming the “political nation” even though such term did not exist at the time. The party program demanded the equality of all the citizens of Russia before the law disregarding of the ethnic nationality. The document stating the publicly relevant point of view contained a number of proposals for constitutional consolidation and guarantee for all the ethnic nationalities in Russia of the special right for free cultural self-determination, besides the full civil and political equality of all the citizens.

Up to now, culture-centrism is still remaining a universal epistemic paradigm as we research the problems of international relationships and ethnic-social processes. Within its framework, the character and type of the existing culture can be listed among the most important reasons of ethnic social-political processes (Dixon, 1998).

#### **Distinctive features of the present-day crisis of culture:**

The very fact of the crisis of culture means that a new culture has started forming, its outlines require thorough contemplation. The crisis of culture in the beginning of XXI century is the crisis of mass culture, the forming of the post-modernist culture, the network culture. The previously traditional united notion of the “ethnic-cultural” has to be regarded as two separate notions in this context basing on the principal controversy of the ethnic and the cultural concepts within their own limits: generic, on one hand and individual, on the other hand. There is a new unity, when the subjectiveness transfers from its active and open form into the anonymous one.

Modern man is no longer the author or the agent, nor even the actor; he is an avatar (Taylor, 2013). He is in the words of the past, a proletarian who sold his soul to Leviathan getting a set of masks named "identities" in return. He is not the sole owner of even his own self as he wanders in the labyrinth of these "identities" including the ethnic ones. He is possessed by the very fact of his anti-sociality needlessness, lack of demand. He is alienated in his singleness but belongs to a category race, class, gender, corporation, citizenship (Meadows, 2007).

History played the same evil trick to the masses of people in Europe (including Russia) as to the individual: neither the herds of "political animals" nor outstanding heroes play the roles of the past, therefore, they are no longer the material for the historic screenplay. In XXI century, the "network" comes on stage. Modern identity is a form of self-determination of a person inside the network. New forms of social existence literally pull an individual into this space, where everything is rearranged: stereotypes of social behavior to "high" standards of modern culture (McCrone and Bechhofer, 2015).

Modern man himself made an entry into the network. On one hand, the network is an instrument of person's identification, on the other hand, it is the form that dominates over him and the society. This very process starts with destruction of old social forms (classes, political parties, traditional ideologies), mixing, multiplying cultures (multi-culturalism) (Castells, 2011). The topic of "identity" becomes fashionable for this very reason: the individual reaction to the challenges of the time. A person has to define "Myself" in relation to a new "Ourselves" (not any totalitarian or ideological but a post-modernist notion, this time).

In its turn, the "Ourselves" impels the "Myself" to take up certain modes of behavior, programming them. Modern compulsion is a form of programming which is soft and non-ideological, i.e., it is implemented not on the conscious or ideological level. It is the conscience that is characterized by a person's unwillingness to investigate the meanings. Political players, the actors of the historic process, find it easier to prohibit something rather than propose a creative and innovative alternative. Any culture is characterized, first of all by the position of personality in the social system by relationships between society and the state (McCrone and Bechhofer, 2015).

The internet community is an example of a new tower of Babylon ready for self-destruction when there is an obvious lack of communication and each individual plays solo to speak of own individual problems. Adepts of post-modernism turn the realm of inter-ethnic and inter-confession relationships into a kind of a "game" forming a "free-for-all fight" discourse on the internet. The times of the "big style" are over.

In the modern Russian post-modernist conscience, everything is blended: soviet patterns, imperial rhetoric and consumption-oriented programs in the mind. This conscience, undoubtedly, seeks to get rid of illusions and complexes of the early 1990s but cannot conceive anything essentially new. Post-modernism as a way of thinking is a most doubtful notion for the historical process: one tends to think that things happen to somebody else (Oden, 1992).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**On the "Russian identity":** Assertion about the crisis of modern conscience requires that intellectuals not only study its social-cultural nature but also develop such perspective models that could be milestones of the practical politics. The response from the national self-determination is forming the national identity a special strategy of national development to become the landmark for self-awareness.

The point of modern discussions about the political nation in Russia in XXI century is finding the dialectic unity between two entities: the "Russian" ethnos and the "Russian" super-ethnic formation. Any nation is not only a combination of sub-ethnic ethnic and super-ethnic formations. This is such a unity that is constantly reproduced in history due to economy, politics and in a more general sense culture. In other words, it is such a "social contract" that unlike the country's constitution is inevitably rewritten by each generation.

Of course, each generation's mind is dominated by its own stereotypes in regard of forming a future political nation in Russia. One of the concepts, in a way, repeats the "soviet" rhetoric, replacing it with a new, "Russian" one. It is considered that a new historical entity, the modern "Russia", forms as a civil consent of a multi-ethnic nation of modern Russia (Laruelle, 2010). As a result, the "Russian nation" is formed on the basis of the popular and quite strong Russian identity cementing the Russian political nation. This popular and influential concept considers the contradictions existing in modern Russia, appealing to the self-awareness of the society. However, similarly to the Soviet (Marxist) Model before, it is largely based on the "automatism" of social trends as they call it.

The other, directly opposite concept completely denies the "Russian" status of the state-forming nation. Its adepts point out that the Russian people have no state of its own and therefore, have no possibilities to use the instruments of the modern state for self-protection and self-development (Strickland, 2013). In this case, the political nation is viewed not as much as a home, however conflicts-ridden but as barracks with its own regulations and high internal unification.

The above-listed concepts are not just imaginary model but actual present-day forms of social conscience functioning in the modern Russian society, they are explained by different models of upbringing and education, life standards, distance to the authorities, etc. One of them can be (pretty conventionally) named “internationalist”, the other one (less conventionally) “nationalist”. A most important pre-requisite to form a national identity and therefore, a “political nation” is personal self-awareness. On the other hand, from the social point of view, these conditions are institutions and norms they form the regulations without which personality is also impossible to imagine.

As a practical attempt to define the outlines of forming the Russian political nation, let us note the document published under the name “Declaration of Russian Identity”. This political text was developed from the results of the XVIII Worldwide Russian people’s convocation devoted to the topic “Unity of history, unity of people, unity of Russia”.

Of the most interest, there is the final conclusion, where the topic of “Russian identity” is structured in the form of five signs: “A Russian person is someone who identified oneself as a Russian, who has no other ethnic preference, who speaks and thinks in Russian, who adopts the orthodox Christianity as the basis of the national spiritual culture; who feels solidarity with the fates of the Russian people”. The analysis of this document makes us draw the conclusion that “Russian identity” is stated as the central ideological postulate of the modern Russian society.

**Outlines of the “social contract”:** The purpose of forming the “nation” shall be in finding such variants of inter-relations between the unique and the general, the generic and the individual that would be acceptable for all the citizens of the Russian Federation. In the Russian political and scientific communities, there are acute debates about the future of the concept of the national state, in general and of the Russian State, in particular. One of the signs of the authorities’ interest to the issues of the modern ethnic-political development was a topical contest of inter-disciplinary research works to be held in 2015 by the Russian humanitarian sciences fund under the title “State National Policy and International Relationships”. The purpose of the contest was to promote inter-disciplinary research works devoted to the state national policy and international relationships. It is planned that the result of this project will be works published in various printed and electronic forms, the results of research works and analytical materials for the relevant state organs of the Russian Federation.

Forming of the “political nation” can be viewed as a function of the culture development, where two entities come into conformity. On one hand, it is a set of social institutions and norms; on the other hand, it is a set of individual consciences changing in the historical process. A unique result of a new spin of development of the Russian culture and the Russian state shall be a new social contract.

A social contract cannot be conceived by the order from the authorities, there must be a consensus formed between various social, ethnic, professional and age groups. May be, it is inside the network that the basis for a new social contract will form, considering the unity of the state, the society and the man (Baltovskij and Belous, 2013).

National self-determination for the modern Russia is in the cultural choice, either the Internet wars will splash outside or civil consent will be achieved over a wide range of attitudes, the foremost of which relates to international relationships and ethnic-social processes.

The modern state is largely losing control over the “atomic” person. However, these functions are being transferred to the network, implementing new forms and degrees of control. The problem of moderating the modern social conscience is not in creating a system of taboos but in creating such regulations that could be adopted by all the participants of the process. The focus should be not on the regulations but on forming self-awareness. Only such politics that will be based on the home tradition of national self-awareness will improve the modern social conscience will prevent its barbarization and provoking conflicts in the sphere of international, inter-ethnic and inter-confession relationships.

## CONCLUSION

“Culture-centrism” is a universal principle to understand and solve the topical problems of international relationships. This postulate, in particular, means that the reasons for ethnic and inter-confession conflicts, mechanisms to prevent and control them shall be sought for in the dominating culture type.

The modern society is going through its own culture crisis which is confirmed by global transformations, especially noticeable in comparison with the previous century. In the modern Russia, a new social and cultural reality is being formed, a network informational society. At the same time, the political notions are being reformatted: external and internal political relationships are transforming, the character of international and inter-confession conflicts is changing.

Adepts of post-modernist culture turn the sphere of inter-ethnic and inter-confession conflicts into a kind of a "role-play". Whereas, the opponents in the mass-media stick to a relatively civilized form of discussion, then, if the discussion is anonymous like on the Internet, if there is no "social contract" a special type of the discourse comes into use, like a "free-for-all battle".

Creating a "political nation" merely on the basis of regulations is impossible. The alternative to the civil war is forming the Russian "political nation". An illustrative example of implementing such an approach is appearance of the "Declaration of Russian Identity" in the realm of public politics.

The modern Russia is facing a choice between two algorithms of developing a political nation either hostilities developing in the virtual network space will splash out to reality or civil consent will be achieved over a wide range of attitudes a new "social contract".

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