

ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS VARIETY OF RUSSIA: RESULTS AND PROSPECTS OF THE RESEARCH

The Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences realized a big scientific project under my supervision for studies of ethnocultural and religious variety of Russia in 2015—2017 as a part of the Russian Foundation for Fundamental Research target contest “Social and Cultural Aspects of National Security.” Besides a number of collective and individual publications by the participants of the project, we published our collective work as a result of it¹, and we’ll present a number of theses and conclusions from it in this report for the International Likhachov Scientific Conference 2018.

This research encompassed the following issues: the changing dynamics of ethnic demography and identity in the post-Soviet period and at the current stage, and what that means for stability and solidarity of the Russian nation; transformations in the sphere of ethnic, civil, religious, regional identity; the dynamics of religious confessions and institutions, including analysis of the state of affairs in case of Russian Orthodoxy and Islam; the state of affairs in ethnocultural education and language policy; migration processes and integration problems; ethnocultural brands of Russian regions and locations. The central scientific problem, at the solution of which our three-year project was targeted, consisted of revealing, analysis and comprehension of cultural and confessional variety of the Russian society from the perspective of overcoming risks and providing national security of the country. To be more exact — searching the answer to the question: does the complex ethnic and religious composition of the Russian population mean the weakness of the state and an obstacle for its successful development, or is this factor not directly related to stability and well-being of the multinational Russian

¹ Ethnic and Religious Variety of Russia. 2nd edition, corrected and supplemented / Ed. by V.A. Tishkov, V.V. Stepanov. Moscow: Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the RAS, 2018.

Federation, and does it even, on the contrary, make an important resource for its development?

Russia is a polyethnic and polyconfessional society, where the state of affairs is aggravated by the fact that institutionalization of ethnicity is provided by ethnoterritorial autonomies in the form of republics and autonomous districts as a part of the federative arrangement of the country, and long primordial vision of ethnicity both in everyday life and at the expert level. There are differently directed factors of centralization as well as regional and ethnic disintegration in force in Russia: on the one hand, nationwide institutions (the system of education, the Army, universal use of the Russian language and operation of mass media in Russian, high professional culture, etc.) help formation of the common civil identity, on the other hand, ethnonational institutions in republics, preservation of traditional cultures, support and development of particular ethnic cultures (literature, folk arts and crafts, ethnic tourism, etc.) support ethnic identity among non-Russian people, giving it primary importance in a number of situations and cases. This primary importance can develop into inter-ethnic conflicts and even rejection of the common state.

A kind of a mirror state of affairs exists in a certain environment also in evaluation of the state of culture and political manifestations on behalf of the domineering majority of the population — ethnic Russians, whose identity is historically expressed powerfully and in many facets, starting from the language, religion and ending with the country's name. It's impossible to deny that the Russian exists because there are the Russians, and this is surely the starting point of the statehood and the country's power. However, politicization of the Russian factor in certain environment can also contain risks that are no smaller than risks of peripheral nationalism or secessionism. It can seem that there is no one for the Russians to separate from, and they are the first keepers of the statehood, but we should not forget 1991, when exactly “the Russian Russia” in the person of the RSFSR became one of the initiators of the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Religion became a new factor for formation of group identities in the Russian Federation, its role is also ambiguous and contextual: in some cases it blurs ethnic borders, in other cases, on the contrary, it strengthens ethnic identity, but on the whole religion is called to be a stabilizing and conciliatory factor, if no radical, fundamental programs and forces originate in its environment or around it. From this point of view Russian polyconfessionality is an interesting and important field for studies.

Both ethnicity and religion form certain special cultural features of worldviews and behaviour, which are usually described in the terms of “national characters” or “ethnic stereotypes.” At the same time, civil integration as a result of purposeful efforts of the elite and authorities leads to establishment of national culture with its own codes and symbols, clear to everyone. This process is based on the long experience in interaction and all-sided inter-influence by representatives of various cultures and confessions within the framework of the historical Russian state: the Russian Empire, the USSR and the Russian Federation.

The object of studies in the course of our research was the issues of relation and interaction of the nationwide culture with ethnic and religious traditions, values and norms: how they combine, if they are capable of integration and non-conflict co-existence, or destined for a permanent conflict as the followers of the theses on “incompatibility of cultures” and “clash of civilizations” as well as opponents of nation-building on the multi-ethnic civil foundation, insist. Our hypothesis proceeds from understanding of culture as an ideal matrix used by people to put the world picture in order. At the same time, culture is heterogeneous and changeable, it does not have fixed borders, and culture can be interpreted.

Cultures are permanently interacting and have a considerable impact on one another, and that leads to origination of hybrid cultures and complex, not excluding each other forms of collective identities: “I am Russian, and I am a citizen of Russia.” All that becomes evident in the globalization environment and has an impact on ethnic and national, and even religious cultures, though religious borders

are more rigid than ethnic. And the main thing is that individuals are not a mere tool of culture; on the contrary, they are capable of efficient cultural adaptation and existence in several cultures or “between cultures,” which is often witnessed in today’s world. Because of that we don’t share the tough stances, advocated by right-wing conservative and ultra-national experts and politicians, thinking that not common cultures and values dominate between the Russians and representatives of other nationalities in Russia, but some civilizational incompatibilities, and that migrants from other ethnoses are incapable of integration.

We think that a lot depends on an individual, his internal resources, mindsets and intentions. Though these mindsets themselves depend on a whole set of factors — social, cultural and psychological. The state policy and impact of strong institutions of the civil society are determining in providing inter-ethnic friendly relations and stability of polyethnic communities. Because of that the most important focal area is studies of how exactly identity is formed in today’s world — national, ethnic, religious identity, what factors influence that, how these factors interact with each other (if they are cooperating or clashing with each other), what people mean under the notion of national, ethnic and religious identity and how these identities influence their real life, what these identities mean in various spheres of life (private and public life, cultural and religious needs, professional and everyday life, etc.), or if they have equal importance in the same areas of human existence.

How is the “ethnic culture” image formed, what is it made of and what does it mean for culture natives? What do “cultural values” mean and what meaning is put into this notion? What really happens when cultures interact and what happens at that time with the idea of “values”? Is an individual capable of being competent in several cultures at once? Can a nationwide identity in a polycultural state have some common cultural and historical foundation? If yes, what exactly this foundation should be, does it require working out a special historical myth (big narrative) and how can the general be combined with the particular?

Analyses of national, ethnic, religious symbols, their social interpretations, symbolic behavioural rules, the language factor's meaning (including bilingualism and multilingualism), social memory and images of the past, the role of professional culture in modern identities' formation are important to solve these tasks. Ethical ideas of the world are no less important, in particular, about neighbours, religious (traditional) understanding of the meaning of history and its combination with scholarly approaches, the identity's impact on people's behaviour, their attitude to the world, to "us" and "them." It's clear that all that depends on social and cultural competence as well as the context-situation (locus), in which an individual finds himself or to which he refers himself. Because of that special features of primordial, multiple, situational and symbolic identity (the "ethnic drift" phenomenon) and their instrumental meanings for the people of Russia are important for the studies of the diversity.

One of the most important objects of studies is religious ideas and practices (connected with both traditional and new religions), having an impact on the identity, as well as contemporary forms of cultural and religious intolerance and violence, xenophobia, racism and neo-Fascist based on them. The dynamics of ethnic and religious composition of the people of the Russian Federation and the changing list of nationalities as well as various rates of their growth and internal migrations at the level of certain regions have an impact on these processes.

Studies of the ethno-confessional diversity of Russia are not only academically important but it also has an impact on the practical policy of nation-building, civil education and upbringing, including and first of all the young generation of Russian citizens. Here our original thesis is important, supported by certain materials — joint residence of natives of many cultures and native speakers of many languages within the framework of one country and as parts of one Russian nation was typical for our state during its whole history. The variety of people became the source of constant and mutually enriching communications, the condition for the country's development. It's difficult to imagine what the Russian

state could be had it developed for many centuries just on territorial, demographic and cultural foundation of one or several East Slavic tribes.

The Slavic culture, the Russian language and religious Christian and Byzantium tradition in the form of Russian Orthodoxy made the foundation and a kind of referent (domineering) culture of the Russians for many centuries. They still stay that till nowadays. However, the Russian people are unthinkable without representatives of other nationalities — natives of other cultural and historical traditions as the religious life of the country is unthinkable without those professing Islam, Judaism, Buddhism. Though ethnoconfessional differences become the reasons for conflicts, intolerance and violence, we proceed from the fact that ethnic and religious variety as well as numerous nationalities within the Russian nation made it rich and strong not only in the past but still make now. And what is more, they are the condition for the country's stability and development. Such presentation of the problem is innovative as notwithstanding the provision of the Constitution and statements by the President of the country, the risks and incompatibility motives prevail in academic and public debates on the topic.

The Russian people, no matter the demographic problems, stay the biggest European nation. The inertia of the past, conservatism of the expert community and ethnic nationalism of a part of the elite were the obstacles for many years to a more powerful establishment of the idea of Russia as a formed nation-state and the Russian people as a civil nation. Old scholarly approaches and superficial political messages proceed from the fact that there is a task as if set “to make Russian citizens” from the Russians, Tatars, Chuvashes, etc. This is a detrimental interpretation of the essence of things. The Russian people-nation is not a result of unification but a joint ethnic variety. The population of new Russia is characterized by the high degree of social-political and historical-cultural unity. The overwhelming majority of the population is proud of their civil identity (“citizen of Russia”).

The views and attitudes of individuals, their groups and institutions, their ideas, purposes and values are quickly changing in modern Russia, with deep social and political changes as a background. This contradictory process brings about a lot of disputes and dissatisfactions, but on the whole it is positive, and we should see and support this positive character. In the 1990s, all our attention was drawn to the conflict in the sphere of ethnocultural development, contradictions tied with revival of religious life of the country. But there are different trends nowadays. We are witnessing a new degree of consolidation of the Russian society, positive aspirations of people, increased activity of non-governmental organizations, helping ethnoconfessional dialogue. This new positive development of the society is manifested in various forms, including the growing potential of the civil society's institutions in providing all-national accord and inter-national peace.

The state has a certain "responsibility area" in establishing ethnocultural relations. We are speaking first of all about advancement of the Russian legislation, which is still lacking in the sphere of ethnonational policy. We are for adoption of a federal law on the foundations of ethnonational policy and provision of national unity of the Russian Federation.

At the same time, ethical and religious life is to a small extent the state's "territory of responsibility." Ethnic and religious life is the choice and effort of the citizen himself, setting up organizations and unions jointly with other citizens. Ethnic and religious life is the right of an individual to stay himself, not to be like others. At the same time, people should obey common laws, co-exist together, strengthen their civil solidarity for the state's flourishing. The latter is also a strategically important task.

Complication and rapid dynamics of ethnocultural, social and political configuration of the modern Russian society in connection with its social stratification, urbanization, mass migrations, differently-directed ethnodemographic trends combined with growing social inequality of regions and areas in the environment of market economy's development create the grounds for

dissatisfaction of the people, mass phobias and prejudices, worries about the future. Russia has become the country admitting migrants, people speaking different languages, with their traditions and mentality are coming to us. We should be ready to integrate migrants and to change ourselves, to stay calm and maintain peace, attain strengthening of people's solidarity. Ethnic variety of Russia and its national unity may become the basis for this solidarity.

Let's sum up some results and offer forecasts.

1. The ethnic, religious, language, cultural variety of the Russian Federation and its regions is not itself the source of its destabilization but at the same time it is not an automatic guarantee of stable and successful development either. Purposeful efforts of the authorities and civil society are required in the environment of cultural variety to prevent tension and conflicts on the grounds of cultural differences and to transform the diversity into the creative development resource.
2. Risks originate when governance is contrary to cultural (ethnic and religious) norms and traditions of local people. In case of culturally sensitive and competent governance the very factor of polyethnic population can be the source of enriching interaction and development. In case of poor governance and management and politicization of ethnicity and religious issues, this factor is a serious risk for destabilization and conflict.
3. Analysis of the dynamics of the ethnic composition of Russia confirms not only deep historical roots of the multi-ethnic nature of the Russian people but also reveals the stable structure of the ethnic composition proper. This means that notwithstanding internal and external migrations, acculturation and assimilation, the composition and relation of the main ethnic communities (nations) on the whole are maintained over a long historical period. The ethnic structure of Russian citizens is stable with the Russians domineering (80%) and distribution of two dozens other biggest groups that together with the Russians make 97% of the population of the country.

4. The stable composition and relation will be typical for most regions of the country in the next two decades in case of the current birthrate and migration processes. However, the trend for increase of the share of people referred to the Moslem historical and cultural tradition and confession will be fixed (10.4% in 2010, 13% in 2020 and 14.5% in 2030).

5. There are negative trends for increase of monoethnicity of the population in a number of regions (first of all, the North Caucasian republics and Southern Siberia) in favour of the so-called title nations as well as formation in the central regions, where the Russians predominantly live, of the “suburb phenomenon” in the form of complexes of mass multi-storied residential development with the newcomer population, often belonging to a different from the local residents ethnicity. Special risks are brought about by possible conflicts of the two groups of population with different life patterns and traditions and lack of social and cultural control over the incoming young people by traditional environment as well as lack of neighbourly relations providing mutual adaptation of the citizens.

6. All serious studies show that ethnic affiliation is first of all the issue of personal identity, and it is not connected with just blood origin and other primordial ideas. Because of that a more sensitive attitude to state and society governance is required in ethnocultural development, as well as transfer to a more flexible idea of the list, composition and status of ethnic communities, which in particular should provide for a possibility for people to fix their complex ethnic affiliation. About 15% of the Russian population are the descendants of mixed marriages and are inclined to ethnically identify themselves dually, this figure is even higher in some regions and depending on age.

7. Research of the confessional state of affairs confirms the fact of conjugation and conflict-free coexistence of traditional confessions and the leading role of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia. The lack of inter-religious conflicts does not exclude the risk of destabilization by radical and extremist groups. In case of the due condition of the confessional and state relations and responsibility of

religious communities, the religious factor is a resource for preservation and support of traditional social norms and practices as well as an important peace-making mechanism.

8. Sociological analysis in polyethnic regions of the country revealed a considerable demand on the part of students, parents, the public for learning both the Russian language and non-Russian languages as well as the growing interest to studies of such subjects as local ethnic cultures, ethnic cuisine and fashion, ethnic tourism, etc. This disproves the opinion about disappearance of local ethnical diversity and casts a doubt on the educational policy providing exclusively all-Russian standards based on the Unified State Exam and minimization of ethnoregional contents in educational programs.