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## **The National Project in Contemporary Russia and the Dynamics of Interethnic Marriage as its Indicator (To the Issue of the Perspectives of the “All-Russian People” Commonality Formation)**

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*The article analyses modern grassroots-level scenarios of interethnic relationships, which are being formed in modern Russia. In this regard, we consider the dynamics of interethnic marriages for the past quarter of the century, the attitude of the Russian youth to the problem of interethnic marriages, the historical material on ethnic relationships and ethnic policy in the Russian Empire and the USSR. The results of interviews based on the author's method, which were carried out in some cities of the Russian Federation and which were devoted to the perception of ethnic problems by young university students. The perspectives of formation of the national project in the Russian Federation are analyzed in terms of acceptability for contemporary Russians of such alternatives as assimilation and “friendship of peoples”.*

*Keywords: interethnic relationships, interethnic marriages, national project, assimilation, All-Russian people (means all the peoples of the Russian Federation).*

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The model of ethnic relationships in Russia today has obviously not been formed: neither at the official level, nor at the grassroots level. However, the regulation in the

ethnic sphere cannot be compared, for example, to the certain scenario of interaction between peoples in the later USSR. Thus, in the recent publication in the Journal of Siberian Federal University, we demonstrated a remarkable accuracy and progress of the spontaneous grassroots-level Soviet ethnic cultural scenario on the example of the dynamics of interethnic marriages in the USSR (Lourie, 2018). What is the modern dynamics of interethnic relationships?

Let us start with a brief consideration of the tendency for interethnic marriages at the present time<sup>1</sup>. It seems to us that this tendency can become an indicator of the tendencies of development of interethnic relationships in the country.

If we relied on common sense reasoning, we could have assumed that in 1990s the share of ethnically mixed marriages would have dropped significantly due to the aggravation of interethnic relationships in the country, and in 2000s it would have grown due to the establishment of certain stability in the country. This is due to the fact that it is generally considered that “in the stable society the amount of mixed marriages increases, while in the crisis one it reduces. Therefore, interethnic marriages could be considered also as a quality of a catalyzer [*an indicator, to be more precise: my note, S. Lourie*] of well-being of the society” (Zeitunyan, 2006: 4), and they “could serve as a diagnostic and forecasting model of the development of ethnic relationships” (Galkina, 1993: 12).

However, the aggravation of interethnic relationships does not necessarily influence the microlevel of the ethnically mixed families directly. Thus, T.A. Titova judging by the large multi-level regional sampling showed that ethnically mixed families in Tatarstan reacted insignificantly to the aggravated ethnic situation in Tatarstan in 1990s: “The problems of interethnic relationships, ethnic identity are discussed in 47% studied Russian-Tatar and 44% of Tatar-Russian families. Only 15% of studied families arguments appear regarding the discussed problems. ... The interviews with the population show that in 1992 there was a certain tension in the public opinion regarding the issues of interethnic relationships. Nevertheless, this tension did not affect the relationships within the families between the spouses of different nationalities. ... The opinions [on political events] of the spouses of different nationalities regarding most issues are mainly the same in the studied families (Titova, 1999: 77, 82). The conclusions on Tatarstan are supported by the conclusions on Buryatia. There, only 6.5% of the interviewed interethnic families assumed that the condition of interethnic

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<sup>1</sup> Among international works on the issues of interethnic marriages the articles by M. Gultekin (Gultekin, 2012), M. Song (Song, 2009), B. Hohmann-Marriott & R. Amato (Hohmann-Marriott, Amato, 2008) and V. Huijink, M. Verkuyten & M. Coenders (Huijink, Verkuyten & Coenders, 2013) should be outlined specifically.

relationships in the society can be the reason for the divorce in the ethnically mixed couple (Trifonova, 2014: 86).

The dynamics of interethnic marriages in different regions is multidirectional. Thus, researchers studying the North Caucasus claim that the share of ethnically mixed marriages has been continuously dropping: "In general, in the North Caucasus, since the 1980s, the percentage of interethnic marriages has been reducing, and this trend will continue for a very long time" (Vereshchagina, 2003: 14). The share of interethnic marriages is 12.8% among the Ossetians, 10.3% among the Kumyks, 9.5% among the Lezgins, 8.0% among the Dargins, 7.8% among the Avars and 6.7% among the Kabardians. If we compare this data with 1989, then the Ingush had 14% of interethnic marriages, and in 2002 it became 10.2%, the Chechens had 10% then and in 2002 it became 6.9% (Naselenie Rossii ... 2006: 237, 239).

Nevertheless, the reduction of interethnic marriages is observed not in all regions of the country. In Buryatia, for example, we see a non-continuous dynamics: a small drop in the level of interethnic marriages in early 1990s, then the share of interethnic marriages starts to grow until mid-2000s, and then again begins to fall slowly. Thus, according to the materials of the Archive of the Registry Office of Civil Statuses the share of interethnic families was 12.3% in 1989, 11.9% in 1994, 12.4% in 1999, 13.4% in 2004, 14.2% in 2006 and 12.0% in 2010 (Trifonova, 2014: 75). "Significant changes appeared in the ratio of the amount of men and women of the same nationality, which entered interethnic marriages. Earlier Russian women entered mixed marriages more often than Russian men did, and for non-Russian peoples (Buryats, Evenki, Bashkirs, Yakuts, etc.) there was an opposite tendency. Nowadays these differences have almost eliminated" (Makharova, 2003: 16).

If we turn to Khakassia, there is an increase of interethnic marriages: in 1989 the percentage of mixed marriages was 15.8% for Khakass men and 19.8% for Khakass women; in 1993 it was 20.1% and 19.7% correspondingly. In 2007 the amount of ethnically mixed marriages increased by 7.9% if compared to 1989 (Krivonogov, 2011: 206). The share of ethnically mixed marriages grows in Bashkortostan, where according to the population census percentage of interethnic families is 29.0%, 30.7% in the cities and 20.4% in the rural areas. Moreover, the share of people living in ethnically mixed families does not significantly differ from Russian (31.3%), Bashkir (31.8%) and Tatar (39.7%). In 2005 in Bashkortostan 1,412 marriages between the Russians and the Tatars were registered, in 2010 this number increased to 3,224. 1,372 marriages were registered between the Bashkirs and the Tatars in 2005, and 3,214 marriages in 2010

correspondingly (Dinislamova, Sadretdinova, 2014: 63-64). Among large peoples of Russia, Komi and Mordva, interethnic marriages make over 40% (and beyond the republics, it even exceeds 50%) (Soroko, 2014: 103). According to the estimations of V.A. Semenov, in the Komi Republic the total amount of students, who come from the mixed marriages, out of 1,500 of interviewed students in the University, made 54%, 42.7% of them were children from the marriages of the Komi with the Russians or representatives of other nationalities (Semenov, 2014: 181-184).

Meanwhile, during the period from 2002 to 2010 in Russia, according to E. Soroko, the proportion of the Kyrgyz, the Tajiks and the Uzbeks in mixed marriages had noticeably decreased: "If the total number of the Kyrgyz couples over 8 years increased by 2.6 times, the amount of mono-ethnic couples increased by 3.7 times. During the period under review, the number of mono-ethnic Uzbek couples increased by 3.4 times, and the amount of mixed couples grew only by 21%, which caused a decline in their share in all families with the Uzbek wife" (Soroko, 2014: 99).

Therefore, is the amount of interethnic marriages in Russia bigger or smaller if compared to the Soviet period? Here we should outline the starting point. In the USSR in 1989, the share of interethnic marriages was 17.5%, but in RSFSR, including all the autonomies, it was lower, 14.7%. According to the data of the State Statistics Service of Russia by 1994 the share of interethnic marriages in the family structure of the society reduced to 11.5%. According to the data of the Census of 2002 16.2% of population in Russia live in ethnically mixed families. The percentage of the Russians, which had ethnically mixed marriages in this period is lower than among other ethnic groups of Russia, only 11.8%. If we look at the data of the Census in 2010, the share of ethnically mixed couples in Russia is only 12%. Thus, we can conclude that the dynamics is periodic.

The numbers of the latest censuses can be compared with those of the Soviet censuses only approximately. The fact is that in Soviet times, the unit of calculation was the family itself, and in modern Russia the unit is the household. Comparing the numbers, we mean that in one household there is only one married couple, and one married couple has only one household, which, of course, is not always the case. Therefore, estimations based on recent censuses are not accurate. Based on these approximate estimations, demographers believe that in 2002 the percentage of the Russians who have ethnically mixed marriages was lower than the average among the peoples of Russia, only 11.8% (Naselenie Rossii, 2006: 236).

The given figures prove that no uniform scenario of interethnic relationships has been observed in Russia yet. If we take in consideration what most modern Russian

researchers of interethnic marriages write about it, that “the processes of creation and functioning of interethnic families are one of the indicators of the cultural level of interethnic relationships” (Zeitunyan, 2006: 5), we can conclude that there is no such uniform culture for Russia as a whole. Different regions of the country experience different processes. For modern Russia quite a stable share of interethnic marriages is typical, which is generally lower for the Russians on the territory of RSFSR. Notwithstanding the variety of trends in interethnic marriages in regions of Russia, it is predictable and there are no unexpected tendencies outlined. This proves that different nations of Russia continue to exist within the framework of their cultural scenarios, which do not contradict each other much.

Interethnic marriage, of course, is only one of the indicators of the interethnic relations dynamics. Though its analysis shows that interethnic relations in modern Russia are situational. Moreover, it is not only the grassroots scenario of these relations that did not develop, there is no distinct model of such relations that would be introduced into life by the authorities.

The state anthem of our country tells that Russia is “An age-old union of fraternal peoples”. Our Constitution starts with the words: “We, the multinational people of the Russian Federation united by one destiny on our land”... In one word, there is an appeal to the historical fortune. There is nothing as specific as can be observed in the anthem of the USSR: “An unbreakable union of free republics, The Great Russia has welded forever to stand”. These words in the old anthem put everything in their places, in the modern version of the anthem, as well as in the official documents and the whole national policy of the Russian Federation the structure of interethnic relations is not reflected in anyway. First of all, the role of the nucleus of Russia, the state forming Russian people, is not clear in relations with its periphery, i.e. fairly large and significant peoples of the Russian Federation. Thus, modern Russian Federation does not have any distinct national project, elite act reactively responding to real and imaginary threats to real or imaginary stability.

What was the situation with national projects in the Russian State before? What was their connection with popular grassroots scenarios of interethnic relations? How can this past experience be useful for estimation of the prospects of national relations today?

Let us first consider what a national project is<sup>1</sup>. The first comprehensible explicit project was developed in the revolutionary France in terms of struggle with the

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<sup>1</sup> Among the recent papers on theoretical problems of nationalism and national projects the articles by J. Santiago (Santiago, 2012), R. Munck (Munck, 2010), A. Sager (Sager, 2014), K. Jaskuowski (Jaskuowski, 2010) and J. Etherington (Etherington, 2010) are of special interest.

monarchic principle of validity for the sovereignty of the nation understood as a union of citizens. The project was aimed at the planned and thoughtful creation of the French political nation through opposition to the diversity of the periphery. Its characteristic feature was an emphasis on the present and the future and the actual denial of the past which it was necessary to go away from. This phenomenon in the scientific literature is known as the French type of nationalism or the nationalism of the centre.

It is opposed to the German type of nationalism, that is Eastern nationalism. It is the nationalism of the suburbs or the periphery. In the nationalism of the periphery, a strong emphasis is placed on the past, which is receives some instrumental interpretation, and the myth of the “golden age” in the past of the nation is developed, and on its basis the image of the “ideal” fatherland in the future, as a distant goal, is formed. These key elements are not directly connected with the solution of practical political and economic tasks, but are loaded with high emotional content. In this case, the nation is understood as a community built on the unformalised paradigms of traditional culture.

With time the development of both nationalism models took an unexpected turn: they got transformed, the “Western” model preserved its form, i.e. its project component, and the content got close with the content of Eastern nationalism. In France, where the idea of nationalism as a project appeared, it went through some ideological adjustment. In other countries nationalism was presented as a cultural and political project, though the grounds of this project were originally the elements, which were partially borrowed from the German system and partially developed by local intellectuals and presented as original to each specific culture. Therefore, in each case we deal with a political project, which was based on a mythologeme and constructed artificially on purpose (Lourie, 1999).

The concept of K. Verdery seems to be the most adequate among many definitions of a nation: the nation is understood as a symbol (or a myth), the use of which itself creates the reality (Verdery, 2002). In this interpretation nationalism is a cover for various psychological and ideological structures, which are put in this cover because it is the most efficient tool for their adjustment to the mass consciousness. The following definition is also possible: the nation is a form of culture existence formed under the influence of the nationalism ideology. This is true as nationalism among different peoples has many similar features, which are typical for nationalism itself as a project, but which occur differently among different nations depending on the peculiarities of their cultures. Culture in this context is understood both as the ethnic culture typical for one ethnic group and as the polyethnic society of a number of ethnic groups, which

live in continuous interaction and have compatible or concurrent general cultural scenarios (Lourie, 2010).

Therefore, the possibility of implementing the national project as a unified general scheme should be rejected because in reality the project is doubled. On the one hand, there is a more or less explicit project (for example, almost universal for all nations ideology of nationalism, which is easily adapted by different peoples depending on their history). On the other hand, there is a popular grassroots spontaneous scenario, in which the ideology is changed in the consciousness of the nation depending on its cultural constants and such a scenario turns out to be not even close to ideology, which was supposed to be in its basis.

Let us turn to the national policy and the practice of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. It is noteworthy that very often the national project is related not only to the self-concept of one nation, but forms its relations with other peoples (in the Russian Empire it was called indigenous policy). In Russia – the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation – self-perception of the key, state-forming nation (the Russians) has always been mainly their perception of themselves in relation to the peoples included into the Russian State. This was already put in the ideologeme of gathering lands, at first Russian and then all, which were available for including into Russia. Actually any empire implicitly has the principle it is based on, which could be expressed by the prophet Isaiah's words: "God is with us, learn languages and resign, as God is with us". This means that truth is with us and it is all our power, which we will use to enlighten peoples and gather them together.

In the case of the Russian Empire, of course, above all, it meant the Orthodoxy of its people. Though already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, everything got much more complicated, and various action plans (often a civilizing, progressive plan) coexisted. Actually, the project as such did not exist at that time, there was only the general feeling of integrity, the need to unite nations in various ways. There was some rather formal national and political idea, which in the framework of official political practice was subjected to a number of reinterpretations, which were in different ways related to the practice of popular colonisation.

The Russian Empire seemed to practice a so-called individual approach to different nations and regions. However, not always there was an ideological programme standing behind this individual approach. Loyal nations or at least those, which seemed to be such were encouraged. Active or disobedient peoples were repressed. According to this approach, the nations that had something in common with the Russians in terms of

external political goals were settled along the borders, though they were not supposed to take the initiative neither. The non-Christian Finno-Ugric peoples of the Volga region and the northern part of Russia were subject to converting to Orthodoxy and assimilation. The integrity of the region, as they said, was achieved under an eight-pointed Orthodox cross.

There was a hope to join the peoples of Turkestan basing on the progress and mainly civic consciousness (as the general-governor of Turkestan, von Kaufmann, used to say “an honest Muslim is more precious than a dishonest Christian”). However, on the other hand the German von Kaufman wrote in his will that he should be buried in Turkestan while “it is also the Russian land and there is no shame to be buried here for the Russian man”. The land was considered so Russian that the people convinced themselves somehow that it is separated from the other Muslim world by the gap that no one can cross. Until the largest all-Muslim revolt which took place in the region at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the Transcaucasia the peoples with the ancient state structures were rejected even in local self-rule. Sometimes it was believed that the Georgians and the Armenians represent a “regional nationality,” as one officer wrote, a very viable “ethnographic force”, which “is not at all ashamed of itself,” but it is embarrassing for the Russians who cannot cope with it. On the other hand, there was a firm conviction that “the Christian peoples, by whose blood, and not only by the blood of the Russians, the Caucasus was bought for Russia, have equal rights with the Russians”. However, more often the Russians under the influence of European imperialism considered themselves to be civilizers, which was quite true in many regions, but not enough for such a nation as the Russians.

In the Russian Empire there were two components, which coexisted, complemented each other and often opposed each other: the religious and the statist components. The statist one prevailed as an aspiration for unification and russification. It is usually natural and should have been productive for the state integrity and the self-esteem of the Russian nation. In reality though, such unification for the Russians was often conflict generating both in practical and psychological aspects, which did not contribute much to the well-being and strength of the Empire. The religious aspect of integration of the Empire’s suburbs was not quite explicit in the official policy, but it was present in the consciousness of many Russian imperial leaders and Russian colonists in the suburbs. Sometimes the statist and the religious origins had serious conflict and led to temporary paralysis of the imperial rule (Lourie, 1994).

It is noteworthy that in the regions where statism was more vivid and Russian peasant colonization was accompanied by some administrative measures and was protected by the state, the integration of the regions into the Empire was significantly weaker than in the regions, where peasants had to act at their own risk and look for the ways to live amicably with the indigenous peoples on their own (Lourie, 1998). This does not mean though that it was right to leave Russian colonists to the mercy of the fate, but it would have been definitely wise to trust the instincts of the colonists and allow them to freely develop spontaneous scenarios of discovering the territory of the Empire and integrating its diverse peoples. It is obvious that in addition to the all-state project performed by the official authorities, there is always a popular grassroots scenario, which is spontaneously fulfilled by common representatives of the people.

The contradiction of the official national project and the spontaneous popular scenario of the ethnic relationships is especially noticeable in the case of the Soviet friendship of peoples (Lourie, 2011). This project started in 1920s as an Anti-Russian and Anti-Imperial policy of localisation and turned into the grassroots imperial scenario with the Russian people in the centre. It provided the Russians with the explicit forms of expressing themselves as an older brother and a patron of many nations of the Empire.

Moreover, the formal features of the project of the peoples' friendship (the term "peoples' friendship" appeared only in the middle of 1950s) are quite similar to the French model of nationalism. It has a vivid purposefulness of the goal and means for its implementation and it was based on the algorithms of relationships of both between the citizens and the state, and between the citizens. Both Soviet and French projects were conceived as tools for building a fundamentally new type of society, both explicitly aimed at solving the tasks of the present and the future, and both rejected the past, building the sovereignty of the society on the basis of the rejection of monarchist legitimacy. There was a number of similar features in the Russian and French imperial models, so the model of imperialism, which was inherent in the Russian Empire, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century literature was sometimes called Russian or French, considering these definitions as synonymous.

Moreover, the main feature that brings together Russian or French types of imperialism is the tendency to assimilate suburbs or colonies, the tendency to transform the entire population of the empire into the Russians or, accordingly, the French. Though the Soviet model in this case differs from the French one, for the assimilation goes not to the national culture of the people of the centre, but to the phantom non-national, as it would seem, image of the "Soviet person". If the Soviet

project of friendship of peoples was about the assimilation of the citizens, then we would deal (at least partially) with a clone of the French project, but the Soviet project, unlike the latter, did not assume complete assimilation. This was its principal feature. On the ideological side, it assumed the realisation of the ideal of internationalism.

The project was balancing at the cutting edge. If internationalism is expected, then there should be nations. These nations though should have such ideal relations that nobody is in a higher position over another, but each nation has some supreme goals (supreme ideals of communism). Therefore, on the one hand, nations were supposed to be formed there where they were not present. Many peoples of the USSR, even small-numbered ones, received at least one university, a library a national theatre and some were even given the written language. On the other hand, if the nation raised its head too high, its representatives were blamed in “petty-bourgeois nationalism” and were repressed. All the forces of any nation were supposed to be concentrated on the better tomorrow. The Russians were restricted in most ways, so they did not get infected by “supreme power chauvinism”.

When the project was “brought to the masses”, they understood it in a completely peculiar way! For them, the main thing was, literally, to be friends. This resulted in a very complicated system of relationships. According to the project, nationalities were preserved and felt very clearly. At the same time, interethnic communication itself became one of the most important reasons they were preserved for. There was a constant dialogue of different cultures. With some exaggeration, we can say that each nation existed for the pleasure of others and enjoyed the existence of others itself. Ethnic peculiarities were manifested either in their own narrow circle or “for the spectator”, and in the latter case, they were presented in a festive pleasant tone. Even the conflicting ethnic groups expressed their conflict in a festive game form, for example, in KVN or the competition “Come on, girls!”.

However, it was only the outer layer of relationships. Deeply inside, they were built on the complex game of compromises and the system of politeness. Moreover, people obviously enjoyed this game of compromises and politeness. The main thing was to be “tactful”. Tact was the highest virtue in the sphere of interethnic relations and politeness inherent for the friendship of nations was very warm. People allegedly fled to it from the cold of the totalitarian regime. The cherry on the cake was the absence of interethnic relations, when people of different nationalities lived together, but it seemed that they did not remember about interethnic relations. They were supposed to express it only in stories about something interesting from the life of nations.

As for the direct regulation of national relations at the grassroots level, their spontaneous popular scenario, then, as one of my Armenian respondents said back in the 1990s, “the communist system did not understand a thing in the national relations. It was wonderful! “I don’t want to be involved in this, otherwise I will make such a mess!”, the authorities seemed to say”. At the level of grassroots communication sometimes it was. The same respondent defined the role of the Russians in the “Soviet empire”: “The image of the Russians in the eyes of other nations is purely charismatic ... “Nation” does not always mean the same thing. In the circle of Russian peoples, “nation” is a stereotype of **being in the view of the Russian people**. Under their eye. Interethnic relations are formed in this way and not in the other way taking into account the presence of the “all-seeing eye” of the Russian people. This should not be confused with the “eye of power”. The Russian people, culture, language serve as a model, which national behaviour **wants** to fit ... “. Not everything, of course, was so perfect, but in the late Soviet years, the spontaneous Russian-centricism manifested itself in national scenarios in the USSR in one way or another.

The whole frame of Soviet culture was based on a specific refraction of Russian culture. For some of the peoples, Russian high culture filled the missing or too thin layer of their own high culture. For the peoples who had their own high culture, the Russian one supplemented and enriched it. By the way, the relative ease of accepting the Russian culture was explained by the fact that the Russians (as a nation, not the authorities) did not encroach upon the everyday culture of other nations, they themselves often assimilated in the everyday culture of the local population: cuisine, dress style, behavioural elements, and some customs. The system of “friendship of peoples” can be imagined as one of the forms of expression of the Russian imperial complex, including its natural and grassroots expression.

It is noteworthy that the Russian “image of themselves” as the carriers of good exists in three ways: 1) *the keepers* are the *cultivators* of good, i.e. the peasant community, the creators of the “great construction projects” and the creators of space rockets, etc.; 2) *enlightenment missionaries* who are always ready to carry the “light to the world,” whatever it is; 3) *warriors-defenders* of good, fighters against “villains” and patrons of peoples who are threatened by evil. Self-awareness as patrons and protectors is very clear, for example, M.Yu. Lermontov wrote: “And God’s grace descended on Georgia! It has blossomed ... without fear of enemies, protected by friendly bayonets”. (“The Novice”). Any nations which entered the Russian Empire or the USSR, even the conquered ones, were considered to be liberated. It is impossible to offend the

Russians more than neglect their patronage! The Russian picture of the world considers significant the places of settlement of peoples in need of protection from anything. The “matryoshka” geopolitical hierarchy of the “mature socialist camp” is built precisely according to the “degrees of protection”. Russia and “fifteen republics – fifteen sisters” around it is the centre of space. The next zone is the “socialist community”, it is no longer the “Unbreakable Union”, but the union of the privileged ones. Then there are countries of “socialist choice,” like Angola, Mozambique or Nicaragua, in relation to which there are no formal obligations, but there are moral ones. And, finally, peace-loving and democratic countries, like India, are also under protection, though they are no longer in debt, having become friends. This spatial structure is not closed, has no closed contours, because something can be added to each of the component levels and the circle of defendants can expand at any time.

*The condition for action is self-protection and patronage* of those many under protection. Any foreign policy action is “forced self-defence,” any action on foreign territory is “liberation” or “help.” The idea of “international duty” is much older than the late Soviet doctrine! Let us recall on the Russian-Turkish war of 1877–1878, interpreted by the “educated society” as an aid to the “Slavic brothers”, and by the common people as coming to defence for the “Greek” (that is, the Orthodox in general, and not the Slavs). The enemy is the one from whom it is necessary to defend oneself, or, to an even greater extent, the one from whom it is necessary to protect others.

In the empire, the Russians acquired a lot of protected ones, but in Soviet times, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when, as a result of the anti-Russian policy of indigenisation at a rapid pace, the unwritten peoples of the USSR acquired their own national alphabet, and even theatres and universities, and those with the written language simply theatres, libraries and universities, the Russians in the end, paradoxically, felt like a birthday child: they were surrounded by a crowd of people that they saved from extinction, stagnation in lack of culture and benevolent peoples. They looked at them with pride and some tenderness as they were their success. The peoples, however, were also “favoured” by communism, but for the time being, the Soviet Russians also considered this to be an advantage. This is the basis of the friendship of nations for the Russians, the foundation of its spontaneous grassroots scenario, this is what set it ethnoculturally through the component, which was specifically emotionally positive for the Russians!

This is not enough though. These components of the Russian national identity should be considered when laying the foundations for a new national project: a modern Russian project. Of course, its main subject is the Russian people, since the comfort

of other nations in the Russian Federation depends, first of all, on the comfort of the Russians in it. If it is comfortable, if the Russians feel in their place, then there will be a place for other nations. If not, the Russians worrying about the discomfort themselves, will contribute to the discomfort of others, constantly worrying them. It is important to realise that no theoretically correct construction will be ever adequately implemented, if the Russians, from the point of view of their psychological and ethnocultural characteristics, have something “itching” in this construction. The national policy of modern Russia should be psychologically comfortable for the Russian people, because without this all of our state will be getting down little by little. Nevertheless, we should understand that what seems to be the creation of a comfortable environment for the Russians (including the system of state support for the Russians, assimilation and Russification of non-Russian peoples) may contribute to the psychological comfort of Russians, and it can destroy it: everything depends on the context. Let us repeat that looking at the cultures of minor nations, their protection often evokes not just a sense of pride in the Russians, but makes their self-identification firm and accurate, because it helps them to feel as patrons and protectors, which correlates with the ethnic and cultural dominants of the Russians. Actually, the inclusion of representatives of different peoples in the ‘Russian circle’, sometimes even regardless of nuances, already stimulates the Russian self-identity. The Russians, first of all, the Russian colonist peasants, at least in the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries, did not always have the need to assimilate the peoples, but there was always the need to patronise and carry out the mission to the peoples.

The constant of *the condition for action* for the Russians is its self-awareness as a powerful and rightmost (just) force. “The strength is in the truth”: this is the idea passing from the ancient proverb to the hero of the famous film Danila Bagrov. On the contrary, blocking this condition (as it happened in Afghanistan and in the “first Chechen war”) automatically deprives the Russians of their capacity, they are lost, because the basis for action is lost. If the Russians do not feel the rightness that they bring to the peoples, no national scenario will turn out to be viable.

Thus, in the case of the Soviet “friendship of nations” scenario, the Russians had a special function: they put sense into it, combining two scenarios, i.e. “the friendship of nations” and “being ahead of everybody”. Then it happened so that the notion of “being ahead” became morally empty because of its initial non-religiousness.

With the loss of its ideal meaning in the late Soviet and perestroika years, “the friendship of nations” scenario gradually began to collapse. As the other peoples of the

Soviet Union were feeling more and more comfortable in only superficially ideological, almost oppressive Brezhnev regime, the Russians were in the state of crisis of their state consciousness. Imperial action cannot be strictly pragmatic. Therefore, if the majority of non-Russians in the USSR looked at the war in Afghanistan as another opportunity to increase the power of the country, for the Russians it was **the war without meaning**. The Russians did not have the feeling that they are saving someone.

The vitally important for the Russians mythogeme disappeared, or, it would be correct to say, there was no cultural theme left. In the Soviet period, it consisted of the idea “that apple trees will bloom on Mars”. And for the sake of these “Martian apples” within the framework of the spontaneous “friendship of nations” scenario, the peoples of the Russian circle learned the complex art of compromise, “sublimation of the good”, communication and “goodness in relation to theirs”, which included millions and millions.

A new spontaneous national scenario, which will again cement the space of cultures and peoples of Russia, will arise when the Russians crystallise out a new understanding of the “Russian mission” acceptable to the current Russian society. On its basis, it will be possible to rebuild the national project. For an adequate national project cannot arise in Russia today in the conditions of its modern constitution, where the state does not have any ideology. I think that the national project will have to embrace the features of the imperial national project with its “individual approach” to the peoples (depending on the loyalty of the people of Russia to the Russians), on the one hand, and on the other, to reproduce the features of “the friendship of nations” scenario, but with an unconditional refusal of unification and enhanced assimilation.

It is unlikely that Russia should become the territory of simply allied peoples on the basis of some civilizational unity like the Eurasian doctrine. For example, the Mordovians and the Yakuts, who allegedly constitute a single Eurasian civilization, have nothing in common except for their common views on good and evil, except for those that are a consequence of the “natural law” known to pagans as well and the values they perceived from the Russians or through the Russians being **the peoples of the Russian circle**. Outside this Russian circle, they are completely different nations that do not constitute a single civilization. They acquire such a common for all the peoples of Russia (and, perhaps, more broadly the former USSR) civilization through the Russians, becoming parts of the Russian civilization. To a certain and significant degree, the quality of existence of these peoples depends on the national project that the Russians would be able to develop. Let me repeat that this project may include assimilation, but may be based on admiring the values of another culture, preserving

it. There is no constantly recurring national policy that is supposedly the peculiar one for the Russians.

A certain wave of messianic consciousness arose in Russia in connection with the “Crimean consensus” bringing together not only Russian representatives of different ideologies (“white” and “red”), but involving quite a few non-Russian compatriots. The idea behind “Our Crimea” was simple: restoring the former greatness of the state. There was no consensus on why it was necessary to restore greatness: perhaps it would have arisen later if the “our-Crimea” social trend continued to develop progressively (if society did not decompose mechanically into “white” and “red”). Though that moral unity, which included representatives of different peoples of Russia, was already enough for the internal alternatives of the Russian and non-Russian peoples inhabiting our country to be manifested: for or against the Russian civilization. In general, it is natural that only a part of each people of Russia, more or less, depending on the intentions of the people, include themselves in the Russian civilization. This will provide an opportunity not for a national project based on a common denominator, but for an “individual approach” to the peoples and the alternative forces present in them through the stimulation of desirable alternatives for the Russians. There will be an object for appeal in each of the peoples of Russia, and at the present stage these individuals and groups in the composition of nations will not always be quite adequate to the Russian agenda: they may look for their own value justifications for such phenomena as, for example, “Crimeanism”.

For representatives of the Turkic peoples who have taken the dominant position of the majority of the Russian people, Eurasianism can become such a justification. This is kind of a euphemism of the “Russian civilization”, which is psychologically easier to be accepted for the representative of the Tatar people, for example, as the thesis about their affinity with the Russians and the inevitable dependence on them. At the stage of formation, this is a positive phenomenon, since everyone who is not against us is now with us. The ideological inconsistency is quite natural, since the Russians themselves have not yet offered a clear positive dominant. Adoption of “Our Crimea” is a primary self-identification into which different ideologies are embedded, it is a frame for those who can potentially become the carrier of the common ideal, who is for the Russian civilization anyway, since there is no unity in understanding the essence, even among the Russians themselves.

As for the national grassroots scenario of ethnic relations, it has not yet been completely revealed. It is clear only that this is not a scenario of complete assimilation.

Let us look at the results of the interview I conducted in 2017 among the Russian students in several cities of Russia: autonomous capitals, regional and district cities of Russia, i.e. in Kazan, Makhachkala, Ufa, Krasnoyarsk, Michurinsk (Tambov region) and Lysva (Perm region) (97 people), as well as in Makhachkala among the students of indigenous nationalities of Dagestan (43 people). (Among those, by the way, 60% called themselves observant Muslims, 20% Muslims “in their heart” and another 20% did not answer the question of religious affiliation). Russian students defined their religion as follows: 2% called themselves atheists, 40% non-believers, 9% doubters, 26% oriented to Orthodoxy, 19% Orthodox, 2% Muslims, 2% followers of other religions. (Express my thanks to Candidate of Philosophical Sciences S.A. Podyapolskiy for help with the interview).

First of all, the question is what the All-Russian people are. Only 8% of the surveyed Russian students called it an ideological cliché. Another 14% considered it as the term for the mechanical population of the peoples inhabiting Russia. 26% understand it as the emerging and even already existing commonality of peoples of Russia. Most of all – 49% of Russian students – called the All-Russian people the commonality of all the people inhabiting Russia (an approach from the point of view of not peoples, but individuals). There are few such people (3%) for whom the expression “All-Russian people” is a euphemism for the name of the Russian people so that it would not hurt other people that they were forgotten. Thus, it is the “All-Russian people” that 75% of the interviewed Russian young people consider to be the real, not ephemeral, commonality for the citizens of Russia.

However, 33% of respondents believe that the “All-Russian people” will remain an amorphous entity, because it does not have common values and goals, and 5% even believe that subsequently the nation will completely fall apart into separate ethnic groups that have little in common. 18% of the interviewed Russian students think that the All-Russian people will turn into a political nation living under the same civil laws and becoming more and more united. 32% think that the ever-deepening unity of the All-Russian people is based on common values and goals, another 8% believe in assimilation and that multi-ethnic All-Russians will increasingly merge with the Russian people. Another 4% found it difficult to answer.

Comparing the answers of the Russian students with the answers of the Dagestani, we get the following. 60% of the surveyed Dagestani students believe that the All-Russian people are the commonality of peoples living in Russia (79% of this number (48% of the total number of respondents), see All-Russian people as the commonality

of peoples of Russia, and 21% (13% of the total number of respondents) consider the All-Russian people as a commonality of people living in Russia. Unlike the Russian students, the Dagestani approach is rather a people-centred one. Only 2.5% of the total number of respondents believe that the All-Russian people are the mechanical totality of the peoples of Russia. Many of them (30% of the total amount of the respondents) believe that the All-Russian people mean the Russian people themselves. 2.5% consider the term “All-Russian people” to be an ideological cliché, and 4% found it difficult to answer the question.

78% of the surveyed Dagestani students believe that the All-Russian people will be getting increasingly united, of which 32% (25% of the total number of respondents) believe that it is the Russian people who are determining the unity (however, this figure must be interpreted carefully, let us recall that 30% of Dagestani students believe that the All-Russian people mean only the Russian people themselves). 52% of those who believe that the All-Russian people will become more united (40% of the total number of respondents) believe that the unity of the All-Russian people will be set by common goals and values, and 16% (12.5% of the total number of respondents) that the reason for the increasing degree of unity of the All-Russian people is the commonality of civilian life. Only 10% of the respondents believe that the All-Russian people will remain an amorphous commonality, or will fall apart into separate nations at all; another 12% found it difficult to answer.

Thus, both the Russians and the Dagestani understand the concept of the “All-Russian people” basically as a method of self-identification as the members of the peoples inhabiting Russia or simply its citizens of different nationalities. Nevertheless, this identification is far from comprehensive. The latter is not at all connected with the hostility towards Russia, which is shown by the answers of the Dagestani students to the question: “Are you proud of being a All-Russian?” 77% of respondents answered positively, and 36% of them (28% of the total number of respondents) explained this with a feeling of sincere love for the Russian people, 28% (21% of the total number of respondents) with the pride of power in the international arena and another 36% (28% of the total number) reported that they were taught to be proud of living in Russia by their parents. Let us add that 80% of the surveyed Dagestani students believe that citizens of Russia are obliged to be patriots, 21% of them (17% of the total number of respondents) are convinced that one should be a patriot of Russia because it is the best and most just country. As for what the Russians expect from non-Russians, only 23% of surveyed Russian students believe that a Russian citizen of non-Russian nationality

must be a patriot of Russia, another 44% believe that it is possible that a non-Russian Russian citizen is a patriot of Russia, and 24% do not consider the possibility of Russian patriotism among the non-Russian citizens of Russia.

Let us turn to the question of the unity of the “All-Russian people”. Almost more than a half of the Dagestani students (52%) believe that the peoples of Russia have a single ethical system, of which 78% (19% of the total number of respondents) consider it practically unified (13%) or potentially unified (65%), and 22% (12% of the total number of respondents) emphasize the common perception of justice for the peoples of Russia. 35% of the total number of respondents consider it natural that every nation has its own ethical system. No one argued that there could not be a single ethical system with the Russians, and 13% found it difficult to answer the question.

84% of the Russians surveyed and 88% of the Dagestani respondents believe in the friendship of peoples (they believe that the friendship of peoples in the USSR was real). 77% of the interviewed Russians and 81% of the Dagestani want the friendship of the peoples to be revived. 41% of the Russians and 51% of the Dagestani are confident that the peoples of Russia are friends now, another 26% of the Russians and 8% of the Dagestani believe that the vector of development of national relations in Russia is directed towards reviving the friendship of peoples.

It remains unclear though if the young people understand the Russian people themselves as the central nation in the ethnic relations of Russia. Here we get a very interesting situation. Only 52% of the Russian respondents themselves consider the Russians to have the ideal functions in the interethnic relations, and 37% think that they have only organizational functions. If we turn to the Dagestani respondents, 68% admit the ideal functions of the Russians. Among them almost a half of the Dagestani see the role of the Russians in setting the goal (“The Russians lead the peoples of Russia to great goals”), in protection of values (“The Russians protect human values in the face of globalization and save other peoples of Russia from immorality”), in finding the right way (“The Russians help other peoples of Russia not to lose themselves and not “to sink” in the modern world”). Only 20% of the interviewed Dagestani students think that the Russians have only an organizational role. None of the surveyed Dagestani students consider the Russians to play a negative role in the international relations. 61% of Dagestani students said that they would like the Russian Empire to revive, only 12% are definite about not wanting this scenario to develop (among them there 3% of those, who consider the empire an outdated form of the state, and 9% of those, who consider the empire to be

tyrannical). Though 27% of the Dagestani students found it difficult to answer the question. Among the Russian students 27% think that the revival of the Russian Empire is a good scenario, and 49% consider it to be undesirable (18% of the total amount of respondents consider this to be a totally wrong way for Russia and 35% see the empire as an outdated form of the state). 24% of the Russian students found it difficult to answer the question.

If we turn to the problem of assimilation, the situation is as follows. 36% of the surveyed Russian students consider assimilation to the Russians possible, and 50% impossible (the rest were uncertain). But is it desirable in the eyes of the Russians? None of the interviewed Russian students agreed with the desirability of “all nations becoming like Russians”. Only 4.5% of the Russians surveyed agreed with the idea that “it is desirable that the idea of morality, the principles of children upbringing and education among all peoples of Russia should be like among the Russians”. That is, the assimilation paradigm in the national scenario of modern Russians seems to be excluded. Though, already 36% consider the mutual assimilation of the peoples of Russia to be a positive phenomenon (that is, they welcome the formation of a unified Russian nation). Still, the majority (50%) are confident that every nation should preserve its own characteristics, its culture, its identity. There are still those who consider assimilation to global supranational values desirable, but there are few of them, 4.5%. 4% found it difficult to answer this question. As for the national feeling, only 74% of Russian students feel it, 5% speak of regional patriotism, and 14% say directly that they are not familiar with the national feeling (the rest were uncertain).

In conclusion of the review of the answers to some of the interview questions, let us compare the degree of idealism in the state-building of the Russians and the Dagestani. 81% of the Russians and 78% of the Dagestani think that the idea is necessary for the basis for a multinational state, and 43% of the Russians (45% of the total number of surveyed Russian students) and 70% of the Dagestani (55% of the total number of surveyed Dagestani students) believe that the idea itself is needed, and the rest will be added to this, while the rest (35% of the total number of the interviewed Russians and 23% of the surveyed Dagestani) believe that the idea that is needed also needs economic and political grounds. It should be noted here that 13% of the Russians and 10% of the Dagestani consider it sufficient that only the Russian people have the state idea and build the state themselves. Only 13% of the Russians see the economy as the basis of the state, and 43% of them (6% of all respondents) believe that the state idea is unacceptable, because it leads to fascism, and 11% of the Dagestani (among them there

are no people who consider the state idea unacceptable). 6% of the Russians and 11% of the Dagestani found it difficult to answer the question.

At the beginning of the article we talked about indicators of the tendencies in the formation of national relations' scenarios in modern Russia from the point of view of data analysis on interethnic marriage. We asked questions about this phenomenon to our respondents, however, only to the Russian ones. The analysis of the answers showed that the interviewed Russian students practically do not include interethnic marriages in the structure of relations between nations, regarding them as expressions of interindividual relations. Students did not choose the answers that connected the spread of interethnic marriages as an indicator of good relations between nations or an expression of friendship between nations. 77% of them answered that they are positive towards interethnic marriages, since they are the result of love between people. 63% of respondents believe that we should welcome the marriage of representatives of any nationalities, if there is love between them. 21% were against black and white interracial marriages. Another 16% expressed doubt that it is permissible for the Russians to marry the Muslims as well. 16% think that there interethnic marriages can pose the problem of raising children in the traditions alien to the Russian culture. About 70% of respondents do not see any serious problems that could be caused by the spread of interethnic marriages, more than half of them believe that, on the contrary, the Russians receive fresh blood through nationally mixed marriages. For comparison, let us present the data of the 2010 survey of the All-Russian Public Opinion Research Centre, which shows that the All-Russians disapprove of the marriages between the people with different religious views: almost half of the respondents (48%) are negative about this. Then the All-Russians of all ages and nationalities were interviewed, and our survey included only the Russian students aged from 18 to 27.

Therefore, we see that interethnic marriages are allowed in the currently emerging national scenario (if it is emerging at all), but are they an element of it? Definitely, they are not a tool for rapprochement between nations, as was the case in the Soviet era. Rather, the acceptance of nationally mixed marriages is an element of the paradigm of consolidating Russia as an aggregate of individuals of different nationalities. We encountered this pronounced alternative in the answers to the interview, especially by the Russian students. In practice, this means that interethnic marriages will be influenced not by the "ties" between the peoples, which are connected with values and ideals, but only by natural complementarity at the behavioural level, acceptance of each other's household scenarios. Therefore, it should be assumed that the number of nationally mixed marriages

will increase or decrease according to the logic that is not understandable at a superficial glance and can be explained by some features of the ethnopsychological constitution of the peoples: ethnopsychological constitution, which includes a complex of psychologically comfortable actions, regardless of their ideal value, and not ethnocultural, which implies a value understanding of action scenarios. Obviously, this is exactly what we see in the multidirectional figures of the marriage dynamics of different peoples of Russia.

We cannot predict the grassroots scenario of national relations in our country in the event if its people get out of the long-running state of unrest. However, it seems to us that this will not be a model of assimilation to the Russian ethnic. Not even because it will meet the resistance of other peoples of Russia, but because the Russians do not want this. No one can force the Russians to assimilate the peoples, because now they do not see the world as the assimilation model requires. Our brief analysis of the attitude of the Russian youth towards interethnic marriages speaks rather in favour of the fact that a certain amorphous model of tolerance is taking shape. But will it satisfy the Russians, who, due to their ethnic and cultural characteristics, need a dynamic model of national relations? We believe that the basis of the new national project should be the reconsideration of the “friendship of peoples” model with a certain emphasis on the role of the Russians as a leading nation, setting the paradigm of existence for other peoples of Russia, and assuming the old imperial selective approach to peoples. This is possible, of course, if the Russians have a guiding idea-goal, at least a cut form of the mission. If the idea does not appear though, the Russians simply will not be able to organise Russian peoples, no matter what the theorists compose for them.

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**Национальный проект в современной России  
и динамика межнациональной брачности  
как его индикатор  
(К вопросу о перспективах формирования общности  
«российский народ»)**

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*Статья посвящена анализу современных низовых сценариев межнациональных отношений, которые формируются в современной России. С этой целью анализируются: динамика межнациональных браков в последнюю четверть века, отношение к проблеме межнациональных браков российской молодежи, исторический материал о национальных отношениях и национальной политике в Российской империи и СССР, результаты интервью, проведенного по авторской методике в ряде городов РФ и посвященного восприятию национальных проблем студенческой молодежью. Перспективы становления национального проекта в Российской Федерации анализируются с точки зрения приемлемости для таких современных русских альтернатив, как ассимиляция и «дружба народов».*

*Ключевые слова: межнациональные отношения, межнациональные браки, национальный проект, ассимиляция, российский народ.*

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