

Scientific Session of the General Meeting of the Russian Academy of Sciences

Russian Identity: Internal and External Challenges

V. A. Tishkov[#]

Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia
e-mail: valerytishkov@mail.ru

Received December 17, 2018; revised January 16, 2019; accepted January 21, 2019

Abstract—The article identifies the main components of developing national identity in Russia as the foundation for building nationwide civilization on a civic basis. Those importantly include the study and preservation of the historical and cultural heritage, i.e., archival and archaeological materials, cultural monuments, places of memory, and historical and cultural landscape. In addition to the outlined findings of the projects already completed by researchers from the Russian Academy of Sciences, some promising projects have been proposed, such as compiling the corpus of the Russian language and other languages of the peoples of Russia, comprehensive dictionaries and encyclopedias, and publishing of collected works of classical Russian writers, as well as preparation of multivolume publications on the history of Russia. The importance of humanitarian and scientific support for infrastructure development projects, mass housing construction, and creating large-scale facilities and transport communications aimed at preventing the loss of cultural and natural environment and values necessary for national identity is substantiated.

Keywords: national identity, Russia, historical and cultural heritage, history, archeology, archives, languages, literature, monuments, infrastructure projects, humanitarian expertise

DOI: 10.1134/S1019331619020229

The issue of national identity appears to be crucial for the establishment of modern states since they all have a complex racial, ethnic, and religious composition of the population. Many developed countries have accepted and continue to accept a large number of migrants, which creates additional problems in the adaptation and integration of new residents. The geopolitical rivalry and the economic competition of national states are getting increasingly bitter. We have observed an evolving global conflict of sovereign values and approaches to the social life of countries and regions.

The Russian Federation is one of the central actors of world politics. Our country has to defend the national sovereignty and status of one of the world's leading powers, and this task is complicated by the fact that Russia relatively recently experienced a dramatic disintegration of its historical statehood and has not completed its search for a new image of the country and its role in the community of nation-states. In this difficult and historically responsible period, the understanding of Russia as one of the world's largest nations and the carrier of a unique culture of global significance is confronted with internal problems and external challenges. The international factors were discussed in three previous reports at our section, so

I will focus only on some of Russia's problems of an internal nature and on suggestions for solving them.

In addition to a territory with protected borders and resources, a constitution, and government institutions, the legitimacy and sovereignty of a state are provided by the following:

- a population that has developed and uses the space of its country and has a scientifically established demographic and cultural image and well-defined social conditions of life;
- historical and cultural values shared by citizens of a given state, and the identity based on them, which nurtures the feeling of belonging to the country of birth;
- effective management of the society based on understanding its cultural complexity and the ability of government and society to come to an agreement and stimulate development, including through scientific expertise.

Today, the problem of Russia's self-comprehension, in other words, the Russian national identity is an object of thorough and intensive study. If there is no common identity, there is no country, and each new generation asks what Russia is, what it means to be a Russian, and what connects a citizen with his country. Answers to these questions are not inherited and are not reproduced mechanically, and science is directly involved in their development. Some elements of national identity are transmitted through the family

[#] RAS Academician Valerii Aleksandrovich Tishkov is Academician-Secretary of the RAS Division of Historical and Philological Sciences.

tradition, through the human environment, both social and natural. However, both family and, especially, school education involves the use of textbooks written by scholars or based on modern scientific knowledge and the surrounding environment is filled with meanings elaborated with the participation of various specialists, primarily historians, archeologists, and linguists. The scientists help people to explain and preserve traditions and cultural values since not everything is retained and handed down through oral memory.

Preserving and reproducing the cultural capital of the nation is a mission that requires cooperation between science and the state because without science-based elaboration of the decision-making process, any policy is a poor policy and irresponsible improvisation. There is also a kind of social order given by society itself as people need adequate and relevant versions of the past, which can only be obtained through the activities of professionals. The well-being in the life of the most ordinary person is based on the ideas developed by science about the world and about the place in this world occupied by one's homeland. By formulating such seemingly abstract concepts as a national idea or the answer to the question "what is Russia?", scientists help people to develop and render meaningful life goals and values of the nation and participate in the elaboration of the country's development strategies.

As an example, let us consider the problem of defining one of the fundamental categories for national identity, the "Russian people." This category, abolished in 1917 after the word "Russia" had been removed from the name of the country, after 1991 seems to have returned to our national history. However, this return was not just difficult, some still uphold the viewpoint that there is no such group, that the term "Rossiyane ("citizens of Russia" rather than ethnic Russians) was invented by B.N. Yeltsin. Historians, demographers, sociologists, ethnologists, and other scholars engaged in humanities over the past quarter of a century have created an updated version of our past, revealing the continuity of the historical process and the significance of great and dramatic events for the national memory, including the Great Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Patriotic War of 1941–1945.

Researchers of the Russian Academy of Sciences have made an important contribution to the preparation and conduct of the All-Russia population censuses of 2002 and 2010, which resulted in establishing the number of Russians, their demographic pattern, including settlement throughout our vast territory, ethnic composition, language skills, and the results of migration processes over the past 30 years. The assertion that the demographic crisis did not imply the extinction of Russia, earlier fiercely contested by numerous experts and politicians, was definitely con-

firmed. We also found that, despite the large volume of immigration after 1991, the ethnic structure of the Russian population is quite stable and the Russians (especially after the accession of Crimea to Russia) continue to make up a stable 80% of the population although their total number is decreasing along with the entire population of the country.

It follows from the above that the priority discussed in our section cannot possibly be implemented without conducting basic research in the humanities, especially studies devoted to the formation of the Russian nation and the ethno-cultural development of the peoples in Russia. We propose to organize support for such investigations. In the coming years, it is necessary to implement fundamental projects for the creation of the academic "History of Russia" and for publishing acts of Russian statehood, and this requires retaining an adequate training level for the proper number of professional historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, and ethnologists.

It is necessary to continue the joint efforts of the Russian Academy of Sciences with Rosstat and the Ministry of Economic Development of Russia on preparing spatial and demographic development strategies as well as with the Federal Agency for Nationality Affairs on implementing the Strategy for the State National Policy of the Russian Federation up to 2025 and drawing up a number of federal draft laws, primarily legislative acts on archaeological and ethnological expertise, preservation, and protection of the historical and cultural environment. Therefore, we deem it necessary more actively to involve in this work institutions of the Russian Academy of Sciences and, in pursuance of the Federal Law on the Russian Academy of Sciences, introduce a statutory requirement for providing academic review and approval of strategic development documents, rather than limiting preparatory assessment by the expertise conducted by the Higher School of Economics and the Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration under the President of the Russian Federation. The country will only benefit from this, as was the case, for example, when the Scientific Council of the RAS on complex problems of ethnicity and interethnic relations was involved with the work on a new version of the Strategy for the State National Policy of the Russian Federation, the content of which was significantly updated and improved. Similar work should be carried out for the program of the all-Russia population census of 2020 and the program of socio-economic and cultural development of Russia.

Over recent years, a sustained effort has been made in the field of studying, preserving, and using the historical and cultural heritage of the Russian people by both the leading institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences and research teams of regional and republican institutions of the RAS. It should be understood that, although historical and cultural studies are also

carried out by university science and the amount of grants allocated to university workers by the Russian Science Foundation (RSF) and the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR) has already surpassed the support to the relevant research teams of the Academy, fundamental projects cannot be implemented by overworked and dissociated university and college professors. The implementation of such projects is only within the powers of large research teams usually dealing with the relevant investigations over many years. This is evidenced, in particular, by the list of Russian scholars engaged in the humanities who have received state awards over the past 20 years.

Projects of this kind include compiling the corpus of the Russian language and other languages of the peoples in the Russian Federation, comprehensive academic dictionaries and encyclopedias; preparation and publishing collected works of classical Russian writers; preparation of multivolume editions of world and national history; and publications of state acts and other historical sources. In working out a strategy for supporting the national humanities, the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation should focus on large projects and basic research programs that can unite institutions of the Academy (and this does not require their merging into mega-structures) and involve university researchers in this work.

The race for large numbers of semi-finished articles cannot replace fundamental developments, much less can it enrich science with new knowledge and, consequently, international recognition. For Russian scholars in the humanities, the priority language of science should be Russian not English, and the translation and promotion of Russian achievements in the outside world can be provided by special groups and institutions such as the Institute of Scientific Information for Social Sciences (INION). The Ministry of Education and Science of Russia should revise the performance indicators for scientists and research teams in this segment of domestic science.

Attention should especially be drawn to the scientific support (or, rather, follow-up) of major infrastructure development projects involving massive housing construction, setting up large-scale facilities and developing transport communications. Scientists cannot neglect the possible repetition of the “Kalyazin bell tower” disaster when thousands of settlements and monuments of architecture and countless archaeological materials were flooded and forever ruined as a result of the construction of hydropower stations in the Soviet Union. Recently, landowners and corporative construction monsters succeeded in attaining the adoption of an amendment to the Town Planning Code of the Russian Federation, which cancels the mandatory archaeological survey of sites intended for construction or flooding and obtaining the RAS approval of construction works. Now the Ministry of

Culture of Russia should determine prospective and unpromising territories for archaeological surveys throughout Russia. This task is impossible and even absurd, for it is clear that, for example, on the territory of Moscow and Moscow oblast, monuments of national history can be found practically everywhere. But these lands are now in private hands and have already been planned for indiscriminate construction development. The idea of the natural and historical park “Muskovya” in the area from Uspenskoye to Zvenigorod was rejected, and Zvenigorod has become a part of the town Odintsovo, which will result in the disappearance of the ancient Russian town founded in 1152.

Before we have disfigured our country, including its cultural heart and cradle of Russian statehood, we must urgently correct the erroneous policy of spatial development and update and tighten the standards for the preservation of natural as well as historical and cultural landscape. The Russian Academy of Sciences represented by the Department of Historical and Philological Sciences is ready to join these efforts together with the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Natural Resources, and the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation. There are recent positive examples, such as urgent work carried out by archaeologists in the Moscow Kremlin during dismantling of the administrative building; exploratory excavations in the construction area of the Crimean Bridge, which provided valuable findings; survey of the upper reaches of the Moskva River in the area of Nikolina Gora—Zvenigorod, which so far has not been taken into account by the authorities of the capital and Moscow oblast in their highly controversial plans for construction development in this zone (the so-called new Moscow).

The next fundamental question is connected with study of the interethnic relations and ethno-cultural policy, including language policy. The situation in the country is generally positive, especially after the accession of Crimea and the successful holding of world-level competitions—the Olympic Games in Sochi and the FIFA World Cup. However, the country’s large territory and complex structure necessitates constant monitoring of ethnic and religious life and scientific study of relevant problems. Investigations are required into both the traditional culture of the Russian people, the Russian language, Russian literature, and the cultures and languages of other Russian peoples. Moreover, the subject of scientific interest should include not only Russian, but also other world cultural landscapes of different peoples. There are glorious achievements of the Russian Academy, which by its 300th anniversary should be specially noted to pay tribute to those Russian Columbuses who discovered and developed new areas and gathered unique scientific materials and museum collections and provided the relevant descriptions.

Russian ethnocultural diversity is successfully studied in the centers of the branches of the Russian Academy. The Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation should support these research teams, thereby protecting them from being taken over by local teams engaged in research in the field of natural sciences. A stable association with the Russian Academy of Sciences secures the proper level of on-site research and is an effective antidote to isolationism and peripheral nationalism. The cooperation of scientists from the Russian regions is one of the components of ensuring the unity of the Russian nation.

The priority research subject for the central institutions of the Russian Academy of Sciences is to develop the concept of the Russian identity. Recently, extensive studies on this issue have been carried out by sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, and ethnologists. The definitive conclusion that can be drawn from their findings is that the old Soviet and regional-ethnic identities are being replaced by the prioritized all-Russian self-identity; i.e., when people are to choose their identity from a set of possible identities, their first choice is "I am a citizen of Russia ("Rossiyanin"). In some regions (republics), ethnicity may prevail over the nationwide identity but nowhere in this country is it explicitly rejected or denied. In this regard, academic science faces a whole range of problems: how to render meaningful and update this complex process of building up the feeling of belonging to Russia, how to combine images of a home and homeland, what foundations are to be laid in the patriotic education of citizens, what aspects of a spiritual and moral basis are to be retained and is there anything new to offer to meet the spiritual needs and feelings of the new generations of Russians?

In solving these problems today, much is left to the mercy of commercial interests (we advertise that which will be bought), ideological, opportunistic approaches (that which brings short-term political profit or is in line with lower mythologies is true). Scientific knowledge in mass consumption is replaced by

the providential and esoteric interpretations of the spiritual and moral side of Russian life. Some influential organizations in government structures as well as political and faith-based institutions come up with projects for reorganizing Russia, which have nothing to do with science and often even belie common sense.

Intellectual isolationism and arrogance have always been alien to academic science. Even in Soviet times, there was an exchange of information and international scientific cooperation in the field of social studies. Currently, they are developing only through initiatives of individuals and some grant programs. The new cold war and Russophobia impede the normal activities of humanities scholars. The time has come for propaganda regulations, and violent ideological and political clashes, and media indoctrination. These troubled waters inevitably breed antiscientific versions of the past and the present, falsification, and scandalous revision of the assessments established in science, let alone serious challenges from foreign revisions of Russian history, the analysis of which requires a separate report.

In the current situation, we propose to compile an inventory of the ideological and semantic bundle of domestic studies of Russia and to develop a scientific concept of the Russian national project as a nation-state with its own history and own national interests, which is at the same time part of the world, above all European, civilization and developing according to laws common to many other countries and societies. Isolationism and falling out of global development trends may cost us dearly, and science will be partially responsible for this. Scientists bear significant responsibility for the competence level of both the ruling elite and the population as a whole, for their attitudes, and for bringing up the next young generation of responsible citizens.

Translated by I. Pertsovskaya