



Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation

Major trends of inter-ethnic relations in the Russian Federation in 2012: vision of civil society

The Russian Federation is one of the largest multiethnic states, where the majority of 182 ethnicities originates from its territory and plays an important role in the nation-building process. The great majority of Russian regions are multiethnic, which is especially evident in metropolitan cities.

In Russia, migration of population has been always very intensive. In recent years, this horizontal mobility of population was sharply increasing and straightly tends to grow further. On the background of unstable socio-economic development, negative demographic changes (except for the South of Russia) and continuing search for civic and ethnic identity, this growth became the main reason of escalated interethnic confrontation in 2012. By WCIOM, 32% respondents assessed interethnic relations in our country as having become more intolerant and strained over the past year. The number of those who expressed an opposite opinion was two times less (16% only).

In 2012, the crimes based on interethnic hatred were coupled with vandalism with respect to objects of Orthodox faith and assaults on religious leaders. In the second half of 2012, Islamic leaders were murdered in Dagestan and Tatarstan, several tens Orthodox facilities were destroyed in Arkhangelskaya, Kalinigradskaya, Pskovskaya, Sverdlovskaya, Chelyabinskaya and other Oblasts, with a number of other confessions' premises having suffered from vandals as well.

Historically, the social basis of nationalism is assumed to comprise small groups of young people tending to street offenses with respect to ethnic minorities, immigrants, and foreign citizens. This type of behavior is especially typical for football fans who often exhibit and initiate nationalistic confrontations. It is through their fault that football became a scene inciting hatred between ethnic and regional groups. This fact admits no delay in being addressed with appropriate measures.

In general, the growth of xenophobia is seen in various social groups, particularly in large cities and among people with university degrees. Their phobias are directed mostly against immigrants from Caucasus and Central Asia, and motivated by "irreducible" cultural differences.

Another significant change is seen in relation of people with nationalist views to liberalism. Former nationalists were adhered to rigid slogans against Western and liberal ideas, while now expressions of nationalism and especially phobias against religious identity become the same typical for liberal pro-Western groups. Opposition to current authorities is the only thing in what they akin.

Although nationalism as an organized movement does not play any significant role (recent joint actions of nationalists - the so-called Russian Marsh - gathered just about several thousand

people in Moscow), this movement is quite widely supported by various classes of people and contributes its share to shaping mass attitudes. It should be acknowledged that the society has been already infected by the virus of nationalism. During the current year, motivation of interethnic conflicts was getting an increasingly “culturological” tone. A couple years ago, their motivation was limited to economic reasons: immigrants from North Caucasus etc. were believed to take up jobs that otherwise would be available for native people. Today almost no one would object to the fact that nonresidents take jobs which local people would never seek. Intolerance of strangers is based primarily on different appearance and behavior of other ethnic groups, poor knowledge of Russian, unusual clothes, different culture and traditions. These negative attitudes and stereotypes are often fueled by “their bad manners”. Most of Moscow citizens criticize such behavior and explain it (according to WCIOM) by “impunity and total permissiveness” (27%), “insolence” (11%), “temper and traditions” (9%). 55% respondents consider sanctions applied by police to offenders “not harsh enough”.

In 2012, expressions of migrant-phobia and nationalism appeared closely interwoven with street rallies in which various directions and orientations of nationalist movement have played their part, including by supplying a large number of protesters. Nationalist leaders were drawing much attention to themselves during meetings and rallies, trying to attract supporters and gain political dividends. Organizations of nationalist nature were positioning themselves as part of democratic opposition and even tried to establish contacts with liberal activists.

Trying to make use of the liberalized legislation on political parties, some nationalist leaders attempted to create such parties and their regional divisions. They build their ideologies on ethnic factor as an instrument of escalating phobias, manipulating the public consciousness, instigating the interethnic hatred. The first nationalist parties have been already formally registered with the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation and conducted their campaigns though inconsiderable in number. The nationalist phraseology and program statements are intensely used by other parties, including those represented in the parliament, some nominees to office of President, and acting regional leaders. The nationalism increasingly outgrows the limits of marginal phenomenon and becomes a factor of attraction for electorate.

In 2012, the law enforcement authorities were not the only force to actively counteract offenses on interethnic grounds. The issues of interethnic relations were paid much attention both by executive and legislative systems that were developing a package of measures to improve prevention of interethnic conflicts and avoid national and religious extremism. President Putin devoted one of his pre-election papers to migration policy and interethnic cooperation. His proposals concerning stiffening of migration laws, registration procedures and sanctions for non-compliance (up to imposition of criminal liability) met the strongest public support (75%, by WCIOM). Some of ideas expressed in that pre-election article were later reduced to practice. Measures intended to facilitate cultural integration of immigrants included mandatory examinations in Russian language, Russian history, and in the framework legislation governing the employment of immigrants in the Russian Federation.

During the whole year, the issues of state national policy remained included in agendas both of the President and the Government. In May 2012, the President of the Russian Federation has signed a Decree “On Provision of Interethnic Consensus” and created the Council for Interethnic Relations under the RF President, designed to facilitate cooperation between power authorities, public organizations, and research institutions in addressing issues connected with implementation of the state national policy. The Council has developed a draft Strategy of

Interethnic Policy in the Russian Federation that was broadly discussed by people and civil society institutions.

Lacking the proper assertion of the Russian national civil identity, development of strong interethnic cooperation and sustainable social and legal grounds presuming the equality of all peoples and cultures, where social mobility is based on common civil identity, it would be impossible to reach consensus between various ethnic groups and enduring integrity of the country.

The national policy should assume that the nation is made of citizens rather than “population”, which implies that development of the single Russian nation will require provision of opportunities for broad involvement of citizens in social and political life, system of civic watch and decision-making process in response to all urgent issues. Such involvement is an indispensable condition for wide public movement “in favor of the Russian civic nation”.

This topic was discussed by onsite meeting of Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation held on 12 September 2012 in Makhachkala, capital of the Republic of Dagestan. The development of civic nation based on common fundamental values and consensus about the prospects of Russia will help to combine efforts of society and the government in ensuring tough counteraction against attempts to incite interethnic and religious conflicts. It is only the coherent civic nation that may be an agent of successful state-building process and the integrating driving force of social development, and provide the foundation for ongoing governmental and political performance of multinational country. This actor should be able to decisively defend the values common to all Russian people, while deeply and heartily respecting the historical, cultural, and religious traditions.

Participants of the meeting supported the establishment of public movement “For the Civic Nation”, since the process of civic nation’s development will require wide public adherence in order to be converted into vital aspirations of active and responsible citizens. Such initiative may not be imposed from above but should originate from the civil society¹.

The coherence of the nation may not be realized without growing internal mobility of people which would require, in turn, the reduction of transportation prices and establishment of legal rent market. Children and youth will need target programs of practical learning about various regions of Russia as part of their secondary education. Mentoring in civic issues must be addressed primarily to young people, with the most important role to be played by culture, cinema, and mass media.

The sovereign development of Russia and establishment of Russian nation as a social infrastructure should correlate with fast growing integration processes in the Eurasian space. Russia is to become a center of attraction for its neighbors there. In such circumstances, the Russian nation, first of all, should be based on values widely shared by its citizens and, second, be a flexible system ready to absorb new cultural, ethnic and political elements subject always to acceptance of these fundamental values.

¹ See <http://www.oprf.ru/press/news/2012/newsitem/18925>