THE PROBLEM OF DIVIDED ETHNONATIONAL GROUPS IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA AND POLAND

The thesis that the problem of divided ethnonational groups should be resolved is widely distributed in contemporary information space. In Russian political discourse we often hear about the necessity to unify the “divided Russian people.” While many of the unification supporters sustain the so-called “German” variant, implying integration of divided groups home-territory, there are also those who accept a “soft variant” of the problem solution. They offer the so-called «Russian Card» (*Karta Russkogo*), as an equivalent to the «Polish Card» (*Karta Polaka*). But the contemporary Russian government clearly understands that it is impossible to tread in Poland’s steps and limit the group of potentially supported compatriots to people of the same ethnic origin. And it is wrong to reduce the group of Russian-speaking compatriots in the post-Soviet area only to ethnic Russians.

«Pole’s Card» («Polish Charter», «Polish Card») is a document established by an act of the Polish parliament, dated 7 September 2007, called the Act on the Pole’s Card (*Ustawa o Karcie Polaka*, Dz.U. 2007 no. 180/1280; see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karta_Polaka). It may be given to individuals who cannot obtain dual citizenship in their own countries while belonging to the Polish nation according to law. *Karta Polaka* can be granted to people who do not have Polish citizenship or permission to reside in Poland, and who are citizens of the former Soviet Union states. *Karta Polaka* can be granted to a person who declares belonging to “the Polish Nation” and meets the following conditions:

- proves his/her relationship with Poland by at least a basic knowledge of the Polish language, which is

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considered their native language, along with knowledge and cultivating Polish traditions and habits;

- in the presence of the consul of the Republic of Poland or an authorized employee of *Polonia* organization submits a written declaration of belonging to “the Polish Nation”;
- proves that at least one of his/her parents or grandparents or two great grandparents were of Polish nationality or had Polish citizenship, or presents an attestation from a Polish or Polish diaspora organization acting on the territory of one of the above mentioned states, confirming that he or she has been actively involved in Polish language and cultural activities within Polish community of their region for a period of at least the past three years.

A holder of the *Karta Polaka* has the right to:

- exemption from the obligation to have a work permit for foreigners;
- set up a company on the same basis as a citizen of Poland;
- study, do a doctorate and participate in the other forms of education, as well as participate in research and development work. The holder retains the right to apply for scholarships and other forms of aid for foreigners;
- preschool, primary and secondary education in Poland;
- use of health care services in the states of emergency;
- 37% discount on public transport omnibus, flier and express rail travel, free admission to state museums.

As Lech Kaczyński said about *Karta Polaka*, “a lot of countrymen outside the homeland for a long time were unable not only to use the Polish language, but also attend the chapels and churches” (Lech Kaczyński. *Karta Polaka. Nowe uprawnienia dla Polaków na Wschodzie*, p. 1. Oficjalny portal promocyjny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2007).

Although the possibility to be granted the «Polish Card» is also given to descendants of Polish citizens, this group is smaller than one of ethnic Poles and their descendants. Such an interpretation also seems genuine because of the predominant mono-ethnicity of the Polish population (in accordance with the Polish census of 2002, 96% of the surveyed declared Polish ethnicity).

In turn, the present Russian government clearly understands that reducing Russian-speaking compatriots in the post-Soviet area only to ethnic Russians is unjustified. The reason of such discrepancy lies in the civil identity specificity of the contemporary citizens of the Russian Federation. In June 2008, the idea was proposed of implementing the «Russian Card» – a document that should allow compatriots who live outside the Russian Federation to have the same rights and freedoms in the cultural and economic spheres as the citizens of the Russian Federation.

A holder of the *Karta Russkogo* has the right to:

- receive multiple visa to visit Russia;
- preferences in acquisition of RF citizenship;
- work in Russia without the permission to work;
- receive education in Russia on an equal basis with Russian citizens.

There is no exact understanding of the target-group features – the drafters of the «Russian Card» concept emphasize that it can be obtained not only by ethnic Russians, but also by those who consider the Russian language a mother tongue and Russian culture as native, who see Russia as their homeland.¹ Many agree with the approach that it

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¹ Russian Card, *Foundation «Russians»*, available at: <http://russkie-fond.ru/work/karta/> (accessed 18 September 2010).

is wrong to reduce all those who seek to maintain ties with Russia to Russians (*Russkie* not *Rossiyane*). Some believe that within the scope of such an approach “ethnic Russians... are pushed to the periphery” and, consequently, “Russian civilization as the core constructs of the Russian state plays the role of a «seasoning-slogan.”² Others, like N.P. Kosmarskaya, consider “«Russian» (*Russkie*) «a kind of code name that is used to denote the entire set of ethnic groups who at different periods were conductors of imperial policy.”³ Considered as carriers of identity can be not only ethnic Russians, but also any members of the Russian-speaking community, or rather, the representatives of “European” ethnic groups, united by common historical destiny and the roles they played in the ethnic and cultural contacts with the titular groups. According to V. Tolts, a significant number of experts consider the Russian and Russian-speaking population of the former Soviet republics as a divided nation, including not only Russian, but also alien ethnic groups for whom this (Russian) social, cultural and linguistic environment is a vital form of existence.⁴

To demonstrate the number of the Russians who live abroad, we traditionally use the data of All-Union census of 1989: 25 million people who lived outside the RSFSR identified themselves as Russians (*Russkie*).⁵ Accordingly, these 25 million automatically considered as Russians (*Russkie*), remained outside Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But such an interpretation seems incorrect, mainly because of its formality – this indicator shows rather the number of «Russians» by passport, reporting in the census their formal passport nationality, and does not represent the actual number of those “loyal to the Russian identity.” Another question is that among the 25 million “formally Russians” were the ones who, according to the opinion of the Institute of the Russian Diaspora’ Director S. Panteleyev, felt they were involved into Russian culture and Russian traditions, Russian history, the Russian state, not being Russians “by blood” (especially in consideration of the prevalence of interethnic marriages in the Soviet Union).⁶ However, it is difficult to identify the exact number of such “conscious Russians” who found themselves in 1991 outside the zone of residence of its majority. Moreover, it is wrong to “mechanically” consider those who lived in 1989 outside RSFSR and identified themselves as Russians to be loyal to modern Russia. Besides, P. Kolsto tells us that it is impossible to generally qualify Russian-speaking and Russia-oriented population of the former Soviet republics as the “Russian” (*Russkie*) in the restricted ethnic sense.⁷ He argues that there are several groups that nominally can be called “Russians”:

1. The inhabitants of the former Soviet republics, who are Russians formally (by documents) and culturally, but do not feel the ideological affinity with the “Russians of Russia.”
2. Formally Russian, but integrating minority. They may have the civic identity of new post-Soviet states, but at the same time preserve its «Russian cultural identity», e.g. the

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² P. Kuzmenko, «Map of Russian and the Russian abroad: the assimilation process and a population of the «Russian-Turkish passport-holders» as its outcome», *Russians in Kazakhstan*, available at: <http://www.russians.kz/russians/994372-karta-russkogo-i-russkoe-zarubezhe.html> (accessed 18 September 2010).

³ N.P. Kosmarskaya, *Children of the empire in post-Soviet Central Asia: adaptive practices and mental changes* (Russian in Kyrgyzstan, 1992-2002). Moscow: Natalis, 2006, p. 406.

⁴ V. Tolz, Forging the Nation: National Identity and Nation – Building in Post-Communist Russia // *Europe-Asia Studies*. 1998. No. 6. Vol. 50, p. 995-996.

⁵ «All Union Population Census 1989. National composition of population in the republics of the USSR», Demoscope.ru, available at: http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_89.php (accessed 18 September 2010).

⁶ S.Y. Panteleyev, Russians in Russia and abroad: one nation, different fates? // *Russian identity in post-Soviet space*, ed. S.Y. Panteleyev. M: Inforos, 2008, p. 9.

⁷ P. Kolsto, The New Russian Diaspora – An Identity of Its Own? Possible Identity Trajectories for Russians in the Former Soviet Republics // *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 1996. Vol. 19. No. p. 608-639, available at: <http://folk.uio.no/palk/identity.htm> (accessed 18 September 2010).

Swedes in Finland, the Germans of Alsace and Southern Denmark, Danes in northern Germany.

3. "Syndrome of Transnistria." A group oriented on the Russian culture and history but seeking to create a new independent state because of its cultural-historical peculiarity.

4. The adoption of the dominant culture of the State where they live or of assimilation. The main indicator of assimilation is a change of the mother-tongue.

5. Supporters of irredentism, who refuse to accept the new civic identity of the nationalizing state they live in. They are oriented on Soviet values. A territorial symbol of their identity is Russia.

Some researchers believe that the "Russian identity" of each of these groups is very peculiar, and it is erroneous to define them as a single community. In particular, P. Kolsto wrote that over a long period the Russian-speaking population of Soviet republics (except the RSFSR) existed as a "regional" special and different from the "Russians of core," particularly, Russians in the Baltic states in the 1970s and Russians in Central Asia in the early 1990s, clearly distinguished themselves from the "Russians of mainland."

It should to be noted that mixed marriages between Russians and the habitants of Soviet Republic of the national republics were very common. According to the data from 1989, 11.8% of intermarriages between Russians and the titular majority in bulk of intermarriages in Central Asia in general.⁸ There were 24% of intermarriages in Kazakhstan, 22,9% – in Moldova, 32% – in the Baltic republics, 25,1-53,7% – in the Caucasus, 57-74,7% in Belarus and Ukraine. According to R. Brubaker, a lot of children from such marriages defined themselves as Russians, but nevertheless had the distinctive identity, different from the "Russians of nuclear."⁹ Besides, one should recall, "Russians" who live outside the Russian Federation, who differ from one another not only by their identity, but also by the level of their enthusiasm to maintain ties with the Russian Federation (their formal motherland).

It seems that the spread of broad understanding of the category «Russian» (*Russkie*) is determined by its gaining a civil sense during the Soviet period. During the Soviet period the category «Russian» turned into a synonym for the category "Soviet." Civic community in the Russian Empire and then in the Soviet Union was formed by ethnic Russian migration to the reclaimed area and by diffusion the cultural and ideological consciousness of the society, based on Russian culture. According to N. Melvin, Russian identity during the pre-Soviet period was maintained as the identity of the motor of colonization, after the 1917 Revolution, the Russian-Soviet culture was used as an ideological support for the regime, and not «containers» of the Russian ethnic consciousness. N. Melvin stresses that during the Soviet period such an attribute as "Russian" in comparison with other ethnic groups had a more symbolic value that was reflected in the tendency of defining themselves as Russians by children from miscegenation with one Russian parent.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, *Russkie* became the largest ethnic group only in one of the former Soviet republics (the Russian Federation). In a similar situation many Russian-speaking inhabitants of the former Soviet republics found themselves deprived of the possibility of integration into closed linguistic, social, political, cultural and value systems. N. Melvin designated groups that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Un-

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⁸ A. Pain, *The legacy of Strife: an outlook for inter-ethnic relations* // Vestnic. 1992, March.

⁹ R. Brubaker, "Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account," in *Theory and Society*, 1994, Vol. 23, No. 1, p. 47-78.

ion as a “Russified resettlement community.” Such groups are multinational, they are unified by a system of values that formed during the Soviet period.¹⁰

In some official documents (the text of the Presidential Decree № 1681 and the Parliamentary Declaration) “compatriots” were “those *who are not citizens* of the Russian Federation, but lived in Soviet Union and Russia, and their direct descendants, regardless of nationality and ethnicity, language, religion, place of residence and other circumstances. Still all of them *feel spiritual or cultural ties with the Russian Federation* or with any of its regions and confirm these ties.”

CONCLUSIONS

It seems that the collapse of the Soviet Union marked the division of the Soviet nation but aberration terms occurred in the socio-political space, when in fact multi-ethnic nations were attributed the characteristics of mono-ethnic Russian people. Such a divided nation cannot be classified as Russian because its «foreign» parts today are poorly integrated into the context of the existence of the contemporary Russian society, while its representatives are mostly united by Soviet myths and values. The gradual erosion of the system of Soviet identity attributes resulted in the fact that the Russian language became the only marker of identity.

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Summary

Both Russia and Poland – to varying degrees – tend to maintain ties with “compatriots” living abroad, but these two groups are distinct in their essence. Poles living outside Poland can be rather qualified as part/parts of divided people, whereas Russian-backed compatriots form a divided nation, and moreover, form not a divided nation of the Russian Federation, but a post-Soviet one.

The Government of the Russian Federation used to claim maintaining ties with “Russian compatriots” living abroad. The theme of rights of Russians living abroad is among the most popular ones in Russian media. The groups of Russian-speaking, who live in the former Soviet republics, have often been subjects or objects of conflict situations in the last 20 years because of their desire to live in accordance with their identity. But the essence of this group of so-called Russians, living on the post-Soviet sphere, is very complex. Russian-backed compatriots form not a divided people – in an ethnic sense – but a divided nation (a cultural or historical, non-ethnic group). And moreover, such groups form not a divided nation of Russian Federation, but a post-Soviet divided nation.

Keywords: Russia, Poland, diaspora, national identity

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¹⁰ N. Melvin, *Russians: Diaspora and the End of Empire // Nations Abroad: Diaspora and National Identity in the Former Soviet Union* / N.J. Melvin (ed.). Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998, p. 27-34.

PROBLEM PODZIELONYCH GRUP ETNICZNO-NARODOWYCH WE WSPÓŁCZESNEJ ROSJI I POLSCE

Streszczenie

Zarówno Rosja jak i Polska dążą, choć w niejednakowym stopniu, do zachowania więzi z rodakami zamieszkałymi poza granicami kraju, jednakże te dwie zbiorowości *de facto* są zupełnie od siebie odmienne. Polaków żyjących za granicą można zaliczyć do tej części ludności polskiej, którą określamy mianem Polonii, podczas gdy zamieszkali poza krajem Rosjanie stanowią podzielony naród i, co więcej, tworzą nie tyle diasporę narodową Federacji Rosyjskiej, ile postsowiecką. Rząd Federacji Rosyjskiej utrzymuje, że zależy mu na zachowaniu więzi z Rosjanami mieszkającymi za granicą. Temat praw Rosjan z zagranicy jest jedną z najbardziej popularnych pośród podejmowanych przez rosyjskie media kwestii. Rosyjskojęzyczna ludność żyjąca w byłych republikach Związku Sowieckiego była często w minionych 20 latach przedmiotem i podmiotem sytuacji konfliktowych spowodowanych tym, że wykazywała wolę, aby żyć w zgodzie ze swą tożsamością. Jednak z samej swej istoty charakter tej grupy ludzi, w Rosji nazywanych *Russkie*, zamieszkujących w przestrzeni postsowieckiej, jest nad wyraz skomplikowany i złożony. Osoby mające rosyjskie korzenie tworzą „naród podzielony” nie w sensie etnicznym, ale w znaczeniu nieetnicznej grupy kulturowej bądź historycznej stanowiącej narodową diasporę, którą należałoby uznać za postsowiecką.

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