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RUSSIAN SOCIETY IN THE SEARCH OF A NEW VISION OF ITSELF AND OTHERS: FROM THE „NATIONAL INFERIORITY COMPLEX” TO A NEW IDENTITY

■ INTRODUCTION

The work on this paper² was close to the end, when the Russian government, may be for the first time in history, published a list of **unfriendly countries**, naming the Czech Republic and the USA³.

That was the official position. What about rank-and-file Russians: whom do they regard friendly and unfriendly countries? Among a number of questions, put in our study, two were crucial: **who we are** and **who are they**?

The question, „**How do we see ourselves?**”, was of primary importance. Are „we” – Europeans, Asians or Eurasians? Are we civilized people or barbarians? Are we a great power or a „regional country with economy turned into pieces”, as Obama once said?

Who are „they” for „us”? Do they differ from us or are similar to us? Are they „alien” or „ours”, who can we regard as enemies, friends, competitors or allies? How does our concept of „them” change under the influence of a global transformation? We believe that the answers to the questions about „them” depend on our own identification. At the same time, we can understand ourselves only in comparison with others, looking at them as in the mirror.

Starting from the middle of 1980s and to the middle of 2010s the Russian society lived through a serious „complex of national inferiority”, when assessments of our own country were extremely low in people’s minds. Opinion leaders of that period suggested

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² This paper is a modified version of the following original article: *They and We. The Images of Russia and the World in Russians’ mind*, ed. by E. Shestopal on the basis of this project, is to be published soon in the publishing house ROSSPEN in Moscow.

³ <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202105140026> (referring to the source 18.08.2021).

that the Soviet time was a kind of a „black hole” in the country’s history and 70 years of the Soviet rule brought us nothing but a lag from a „civilized” world and that lag should be overtaken as soon as possible even at the cost of our sovereignty and national identity.

The majority of population saw our country as underdeveloped, backward, outdated from the middle of 1980s till 2014 (Shestopal 2012). In the official discourse the former Soviet values were not merely denied. Together with them traditional values of the Russian culture and history were put under question. They were replaced by some global values and aims of development, alien to the Russian society.

As it turned out we are not unique and identification split is not an exceptionally Russian feature. For instance Samuel Huntington, while studying the problem of the American identity, found contradictions between national and cosmopolitan, national and subnational identities in the contemporary USA (Huntington 2004: 20–33). These unsolved contradictions led to political, racial, gender and other splits of the American society which manifested themselves so explicitly in 2019–2021.

One more problem that was pointed out by Huntington and which we also noticed in our study – was the difference in national identity between rank-and-file citizens and representatives of elites, especially transnational elites who do not identify themselves, their corporative and personal interests with their state. Huntington had convincingly proved that this difference in one’s own country perception is not constant. This gap declines in the moments of serious threats to the country as it happened in the USA in September 11, 2001.

In Russia the sharp shift to a greater consolidation of citizens and elites happened under the influence of Crimean events. But the identity crisis in our country superimposed on a catastrophic destruction of our former identity during the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Reunification with Crimea and the subsequent string of Western sanctions against Russia have helped us to find an answer to the question: „who we are”? This question demands to analyze how representations of one’s own country, its enemies and friends, are formed. To what extent are they changeable? Is it possible for people to have a negative image of their own country? The answer to the question „who we are?” demanded of the Russian society to become aware of its own special way and its differences from the West as far as key aims and values are concerned.

The recent events quickly changed political reality and our representations of our country, the outside world and Russia’s place in it. Current perception of one’s own and other countries was a focus of our study „Country’s Image in Russian Society: Political and Psychological Analysis” that was held in 2017–2020. This article summarizes the results of this study⁴.

⁴ A book *They and We. The Images of Russia and the World in Russians’ mind*, ed. by E. Shestopal on the basis of this project, is to be published soon in the Publishing house ROSSPEN in Moscow.

■ THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE ANALYSIS OF THE COUNTRY PERCEPTION

We based ourselves on the three main approaches: **theory of political identity, political geography and theory of international relations**. Our conceptual model was built in the field of political psychology as we believe that it is impossible to evaluate adequately country images without taking into account psychological nature of perception.

Theory of political identity permits to see an image of one's own country in people's mentality as „a set of parameters for self-identification” (Семененко 2007: 5). This theory connects components of one's own country image with a particular social entity (country in our case). In 2000s some publications on the crisis of Russian identity helped to understand better the context of one's own country image formation (Дробижева 2017; Евгеньева, Селезнева 2017).

Theorists of **international relations and comparative politics** also enriched the country images studies. Their analysis of country images transformation are most relevant to the so called „growing states” (Li (Leah), Chitty 2009; Chaban, Elgström, Gulyaeva 2017; Браун 2018), including Russia.

The studies of country images in public opinion are fitting the most to our aim (Herrmann, Fischerkeller 1995: 425–428; Castano, Bonacossa, Gries 2016). So speaking about other country's images Richard Herrmann and Michael Fischerkeller distinguish in other country's image three components. The first permits to understand motivation in international policy of an opponent, the second gives an opportunity to make judgments of his potency and the third to understand the process of his decision-making. Their combination is reflected in the images of an „enemy”, „empire”, „degenerate”, „ally”, „colony”. In other sources this list is supplemented by an image of a „barbarian” (Herrmann et al 1997: 409) and „outcast” (Cottam et al 2004: 45).

Political geographers tackle Russia's image in Russian mentality first of all from the point of view of its territorial aspects avoiding discussion of psychological nature of the country perception (Колосов 2008).

Our conceptual model of one's own and other countries images is based on a political-psychological approach that study the country image as a complex in which both the contents of an image and its complicated psychological structure (both rational and unconscious) are taken into account (Бокова, Ван 2016).

■ CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF THE STUDY

In our analysis we assumed that an image of our respondents' own country includes unconscious elements (mainly emotional) together with rational ones. To reveal unconscious elements we needed a special methodology. In terms of contents we revealed and defined the significance of such components of a country image as:

- **territory**
- **power**
- **leader**
- **people**
- **country's role in the world.**

As the former studies have shown (Шестопал 2019: 44–72) there is a system of factors that influence formation of the country image: objective, subjective, spatial, temporal, communicative etc. Such a research model permits to receive an actual representation of how „we” see „ourselves” and „them”, what is the level of our similarity and differences. So, in a result of the study we should have the „picture” of the world of Russian citizens, that is formed in their mentality.

The methodology included the survey with a number of open-ended questions, focused interviews with a method of „unfinished sentences” and a method of a projective test (a picture of a country) and some other. Unconscious aspects of country images were fixed with a help of metaphors in verbal answers and symbols and plots in the visual tests and unfinished sentences. The interpretation was made by qualitative methods with elements of quantitative ones, in particular such methods as coding and scaling of answers to the open-ended questions as well as statistic analysis.

■ THE STUDY DESCRIPTION

Single parts of an empirical study were held in different years, since 2006 till 2020. Here we will refer to the data from the last stage of the study, from 2017 to 2020.

Sample. Respondents were selected from several regions of the country: Moscow, Bryansk, Samara, Smolensk, Tomsk, Chelyabinsk, republics of Bashkortostan, Dagestan, Crimea and Tyva. The sample exceeds 3000 respondents but at each stage the number of respondents was defined according the aims and standards of a qualitative study, that never puts an aim to reach representativeness contrary to the „hard” sociological study (Селезнева, Смулькина 2020: 209–236). Though the sample is not representative for the country in general, nevertheless it was balanced by age, gender and education. At the different stages of the study the sample differed not only by the number of respondents but also by the choice of territories depending on the purpose of a particular research. Thus the image of the neighboring countries was made in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Samara, Costroma, Rostov regions and in republics of Dagestan and Karachay-Cherkessia. The choice of the last two regions was determined by our aim to reveal the role of the territorial factor as these two regions are neighbors with Azerbaijan and Georgia. We found it important to have respondents both from the center of our country and from its outskirts. For instance for the study of Turkey’s image a survey was made in different regions and for Thailand’s image – respondents from Siberia were asked as they more often go there for vacations.

■ THE STUDY RESULTS

„We”. Russia’s Image in the Russian society

First of all we’ll look at the Russia’s image in Russians’ mentality under the angle of its **psychological qualities**. Today, in comparison with our data of 2000s, the image of our own country looks attractive, rather than unattractive. Respondents regard natural resources (61.5%), armed forces (50.1%), history (49.7%) and the Russian people (41.3%) as attractive, while negative evaluations concern economy and finance (80.2%). We have to remark specially their claims to the state (33.7%).

It turned out that respondents have not noticed all those positive changes and achievements that objectively took place in the country during last years. It can be interpreted as a manifestation of non-synchronicity of real processes in politics, economy and society on the one hand, and their perception by citizens on the other hand.

Russia’s strength and activity in international relations are the object **for pride** for respondents. They feel **shame** for the low level of life (especially among the older generation), social insecurity, high social stratification, underdevelopment of economy, industry, agriculture, science and education, corruption, the lack of respect of authorities to the people. 7% of respondents reported that they are not ashamed and cannot be ashamed for their country.

As mentioned before, **the contents of the country’s image** is connected with **territory, people, authority, leader and the country’s mission at the international arena**.

Territory. The majority of respondents recognize the current state boundaries of Russia. It looks quite normal, but in 1990s the situation was absolutely different. Then the majority still perceived new Russia’s territory in the limits of the former USSR and only less than the a half (40%) perceived it in its official boundaries (Шестопал 2000: 255 and 256).

We grouped our respondents into three types according to the size of the territory with which they identify themselves. So, 8% could be called **maximalists** as for them Russia has no limits, „(it) is limitless and endless”, „Russia is there, where the Russian language sounds, where one can find the Russian culture and morals”.

Another attitude toward country’s territory can be called a **minimalist** one. Minimalists would not mind to decrease our territory, give up from everything that seem excessive to them, like Chechnya. This group consists of only 4.1% of the sample. In 1990s this type was about 18%. Respondents fear the growth of separatism. Speaking about territories, that Russia can lose, they mention Siberia. We must note that now both maximalism and minimalism can be found much more rare than in the first post-Soviet years. They are replaced by **realists**: 66.9% of respondents believe that in the nearest future Russia will stay within its current limits.

Our study has shown that the territorial question is not significant for respondents. No formal, but psychological boundaries of the country's image mean much more to them.

People. We put the question „What qualities do Russian citizens obtain?“ to our respondents. The majority of traits were focused around unique qualities of unrepeatable Russian character, unknown „Russian soul“ and its potential. Positive personal qualities dominate (72%). Negative evaluations were fixed in 8.7% of answers. Even evidently negative laziness, relying on chance were explained by the need not to waste energy on trifles but save it for a spurt. It is important that the focus was made on moral (48.8%) and psychological traits (36.4%).

For the study of different identities we asked respondents to rank them. The common civic identity takes the first place (58.5%). Ethnic identity goes second (15%). Regional identity differs strongly according to the territories. Thus we can see progress in formation of the national state identity in comparison with the first post-Soviet decades.

The image of the Russian authorities. Our data show that the Russian authorities' image is completed, simple and well-shaped in citizens' mentality. Nearly a half of respondents tend to give them a negative evaluation (45.3%). The positive response Russian authorities evoke in 17.1%. And 7.2% of respondents give an ambivalent answer. This phenomenon is not new. During nearly all post-Soviet years we have fixed a negative coloration of power images in the „mass consciousness“ (Шестопал 2004, 2008, 2012, 2019).

A negative character of the power image looks even worse, if to take into account a low level of its **strength** (weakness of authorities was noticed by 39% of the sample) and by a high level of their **activity**, that is evaluated ambivalently (12% marked with plus and 18% marked with minus). According to respondents, authorities use the country's resources ineffectively.

Perception of the Russian elite as **mercenary**, not interested in rank-and-file people and not eager to listen to their demands is an important trait of the country's image. Authorities' corruption has the second rate in answers to the question „What makes me feel shame for my country“. It is interesting that authorities corruption was mentioned more often by respondents from regions which faced it personally (in Moscow only 6% gave this characteristic while in other regions this figure varied from 11% in Kerch to 32% in Dagestan).

Interrelations between authorities and society was in the center of people's attention also at the unconscious level of country's perception according to the results of the projective test. Authorities are regarded by respondents as an anonymous, faceless force. It is clearly seen on the Figure 1, where authorities are depicted as a dark cloud that covers the sun (people).

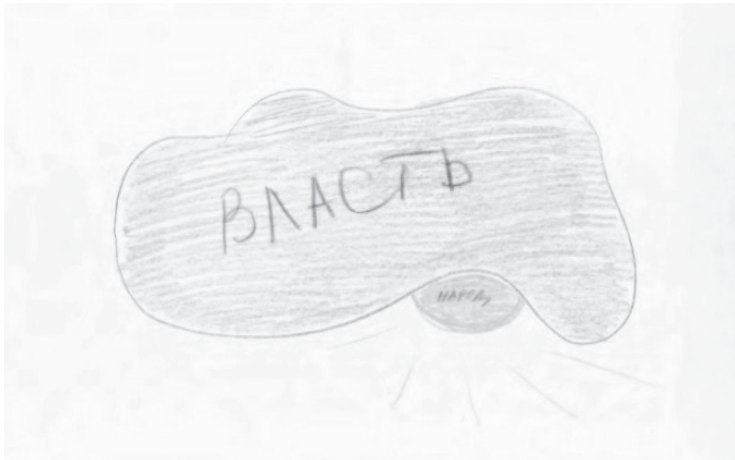


Figure 1. Authorities and people in Russia (A male, 28 years old, secondary education, Tyva)

The image of a leader and its place in a country's image. According to respondents' answers, the leader of the country has influence and trust. Trust is found much more rare than the capability to influence. Regional leaders were hardly mentioned among influential people except for the Mayor of Moscow, Sergey Sobyanin (5% in Moscow sample) and Akhmad Kadyrov (28% in Chechnya). In the capital more often than in regions people named opposition leader Alexei Navalny (though it did not add him trust). The significant number of respondents (no less than 20%) do not trust any acting politician.

Russia's mission in the international arena. Our data show that despite recognition of undeniable merits of the Russian state in international affairs in our mass mentality there is no clear and stable opinion concerning the place that our country should have in the world. Our respondents see the country's mission not in conquests and aggression, but in defending the weak and the suppressed, in bringing peace to other nations. Returning to „normality” our citizens connect with the role of a great power and definitely approve those actions of our authorities that return this status to their country.

„They”. Images of other countries in the consciousness of New Russia's citizens

Images of other countries, their mere „picture of the world” went through several serious turns and stresses during the last three decades. **In the first years after the collapse of the USSR** the core representations of this picture of the world were formed within the Soviet ideological system of coordinates.

The study of Boris Grushin *Four lives of Russia in the mirror of sociological polls* gives an idea of this picture of the world starting from 1960s. These data

witness that in Khrushchev's and Brezhnev's times Soviet citizens believed that their country is the best and they believed into it quite sincerely. More than this, their knowledge about other countries were cognitively rich though not free from some propagandist cliché (Грушин 2001).

The destruction of this logically slender picture of the world, in which „we” are good and „they” who oppose us – are enemies, dreaming to annihilate us, happened in the end of 1980s in the Perestroika period. Critical revision of the Soviet inheritance started at that years. Together with Marxist-Leninist ideology, our national identity was broken. It was replaced by values of „democracy”, „glasnost” and „human rights”.

The Soviet period of Russian history was labeled in the speeches of the so called „proraby perestroiki” (democratic leaders) as a „black hole” of history, as a norm violation. In many aspects the Russia's image as a country that was taken into a wrong direction by Bolsheviks, became a basis for that complex of national inferiority that was formed in that time. The formula: „we” are good, „they” are bad was replaced by formula „they” are good, „we” are bad. In that years „they” were perceived in an idealistic way.

During the first years after the fall of the „Iron Curtain” Russians started to travel abroad intensively and we influenced by the novelty effect. Openness was regarded as a main victory of democratization. Leaving behind the former ideological stereotypes and cliché, our citizens naively believed that the world will embrace us as brothers. We saw the world as friendly and ready for collaboration.

In 2000–2010s and mostly **after 2014** some sobering in regard to the other countries came. Facing the sanctions and threats, we have suddenly remembered that Russia has only two allies: the army and the fleet. In this period perception of not only the West, but also partners, neighbors, former allies, transformed substantially in our society.

To the current moment the majority of population evaluates the changing context of interrelation of Russia with our „partners”, who more and more are looking „competitors” and even open „enemies”, more adequately. We should be grateful to them for reminding us that in a geopolitical game all countries are playing for their own team, pursuing own national interests, and the game itself is not a give-away that first Gorbachev, than Yeltsin had played. At the same time the number of those who regard themselves patriots reached 82% on August 2020, according to the Foundation of Public Opinion (FOM)⁵. It means that the complex of inferiority goes away.

The „inferiority complex” that dominated for nearly three decades stays in a gap, though there are some groups in our society who still share this complex.

⁵ Fom.ru. September 2020, referring to the source on August 15, 2021.

Paradoxically this group includes more educated and cosmopolitan part of population. In this respect, it is interesting to look at the young respondents. On one hand, their view of their own country is determined by global networks that form the image of their country, „borrowed from outside”. On the other hand – this age group totally devoid of complexes about themselves except may be the superiority complex. They are ashamed of nothing while the older groups are still belittling themselves and their country.

As our analysis of other countries’ images in Russians’ mentality have shown, they have some unique features that are determined by the differences of „them” from „us” as well as something in common that can be explained by particular features of Russian mentality itself.

On the first sight ‘the map of outer world in Russians’ mind looks chaotic and mosaic. But if to look closer, one can find in these images a particular system, according to which respondents attribute some category to each country. The mere set of these categories differ from each other according to emotional closeness of a country to the scale „friend-enemy”, the degree of attractiveness, strength and activity and some other criteria.

Thus 6.8% of respondents noted that Russia has no friends in the world. The USA leads in the list of **enemies** by a wide margin. Tense relationship Russia has with Ukraine, Great Britain, Germany, Poland, Turkey, France and NATO. The list of **friendly** countries includes China, Belarussia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Cuba, Syria, Serbia. An **ambivalent** position is attributed to Japan, Turkey, France as these countries equally often are regarded as friends and as enemies.

We often met doubts in sincerity of friends towards Russia, that is connected with a principle impossibility of friendship in international relations. Respondents do not idealize world politics and admit contradictory national interests in each country. In this case they use a concept of „ally” rather than a „friend”. Respondents also mention an inclination of some countries to be friends **according to circumstances**.

The idea of the absence of friends and inclination to see enemies everywhere more often was met in the answers of Moscow respondents who see the „country under siege”.

Neighbors from the former USSR

The first type of countries that were revealed in the Russians’ minds, were the neighboring countries, former republics of the USSR. As the Table 1 shows below the category of a neighbor is the most often characteristic of these countries. In our project they were represented by two Slavic countries (Ukraine and Belarussia), three Caucasus countries (Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan) and three countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kirghizia and Tajikistan).

Table 1. How could you describe the relation of country X to Russia?
(More than one answer was possible)

| | Georgia | Armenia | Azerbaijan | Ukraine | Belorussia | Tajikistan | Kazakhstan |
|--------------|---------|---------|------------|---------|------------|------------|------------|
| A friend | 2 | 62 | 30,2 | 10 | 82 | 24 | 60 |
| An enemy | 10 | 0 | 0 | 34 | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| A neighbor | 90 | 48 | 79,2 | 68 | 80 | 58 | 72 |
| A partner | 12 | 40 | 30,2 | 14 | 60 | 42 | 64 |
| A competitor | 0 | 0 | 3,8 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 2 |

These countries are designated in the Russian international doctrine as a key direction of our foreign policy (Russian Federation Foreign Policy Concept). Contrary to the official position of the Russian Foreign Ministry, our respondents perceive relations with these countries as less important for them personally and for the country in general. If on the rational level they admit their key role, at the unconscious level they do not believe in this to the end, assuming that USA, Europe and China are much more important to our country.

It is worse of saying that authoritarian political regimes of some of post-Soviet countries are regarded not as their weakness but rather as a competitive advantage. So, Kazakhstan and Belorussia look in their eyes as the most comfortable for living and wealthy post-Soviet countries and their regimes based on a personal rule are tackled as an important factor of their prosperity

We can fix here a quite ambivalent attitude to these countries that shows a transitory character of our relations with them: from the Soviet unity and „people’s friendship” we have already left and to the more formal relations with foreign countries have not yet arrived. Our study reveals that the Russian society during the last quarter of a century started to elaborate a new optics in respect of the closest neighbors. Some images are still under the Soviet stereotypes, but we should not overestimate them. Such feelings are stronger in the older age cohorts, as new generations do not have them. Age strongly influences the images of post-Soviet countries in Russian citizens due to the specificity of the socialization of each generation. Older respondents more often note that their relation to the post-Soviet countries have changed radically (25%). Respondents less than 30 years old have not changed their attitudes at all (62%). Middle-aged respondents are the most critical towards neighboring countries and they do not believe in the friendliness of post-Soviet countries to us.

Education also appeared to be a significant factor of a foreign country perception. People with a lower level of education give more emotional answers, their reactions are more critical and dependent of stereotypes, traditions and external pressure. This group of respondents does not rarely perceive post-Soviet countries as enemies (20% of respondents with uncompleted secondary education vs 7.6% of respondents with the high education).

„The former allies” (Latin America and Africa)

Russian citizens as earlier Soviet, include countries of Latin America in the list of the country's friends. However, they put them into the end of this list.

Thus, on the one hand, these countries are regarded as the former comrades to whom they preserve warm feelings (42%). On the other hand, the majority remember them with some effort.

We should note that positive images of Latin America have a **non-political character**, that differ them from the former Soviet cliché. The significant reason for including two continents into one category is... football that unites Argentina, Brazil and the leading African countries (Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Morocco and some other). Their teams many times won the World championship. Players from Argentina, Brazil and African countries belong to the leading world clubs and are known in Russia.

The images of this group of countries are also united by nostalgia for closer communication with people from these countries in the Soviet period.

Europe as a „Significant Other”

It is hard to overestimate the place of Europe in the Russian history and culture. Starting from the time of Peter the Great our national self-esteem has been always formed in comparison with Europe playing a role of a reference point. Psychologically this image can be described as a „Significant Other”.

The EU. Our study showed the significance of the political context of the EU perception that has declined permanently since 2014. In such a situation closeness of our cultural traditions, a respect to the European inheritance and a gratitude for the former support and allied relations that recently determined a positive attitude toward the European Union were replaced by the feeling of unreliability of this partner and even of its betrayal under the USA pressure.

EU image has a kind of mismatch. Its attractiveness is higher at the unconscious level that can be tackled as a rootedness of the more early stereotypes in mass mentality. But at the same time EU at the unconscious level is perceived as strong by a smaller number of respondents than at the rational level. They say that EU used to be strong but gradually weakens under the influence of the USA (Europe as „an old woman”).

As it concerns the contents of the EU image it is perceived as an economic rather than a political union. Respondents associate it not with industry or agriculture, but with financial institutions. Military force is practically invisible there.

Differences in perception of EU are the most salient between those respondents who have personal experience of visiting EU and those whose image of the Union was picked up from media. Contrary to our hypothesis, the image of EU was more positive among those who have never been to Europe.

Positive stereotypes formed by the Russian media appeared to be quite consistent. But these positive attitudes do not diminish alertness and mistrust and do not stop us from seeing the threat to our security by NATO approaching our borders and deploying a missile defense system.

Single European countries. Europe's image is not distinguished by a particular integrity. For us Europe is associated more with single countries than with the EU. A perception with this or that country is based exclusively on the current agenda. The most clear and cognitively rich images we have found in two European countries: Great Britain and Germany that were regarded as strong and influential. Even France not mentioning other countries of the region is rather perceived as a tourist destination than an actor in international relations.

An emotional sign in the images of the majority of European countries is positive. Mostly they are seen as partners and neighbors. Great Britain and Estonia are regarded as the most „hostile”, while Spain seems to be the most „friendly” among European countries.

„Strategic partners”: China and India

There are few countries related to the „friends” category. The concept, closest to this category that is used by respondents, is a „strategic partner”. It is attributed to two countries: China and India. But their perception has a basic difference. It is rooted in history of Russia's relations with these countries: i.e. cooling of China-Russia relations and improvement of Russia-India relations in the middle of the XX century.

Acknowledging China a geopolitical and a trade partner, Russians nevertheless fear the possibility of an armed clash or an expansion of China in the Far East near our borders. The limited civil dialogue and a low popularity of this country among tourists from Russia do not contribute to the elimination of stereotypes and better understanding of Chinese by Russians.

Russians elaborated quite a friendly attitude to the Indian state, while the people of this country seem to them distant and weird. Images of India and Indians in Russia are extremely stereotyped.

USA: „An enemy image”

The USA's image in Russia's citizens has a number of specific differences from other countries' images, both in psychological structure and in its meaning. Thus **psychologically** this image is characterized by the cognitive clarity and completeness. The emotional component of this image is ripe and clearly negative. The number of those who notice any positive features in the USA image does not exceed 16%. All three psychological indicators of attractiveness, strength and activity distinguish the USA image from other countries. It is extremely negative. At the same time strength and activity are very high.

The meaningful content of the USA image is also very specific. First of all, the political aspect in it is very salient in comparison with other components. This aspect is connected mainly to international conflicts and contradictions. The American state, authorities and leaders, the mission of this country in the international arena are perceived very negatively. The USA image manifests the „enemy image” in a full sense of the word.

A „tourist Mecca”: images of Turkey and Thailand

Two countries are united because of their high tourist attraction for Russian citizens. Thailand's image is cognitively quite poor: it is based on associations and stereotypes. For Turkey's perception historic intersections (especially Russian-Turkey wars), relative territorial closeness and some aspects of our bilateral collaboration are important factors as well as the experience of personal visits to this country by many people.

The Turkey's image can be hardly regarded as harmonic. There are many contradictions in it. For instance, Turks are described as friendly and complaisant, but at the same time as not sincere and deceiving. We have rather good economic relations (tourism, big projects in military industry, energetics), but the international policy of Turkey leaves a negative impression in our respondents. Though it does not stop them from visiting this country in moments of sharp aggravation of our relations.

We can see that hospitality industry and „soft power” in politics of these two countries influence their perception by Russian citizens. For many of them they became really a „tourist Mecca”. Their positive perception has fixed on the emotional level in spite of the fact that on the rational level respondents are aware of the dangers of visiting these paradises.

■ CONCLUSION

Summarizing our study let's turn to those problems that were revealed in it and demand the further examination.

The first of them concerns perspectives of overcoming of that identification crisis in which we miraculously stayed on the edge of the abyss, were able to unite

and started to return back to our „norm”. Of course in this process there were the steps back (post-Crimean syndrome) and new steps forward to a greater consolidation (Sochi Olympics and FIFA World Cup).

In spite of ensuing evident successes we can't say that the crisis is over. We still have to overcome the identification split between the majority of society and elites whose aims and values do not coincide. The „nationalization of elites” that started after 2014 is not completed. This evokes people's dissatisfaction and a feeling of injustice. The society and elites evaluate the meaning of foreign countries to Russia differently.

There is the second theoretical issue: we do not understand why our society uses two absolutely different systems of evaluation of „others”: territorially and psychologically closer countries and distant countries, partners and competitors, friends and enemies. A psychological paradox arises when close by values and interest partners and neighbours are evaluated as less significant to us than countries more distant territorially, psychologically and historically, and even more hostile to us.

The third issue demanding further research concerns paradoxical viewing by many, if not the majority, of foreign countries exclusively from the point of view of tourism and rest. Optics of our representations of other countries except only the USA is focused on nonpolitical interests and issues. **In the Soviet period**, the foreign world was regarded as a place where interests of different parties and movements clashed, where there were folk traditions and classic culture. **In 1990–2000s we knew that one can go abroad to work or study, make business or buy something.** Now, our respondents are considering other countries exclusively as a place for rest and journeys. This narrow representation of other countries and states is marked by a spiritual poverty that never was true to typify the Russian culture. This causes a deep concern.

Mostly this concerns „the tourist Mecca”: Turkey, Thailand, Egypt. But the same trend was fixed in perception of Czechia and France, Netherlands and Spain. One can try to explain this by a desire of Russian respondents to get a good service abroad for their money. But how can we explain a risk of our people who buy a ticket to Istanbul just after our ambassador's assassination and the death of the Russian pilot not saying of pandemic? Our people understand this threat rationally, but keep going there.

Starting our study we have suggested that together with the education and the Medea perception of other countries may be influenced by one more factor, that is a personal experience of visiting the other country, knowing the real people and practicing communication. This hypothesis only partly was proved to be true. Our study shows that three decades of free travelling around the world has not provided their picture of the world neither with the systemic character, nor with the cognitive clarity. Our respondents keep living in the world of stereotypes and clichés that simply changed their sign. It seems that personal experience is not enough to form such a picture of the foreign world that would encompass not only knowledge about it, but also a system of national interests and values. This demands a qualified information policy of the state.

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RUSSIAN SOCIETY IN THE SEARCH OF A NEW VISION OF ITSELF AND OTHERS: FROM THE “NATIONAL INFERIORITY COMPLEX” TO A NEW IDENTITY

The paper is based on the results of a study of Russian citizens' images of their own and foreign countries. Methodology included a survey with a number of open-ended questions, in-depth interviews, methods of cartography, semantic differentials and a projective test. The study has shown that such factors as an event context, cultural traditions, psychological conditions of Russian society and communication strongly influence country's perception. Our results have proved that Russians in general do not share territorial expansionism. Recognition of the Russian culture and the value system by others is more important for them. Though at the current moment national „inferiority complex”, widely spread in 1980–2000s, still manifests itself, a new tendency, based on the growth of a national pride that started in 2014, strongly influences social moods.

Our analysis of Russians' perception of other countries enabled us to distinguish categorization mechanisms used by our citizens. So the images of other countries include „neighbors” (post-Soviet countries), „strategic partners” (India and China), „forgotten allies” (Latin America and Africa), „significant «other»” (individual European countries and a less significant EU), „enemy image” (USA) and the „tourist Mecca” (Turkey and Thailand).

Keywords: political perception, country image, perception factors, identity, mental „world map”