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Ideological and Axiological Foundations of the National Identity of the Russian and Serbian Youth³

SUMMARY

The article attempts to identify the ideological and value bases of the national identities of Russian and Serbian youth, two Slavic countries with strong ties. The phenomenon of the national identity of modern Russian and Serbian youth is of particular interest to comprehend. These two countries experienced the transit of power and the transformation of collective self-images in the early 1990s and have a lot in common: cultural and linguistic ties; the experience of living in the Soviet political system; the collective trauma of the statehood collapse; and the following growth of nationalism. On the other hand, it is clear that many of those factors are changing. Thus, at the current stage, the common Slavic identity is losing its former ideological-theoretical and value-semantic content. The hypothesis of the study is that the ideas, meanings, and values that form the basis of the Slavic identity can become one of the factors in the consolidation of Russian and Serbian society, especially in the context of the formation of the national-state identity of modern youth. In addition, the dominants of public consciousness and value-semantic matrices

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identified in the research will make it possible to build a productive dialogue between our countries that have a similar civilizational code. This is relevant in the current situation of international tension, which will have long-term consequences.

Keywords: national identity, values, ideas, Russia, Serbia, youth, Slavs.

Идеолошке и аксиолошке основе националног идентитета руске и српске омладине

САЖЕТАК

Чланак покушава да идентификује идеолошке и вредносне основе националног идентитета руске и српске омладине - две словенске државе са снажним везама. Феномен националног идентитета модерне руске и српске омладине од посебног је интереса за разумевање. Ове две државе искусиле су процес транзиције и преобликовање колективне сопствене слике раних деведесетих година и имају доста заједничког: културне и језичке везе, искуство совјетског политичког система, колективну трауму колапса државности и пратеће снажење национализма. Са једне стране, многи од ових фактора очигледно се трансформишу. Стога тренутни заједнички словенски идентитет губи свој претходни идеолошко-теоретски и вредносно-семантички садржај. Хипотеза истраживања је да идеје, значења и вредности које чине основу словенског идентитета могу постати један од фактора консолидације руског и српског друштва, посебно у контексту стварања национално-државног идентитета модерне омладине. Додатно, доминанте јавне свести и вредносно-семантичке матрице идентификоване у истраживању ће омогућити изградњу продуктивног дијалога између наших држава које поседују сличан цивилизациони код. Ово је од значаја у тренутној ситуацији међународних тензија, које ће имати далекосежне последице.

Кључне речи: национални идентитет, вредности, идеје, Русија, Србија, омладина, Словени.

Disputes around Identity

The concept of “national identity” is, on the one hand, one of the most common and used categories both within political science and in broader socio-political discourse. However, on the other hand, discussions about its content are still a controversy surrounding the professional community, and it seems that the established constructivist ideas about the “nation”

and “national identity” are again becoming the objects of criticism by modern authors.⁴

All this makes researchers repeatedly address the category of “national identity”, choosing a new research optics for such an “elusive” subject.⁵

At the current stage of identity research, scientists are interested in questions related to the classification of identities, the analysis of their types (“political”, “regional”, “urban”, “social”, “local”, “ethnic”, “collective”, etc.), the consequences of conflicts based on identifications, and the possibility of “constructing” social identities and forming a broad (“national”) socio-political consensus based on common identifications (“civil nation” or “national identity”). And in this regard, it is important to note the Russian research project “Identity Research Network” (<http://identityworld.ru>), launched in 2009, which gathered a broad geography of experts and scientific schools. One of its outcomes was the preparation of a collection of articles titled “Identity as a Subject of Political Analysis”, in which the authors consider the methodology of identity analysis and the problems of its conceptualisation as well as generalising the results of research and achievements of domestic science in the study of the socio-cultural foundations of politics and types of “identity”.⁶

Conceptual developments by research experts within the network are being disseminated and continued in the framework of applied research on identification processes. Thus, under the guidance of the Doctor of Historical Sciences L.M. Drobizheva, the Centre for the Study of Interethnic Relations of the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences conducts large-scale representative surveys both in the Russian Federation as a whole and on the scale of individual regions in order to identify general trends and features in the formation of civil, ethnic, and regional identity.⁷

Around the mid-2000s, studies of “identity” were associated with political mobilisation, which was based on the politicisation of the topics of “ethnicity”, gender, religion, racial, and interethnic relations.⁸ However, in parallel, within the areas where state institutions and political governance are studied, an interest that pushes to establish the relationship between

⁴ See: Anthony Smith, *Ethno-symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach*, Routledge, New York, 2009.

⁵ Kirill Telin & Kirill Filimonov, “Identity Gaps: How and Why the Nation Eludes the State”, *Russian Sociological Review*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2020, 35–73.

⁶ Irina Semenenko (ed.), *Identity as a Subject of Political Analysis. Collection of articles on the results of the All-Russian scientific-theoretical conference*, IMEMO RAN, Moscow.

⁷ Leokadiya Drobizheva, “Russian Civil Identity in Scientific and Political Discussions and Public Opinion”, *Issues of National and Federal Relations*, vol. 4, no. 43, 2018, 324–336.

⁸ Olga Popova, “Development of Political Identity Research in Russian Political Science”, *Political Expertise: Politeks*, vol. 2, no. 1., 2013, 205–219.

governance and “identity” in theory and practice is being developed.⁹ In other words, the points of unity and stability of political communities organised within the framework of the state and other institutions are brought forward by experts, who further explain how this unity and stability can be ensured and what the basis of this unity is on the deep, political, and psychological levels.¹⁰

Currently, there are many works by foreign and native researchers devoted to the analysis of the state of society from various vantage points. Issues of internal cohesion, the level of social harmony, the presence of social and political consensus in it, and splits or divisions are noted in the works of R. Inglehart and K. Welzel, S. Lipset and S. Rokkan, A. Remmele, and F. Schmitter.¹¹ Native researchers focus mainly on dynamic changes in the direction of integration and consolidation or disintegration and differentiation.¹²

In foreign literature, the conceptual reconstruction of “identity” has also become widespread in connection with the problems of political communication, public administration, and the search for social cohesion.¹³

A more detailed analysis of political relations associated with the phenomena of “identity” and identifications, ethnicity, “nation”, and “national identity” can be found in the works of R. Brubaker and his

⁹ Valery Achkasov, “Identity Politics in the Modern World”, *Bulletin of St. Petersburg University, Series 6, Political Science, International Relations*, no. 4, 2013, 71–77.

¹⁰ Alexander Solovyov, “The State as a Policy Maker”, *Polis*, No. 2, 2016, 90–108; Irina Semenenko, “Identity Politics in the Context of Ethno-Cultural Diversity: A New Agenda”, in Irina Semenenko (ed), *Identity: Personality, Society, Politics, Encyclopaedic Edition*, Ves Mir Publishing House, Moscow, 2017, 102–112; Valery Tishkov, *Russian People: The History and Meaning of National Identity*, Nauka, Moscow, 2013; Olga Malinova, “Commemoration of Historical Events as Instrument of Symbolic Policy: Possibilities of Comparative Analysis”, *Politeia*, no. 4, 2017, 6–22.

¹¹ Ronald Inglehart & Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence*, New Publishing House, Moscow 2011; Seymour Lipset & Stein Rokkan, *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*, Free Press, New York, 1967; Andrea Remmele, “The Structure of Cleavages and Party Systems in Eastern and Central Europe”, *Political Science*, no. 4, 2004, 30–50; Philippe Schmitter, “Democratic Transits: Variants of the Ways and Uncertainty of the Results”, *Polis*, no. 3, 1999, 30–33.

¹² Valentina Fedotova, “Mechanisms of Value Changes in Society”, *Bulletin of the Russian Humanitarian Science Foundation*, no. 4, 2011, 56–65; Elena Brodovskaya, “Transformation of Value Orientations as a Factor of Democratic Transition in the Countries of the Post-Communist Space: An Experience of Theoretical Understanding”, *Bulletin of the Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia, Series: Political Science*, no. 3, 2010, 83–93.

¹³ Daniel Beland, “Identity, Politics and Public Policy”, *Critical Policy Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2017, 1–18; Mary Bernstein, “Identity Politics”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 31, 2005, 47–74; Rawi Abdelal, Herrera Yoshiko, Alastair Iain Johnston & Rose McDermott, “Identity as a Variable”, *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2006, 695–711.

colleagues.¹⁴ Among Russian researchers, these problems have been the focus of V.S. Malakhov for many years.¹⁵ In Russian research practice, it is important to note the political-psychological approach to the study of nation-state identity, which was developed by T.V. Evgenyeva and V.V. Titov.¹⁶ Within the framework of this approach, the following points are studied: the state of the national-state identity in Russia at all stages of the post-Soviet period; individual elements of the national-state identity: images of state power, country, and political leaders, historical ideas, political values, and symbols; and actors, factors, and tools of the process of formation of the nation-state identity.¹⁷

In general, even a brief historiographical review of modern research on the subject shows how complex and multifaceted approaches to understanding “national identity” are and that this issue requires further development and clarification. One of the attempts to generalise the available authorial approaches was a recent study that proposed a “discursive-constructivist” definition of “national identity”: “National identity is a clichéd element of public discourse, the appeal to which implies the existence of a political association based on a sense of belonging to a “nation” as well as on the community of values, beliefs, and patterns of behaviour resulting from this feeling”.¹⁸

However, in the context of our study, it seems that the appeal to the understanding of “national identity” in line with the political and psychological tradition has the greatest heuristic potential. In this vein, “identity” is understood, on the one hand, “as a kind of holistic image that a person forms about oneself, comparing oneself to other individuals”, and on the other hand, as “a person’s ability to perceive one’s own behaviour and life as a connected whole in the process of interacting with others, and to perceive oneself from the point of view of others, that is, to carry out “taking the role of the other”.¹⁹ Such an approach allows one to take into

¹⁴ Rogers Brubaker, *Beyond Identity/Ethnicity without Groups*, Publishing House of the Higher School of Economics, Moscow, 2012.

¹⁵ Vladimir Malakhov, “Uncomfortable with Identity”, *Questions of Philosophy*, no. 2, 1998, 43–53.

¹⁶ Tatiana Evgenieva, “Socio-Psychological Aspects of the Formation of the National-State Identity of Russians in the Post-Soviet Period”, in *Actual Problems of Modern Political Psychology*, RIOR, Moscow, 2010, 25–38; Viktor Titov, “Nation-State Identity as a Space of Political Meanings and Images”, *Bulletin of Tula University*, no. 1, 2010, 42–54.

¹⁷ Antonina Selezneva, “Political Representations of Russian Youth as the Basis for the Formation of National-State Identity”, *Values and Meanings*, no. 5, 2012, 149–166; Alexey Shcherbinin, “Games with the Motherland: On the Issue of Technologies for Constructing Political Reality”, in *Symbolic Politics, Issue 2: Disputes About the Past as Designing the Future*, Olga Malinova (ed), INION RAN, Moscow, 2014, 219–231.

¹⁸ Kirill Telin & Kirill Filimonov, “Identity Gaps: How and Why the Nation Eludes the State”, op. cit., 36.

¹⁹ Eric Erickson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, Progress, Moscow, 2006; George Herbert Mead, *The Philosophy of the Act*, University of Chicago, Chicago, 1950.

account and analyse such important constituents of national identity as the unconscious building blocks of the political and cultural matrix (national mentality, stereotypes, archaic identification forms, unconscious elements of the individual's social ideas about an own group membership, etc.); cultural and symbolic components (values and images dominating in society; a symbolic space of identification choice); constructed components (the ability of the state as the central institution of the political system to influence the identification choice and political self-identification of citizens through the conceptualisation of the ideological field and the ongoing information policy).²⁰

Study of Youth

Before proceeding directly to the main subject of the article, it is important to give a brief overview of existing approaches to the study of youth as a generational community.

In modern science, considerable experience has been accumulated through the research of young people. In all areas of knowledge regarding society and humans, there are areas that study young people and general or individual aspects of their lives from different theoretical and methodological positions. Considering the presence of various industries, approaches, and schools working with aspects of youth, only those relevant to the problems of the project and the study of youth as a generational community are significant.

The sociology of the youth considers it a part of society, primarily in the demographic sense: in the structure of society, the youth is determined by age criteria. At the same time, scientists' attention is focused not so much on age-related features but on the group-forming characteristics of young people, such as their age-related social position. Within the framework of this approach, empirical studies are carried out on various aspects of youth life: education, professional choice, employment, social and political activity, youth subcultures, value orientations, social relations, and much more.²¹

The study of the youth from psychological positions is carried out within the framework of age and social psychology. At the same time, the focus of scientific analysis is on psychological patterns of development in the young years and the basic psychological acquisitions in the development of young

²⁰ Tatyana Evgenieva & Viktor Titov, "Nation-State Identity Formation of the Russian Youth", *Polis*, no. 4, 2010, 122.

²¹ Mikhail Gorshkov & Franc Sheregi, *Russian Youth: Sociological Portrait*, Institute of Sociology RAS, Moscow, 2010; Lev Gudkov, Boris Dubin & Natalia Zorkaya, *Russian Youth*, Moscow School of Political Studies, Moscow 2011.

people.²² The research practices of modern Russian psychologists relate to the study of digital socialisation and the influence of the information environment on the consciousness of young people.²³

Within the framework of political science, the problems of the youth are considered primarily from a political and psychological perspective in relation to the issues of political socialisation as a process and the features of political consciousness and behaviour formed as a consequence.²⁴ Another significant area of political science research on youth is associated with the development of the problem of state youth policy in our country.²⁵

It is of particular importance to highlight the value profile of the study of youth. This problem is modestly presented in the research field of modern socio-humanitarian science. Most often, the issues of value orientations among young people are considered in sociological studies along with others. Studies in which the political values of youth are the subject of analysis are extremely limited.²⁶ And even though they are not complex, they operate on the premise that they do not rely on conceptual foundations that consider the psychological nature of values.

In summary, the literature review given above shows that studies of the youth as a generation group, its values, and its identity almost do not intersect. Our project aims to close this gap.

The National Identity of Russian and Serbian Youth: What is in Common?

Understanding the phenomenon of the national identity of modern Russian and Serbian youth, two countries that experienced the transit of power and the transformation of collective self-image in the early 1990s, is of particular scientific interest. In both countries, we are witnessing the

²² Viktor Slobodchikov, "Age Category in Psychology and Pedagogy of Development", *Questions of Psychology*, no. 2, 1991, 37–49.

²³ Ivan Palitay, Svetlana Popova & Antonina Selezneva, "State Youth Policy in Russia: Socio-Psychological Foundations and Implementation Technologies", *Bulletin of the Tomsk State University*, no. 455, 2020, 68–77; Elena Belinskaya, "Youth Perceptions of Difficult Life Situations: Cross-Cultural Differences", *New Psychological Research*, vol. 1, no. 4, 2021, 109–121.

²⁴ Antonina Selezneva & Ivan Palitay, "Perception of Their Own Country of Russian Youth: Value-Symbolic and Political and Cultural Aspects", *Terra Linguistica*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2019, 123–135.

²⁵ Igor Ilyinsky, *Youth, Youth Policy, Youth Organization*, Terra, Moscow, 2016; Valery Lukov, *Theories of the Youth: An Interdisciplinary Analysis*, Kanon+, Moscow, 2012.

²⁶ See: Sergei Chuev (ed.), *Value Orientations of the Russian Youth and the Implementation of State Youth Policy: Research Results*, Publishing House of State University of Management, Moscow, 2017.

formation of new identities, in the construction of which a special role is assigned to memorial practices. If there is nostalgia for the "Soviet identity" in the public discourse of Russia, then in Serbia, on the contrary, there are clear revisionist tendencies in the public field present.²⁷ In this context, it becomes especially interesting to study the extent to which these trends are reflected in the civil and political self-identification of the young generation of these two countries.

Nevertheless, what enables us to compare young people from Russia and Serbia in terms of identity, despite the obvious cultural and linguistic unification and similarity of the experiences of the post-communist transition? We proceed from the assumption that both Russian and Serbian identities belong to the type that has been called "nation-state" in the literature. Its key feature is that its bearers have a "historically and culturally conditioned psychological self-association of an individual with the geopolitical image (images) of a certain nation-state community, which is based on personal motives and social values, which are fixed and manifested through symbolic representations". It seems that this statement is true for both Russia and Serbia, where the state is always an important actor that modifies the process of forming a national identity.²⁸

Using a political-psychological approach to the analysis of national identity, we traditionally focus on three components: images, values, and symbols.²⁹ Values and symbols act as a sense-forming basis for the ideological consolidation of society, having a significant potential for nation-building. Political images, being a reflection of political reality in the minds of people, are often determined by values and symbols.³⁰

The purpose of this work is not a consistent analysis of all stages of the transformation of the post-Soviet identity of Russian and Serbian youth since there is enough special research on this subject.³¹ Let us note some important features inherent in the current state, in our opinion.

²⁷ Maya Yadova, "Nostalgia for the Past, Nostalgia for the Present: Post-Soviet Youth on the Collapse of the USSR", *Outlines of Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, Law*, vol. 14, no. 5, 2021, 231–246; Jelena Dzhureinovich, "The Writings of a Small Group of Revisionist Historians are getting Huge Media Coverage as They Act as Agents of the State-Sanctioned Politics of Memory", *Historical Expertise*, vol. 4, no. 25, 2020, 61–76.

²⁸ Viktor Titov, *National-State Identity of Russian Youth at the Beginning of the 21st Century*, Max Press, Moscow, 2012, 62.

²⁹ Tatyana Evgenyeva, Viktor Titov & Sergey Belokonev, "The Place of the Image of the Slavic World in the Formation of Modern Russian Identity", *Bulletin of the Tomsk State University, Philosophy, Sociology and Political Science*, vol. 3, no. 66, 2019, 135–144; Antonina Selezneva & Natalia Smulkina, "Images of the Countries of the Slavic World in the Minds of Russian Citizens (on the example of Ukraine and Belarus)", *Rusin*, vol. 4, no. 54, 2018, 352–371.

³⁰ Elena Shestopal, *The Psychology of Political Perception in Contemporary Russia*, ROSSPEN, Moscow, 2012.

³¹ Zorka Sharats & Elena Voyevoda, "The Crisis of the National-Cultural Identity of the Serbs of Bosnia and Herzegovina within Austria-Hungary (1878–1908)", *Concept: Philosophy*,

The collapse of the USSR and Yugoslavia and the subsequent serious demolition of the economic, political, and even everyday foundations of society led to a strong socio-cultural crisis that destroyed the self-identification of the "Soviet person". The result of this crisis was an ever-increasing gap in the figurative-symbolic space of identity, which led to the strengthening of ethno-regionalism. As modern researchers note, in transforming communities, they often resort to "the practices of the archaic identification renaissance", which are based on "a sense of frustration caused by the loss of certainty of the national-state status".³² It is in such a situation that individuals begin to turn to the "datum levels" of identity (ethnic, regional, local, etc.).

In the period 2000-2010, the ideological and value space of the national identity of the Russian and Serbian youth was gradually filled with meanings, images, and values, but this process was contradictory. For example, among the Russian youth, there was a clearly fixed trend of inconsistency in the processes of identification with Russia as a country and with Russia as a state, which complicated the formation of the civic component of identity. In Serbia, one of the problems, in our opinion, was the unresolved issue of EU membership. On the one hand, the political discourse announced the intentions of joining European institutions and, as a result, the formation of a common European identity. But on the other hand, this process dragged on for such a long time that young people no longer trust the EU's statements about its intention to give Serbia assent as a member of the union. Moreover, as in-depth interviews conducted with Serbian students showed, many of them are already clearly tired of the promises of European integration, and sometimes they oppose the EU both as a political institution and as a European identity (among the respondents' answers: "The EU countries are not equal among themselves", "the EU is about to collapse", etc.).³³

As a result, it seems that the minds of modern Russian and Serbian youth are still dominated by, using the terminology of R. Inglehart, materialistic values or survival values, as evidenced by the latest data from the World Value Survey, published in June 2022.³⁴ This dictates a certain logic for the development of the process of national identity transformation.

Religion, Culture, vol. 5, no. 3, 2021, 113–127; Veljko Vujacic, *Nationalism, Myth and the State in Russia and Serbia. Prerequisites for the Collapse of the USSR and Yugoslavia*, European University Press in St. Petersburg, St. Petersburg, 2019.

³² Tatyana Evgenieva & Viktor Titov, "Nation-State Identity Formation of the Russian Youth", op. cit., 122.

³³ Samuel Huntington, *Who Are We?: Challenges to American National Identity*, LLC Publishing House ACT: LLC Tranzitkniga, Moscow 2004.

³⁴ World Values Survey Association, *The new 2022 World Cultural Map has been released*, <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSNewsShow.jsp?ID=428,08/11/2022>.

One of the consequences of this phenomenon may be that, in search of their identity, young people may turn to the search for alternative ideas, meanings, images, and values. In our opinion, one of the options for such a search, which would allow avoiding the extremes of ethnonationalism and globalism, could be the appeal of young people to the Slavic identity of our countries.

Slavic Identity as a Basis for the Formation of Political Dialogue

Unconditionally, the question of what Slavic identity is and, most importantly, whether it exists in reality, is debatable. Following L. Suchanek, we can agree that the Slavic world is an indisputable unity in linguistic and geographical terms only.³⁵ One should not deny the fact that ideas about the Slavs as a single cultural and historical type, with their own special aspects of national character and mentality, begin to take shape in the works of Slavic thinkers of the 19th century influenced by the ideas of German romanticism. In an attempt to "ancientize" Slavic history, to romanticise it, and to oppose it to German ("European") history, the leaders of the "Slavic Renaissance" tried to solve a quite obvious political task: admonish cultural assimilation and the loss of national identity. In fact, nineteenth-century thinkers reconstructed "Slavs" by forming a sense of Slavic self-identification among those who may not have been aware of themselves earlier.³⁶ Therefore, historical studies by foreign historians (F. Palatsky, J. Shafarik, and others) and then Russian Slavists (N. Ya. Danilevsky, A. F. Gilferding, O. F. Miller, V. M. Florinsky, or V. I. Lamansky) revealed that subjective assessments of the essence of Slavic identity were not resolved.

However, in our opinion, the fact that people themselves still identify themselves with it and call themselves "Slavs", allows us to talk about the presence of a Slavic identity and, therefore, to study it. Thus, we are getting close to the position of S.A. Ivanov, which consists of the fact that ethnicity, unlike language, is not a phenomenon but a noumenon. It is the feeling of belonging and self-identification that makes a person a "Slav". In addition, modern historical research tells us that initially the ethnonym "Slav" was a self-name and a way of self-identification, and even representatives of various language groups could identify themselves with it. That is, Slavic identity could initially be based not on a linguistic factor but on a cultural one, in the broadest sense of the word.³⁷

³⁵ Lucjan Suchanek, "Slavic Identity – in History and in Our Time", *Slavonic Culture. Annual Review of the PAU Commission on the Culture of the Slavs*, vol. 13, 2017, 53–69.

³⁶ Alexander Maxwell, *Choosing Slovakia: Slavic Hungary, the Czechoslovak Language and Accidental Nationalism*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2009.

³⁷ Sergey Ivanov, "'In the shadow of the Justinian fortresses?' F. Kurta and the paradoxes of early Slavic ethnicity", *Studia slavica et balcanica petropolitana*, vol. 2. no. 2, 2008, 5.

In order to answer the question of how the modern rising generation in Russia and Serbia apprehends its Slavic identity, its content, and how it is identified with it, together with colleagues (A.F. Yakovleva, I.S. Palitay), a pilot study was initiated with the decisive task of identifying the key images, values, and symbols that form the Slavic identity of the youth of Russia and Eastern Europe. Within the framework of the project, it is planned to identify the ideological and value bases and structural and content characteristics of the Slavic identity of the youth of Russia, Eastern Europe and, in particular, Serbia, based on a historical and political science approach using political and psychological analysis. The study hypothesises that the ideas, meanings, and values that form the basis of the Slavic identity can become one of the factors that have significant potential for the consolidation of Russian society from within, contributing to the formation of the national-state identity of modern youth as a generational community. In addition, the dominants of public consciousness and value-semantic matrices identified in the course of the study will make it possible to build a productive dialogue with countries that have a similar civilizational code. This is of particular relevance in the current situation of international tension, which will have long-term consequences.

Although the study is being carried out, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn at present:

1. While in the course of in-depth interviews and surveys, the majority of respondents note some kind of unity between the Slavs (primarily cultural, linguistic, and historical), the ideas of Slavic solidarity or the possibility of Slavic unification at the present stage seem to them extremely vague. This is primarily determined by the prevalence of materialistic values among young people. As a result, respondents do not see economic prospects for such integration, in contrast to, say, the EU project, which, as young people think, formulates clear and understandable priorities and preferences: study, work, travel opportunities, etc. (among the answers, for example, were such as: "The EU provides advantages for business", "The EU is an opportunity to find a job and travel", and "There is more food in the stores in the EU").

Unfortunately, it can be stated that despite the interest of the Serbian youth, Russia is making very little effort to use the common cultural and linguistic potential. Serbian respondents are not aware of any student exchange or internship programmes, and interest in the common past remains only at the level of folklore. The EU, on the other hand, is pursuing an active policy of forming a political identity, creating a sense of belonging to a "common European home" with the help of images, symbols, and understandable "pragmatic" preferences that such cooperation proposes.

Nevertheless, despite all the efforts of the EU, a trend towards an increase in the level of EU scepticism is clearly recorded among Serbian youth. In our opinion, this could contribute to the activation of Russia's

economic and cultural programmes with the countries of the region, which could be developed into other forms of integration in the future. It seems that with such significant cultural support, the programmes of political cooperation and integration of Russia and Serbia in the Balkans could have a much greater effect, a priori affording opportunities to increase the economic preferences of such cooperation.

2. Most of the respondents, in one way or another, point out the presence of characteristics and features characteristic of the "Slavs". Among the most common answers, Serbian students named "friendliness", "emotionality", "openness", "conservatism", "generosity", "expressiveness", "honesty" and "collectivism". The answers received by the Serbian respondents partly coincide with what the Russian students said during the interview. This intersection of elements within the political-cultural matrix definitely needs to be taken into account in our bilateral relations.

3. Indicative are the associations in the minds of young people with a symbolic date – May 9th. Thus, it is advisable to compare the results for two countries, Serbia and Bulgaria, which, being Slavic countries, at the same time, to varying degrees, experience the symbolic policy of the EU. Respondents were asked to evaluate two posters symbolising the memorable date. However, in the first case, the photo was dedicated to "Victory Day" (Victory Day), and in the second, "Schuman Day" (Europe Day). Respondents were asked to choose which of the proposed images they associated with May 9th. According to the results of the survey, we got an indicative picture: for the majority of Bulgarian students, May 9th is strongly associated with "Europe Day" (Schuman Day) because they see its symbols every year in the lead-up to this date. But for Serbian students, May 9th is still mostly associated with "Victory Day" (Victory Day). These indicative conclusions should be taken into account by our countries in the formation and implementation of their own symbolic and memorial policies, which, first of all, should be broadcast at the field level, forming a personal experience of "contiguity".

4. If we talk about the symbols of "Slavic unity" or "Slavic identity", then, unlike the symbols of Europe, they are almost completely absent in public space. In that way, during in-depth interviews, respondents were shown two flags: the EU flag and the pan-Slavic tricolour (traditional for most Slavic countries). And if the first one was familiar to absolutely everyone and caused various associations (from negative to positive), then the second flag was practically unfamiliar to anyone (at best, there were associations with Yugoslavia). The same goes for the rest of the characters. Thus, the EU anthem, Euro banknotes, and license plates with the EU flag are seen by the respondents every day. They become accustomed to these symbols, and they, in turn, shape their personal experience, becoming part of their identity. Slavic symbols in this regard are almost completely unknown to the respondents. Among the common Slavic symbols were

either religious (mostly Byzantine heritage, which is typical for Orthodox countries) or natural. However, unlike the symbols of the EU, these symbols are quite amorphous, have little effect on everyday experience, and therefore do not form stable associations.

5. For the vast majority of respondents in both Russia and Serbia, the demand for the formulation of a new political agenda, where the topic of ecology will be the key issue, becomes obvious. Here, Russia and Serbia should make every effort to intercept this agenda from the EU countries, since the rising generation of our countries is waiting for steps in this direction from the governments. In that way, questions such as "Other things being equal, if you were offered to move to work in..., which country would you choose? And why?" were answered by the majority of respondents using the names of the European countries (primarily Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden), but not because of the closeness of culture and mentality (here the respondents were aware of possible difficulties), but largely because of the environmental policy of these countries. According to the respondents, they will feel safe there in the context of ecology and health. Thus, our countries should make efforts to form their own environmental agenda, primarily in the context of positioning the state with which young people would like to be associated. This is important in order to convince young people to stay and work in Russia and Serbia, respectively.

6. One of the forms of cooperation and promotion of "soft power" in the region should be tourism programmes that attract young people. So, to the question asked during in-depth interviews, "Would you like to visit other Slavic countries as a tourist, or would you choose European countries, all other things being equal?", respondents more often answered not in favour of the Slavic countries while noting the cultural potential of cooperation. However, when asked why they still prefer travelling to Europe, respondents reasonably point to the high cost of such travel (for example, from Serbia to Moscow or vice versa) and the lack of information about what such a trip will bring them in terms of "impressions". Here it is worth thinking about special programmes to support such tourism because this is one of the main mechanisms of "soft power", which, for example, is successfully used in the EU.

Some Conclusions

In conclusion, it should be emphasised that the launched study is a pilot study, and being preliminary at present, these findings require further discussion and testing. However, in our opinion, the continuation of this project is critically important. Such studies have potential, as they can identify the main value-semantic dominants in the public consciousness of the youth of Russia and Serbia. This will make it possible to understand

what kind of “mental” problems may arise when trying to build a political dialogue between our countries and outline specific prospects for working under the current international pressure. In the current transformation of the traditional space of values for today’s youth, it is especially important to build partnerships with countries that have a similar civilizational code. In Russia and Serbia, the state has traditionally been an important actor that can purposefully and comprehensively influence the building of national identity (primarily through information policy, education and culture policies, and memorial practices). Taking into account by the state the features of the ideological and value bases of the national identity of Russian and Serbian youth identified above is becoming extremely relevant in the context of increasing international pressure and building a new architecture of international relations.

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