

ARE RUSSIANS TRULY EUROPEANS? *A Question Requiring Tactfulness*

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SPECIAL OPINION



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Are Russians truly Europeans?

The answer to that question should be rather positive. Russians look like Europeans and tend to be easily confused with Scandinavians, for instance.

Russians are Christians, and Christianity is the religion that dominates in Europe. However, it is also true that Christianity in Russia differs somewhat from the one adhered to by the rest of Europe since Russians are Orthodox whereas Europeans *per se* are mostly Catholics and Protestants. But one also has to keep in mind that Russia traditionally belongs to the northern branch of Orthodoxy, which, in many ways, is close to the reformed or protestant faiths. For one thing, for a long time, the Russian Orthodox Church was presided over, not by patriarch but by a civil prosecutor-in-chief (Oberprokuror) and a semi-lay Synod. This is the way that

religious authority used to be organised in Sweden, for instance.

Besides, the Russian monarchy was integrated into a single system with the various European dynasties. Nicholas II, for example, was a cousin to both the Emperor of Germany and the King of England.

Therefore, historically speaking - all misgivings notwithstanding - the Europeans indeed considered the Russian people as one of their kind.

This recognition had some legal grounds since, technically speaking, as much as 60% of the diplomacy of the nineteenth century world was determined by the Russians. The modern diplomatic system as a whole was legalised by the Congress of Vienna, which was itself a brain-child of the Russian emperor. Due to the fact that Russians often served as international arbitrators, they played a role in resolving disputes between various foreign powers (the major nations of the world). As such, they also helped to bring about a peaceful resolution to territorial disputes that emerged between Britain and the United States, between the Netherlands and English, or the latter and Venezuela, for instance.

On more than one occasion, Russia's intercession proved to be instrumental in settling various diplomatic crises – like the one between England and Netherlands. And it is with Russia's involvement that the process of arms reduction originated (through the Congress of Hague).

After the October Revolution of 1917, Russia has undergone radical change not only in terms of its political system, but also in relation to the type of civilisation it belongs to. The process was initially deemed to be a social revolution. However, later on, the revolution proved to be more of an ethnic nature rather than a social one. Those of the latter kind invariably develop in accordance with particular rules. Following the initial period of social innovation, there is always a phase of restoration, which

brings back the majority of the institutions that were fought against by the revolutionaries in the first place. As a result, both legal and cultural continuity tend to prevail.

On the contrary, a state emerging from an ethnic revolution undergoes dramatic changes. For example, the conquest of Spain by the Moors resulted in the country being introduced to and emerging as a different civilisation. It took the Spaniards several centuries for the Reconquista to be completed and for European rule in the Iberian peninsula to be restored. If we can imagine that the Reconquista had not occurred, modern Spain would have turned out to be another Turkey at best – or another Morocco at worst.

In Russia, this ethnic revolution resulted in the pre-eminence of people of Asian origin – particularly those originating from Caucasus. The state itself was once headed by Georgians – like Stalin (Dzhughashvili) or his chief henchman Lavrenty Beria. The second man in command under Nikita Khrushchev – Anastas Mikoyan – was also from the Caucasus. It is also worth mentioning various individuals such as Ordzhonikidze, Yenukidze, Georgadze, among others. All of them were involved in building a society that they would feel comfortable in – the only one they could have created given their particular cultural and ethnic traditions.

After the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991, the newly-emerged states that were founded in its wake were taken over by members of the national intelligentsia of each respective region, who were set on developing their countries in accordance with the traditions of their people. As a result, the Azeris in Azerbaijan have built a state that no one considers to be a part of Europe, while the Baltic countries established a distinctly European state are legally recognised by Europe to be such.

In Russia, unfortunately national revival has failed. In our country, Asians – particularly from Caucasus – are still mainly in charge. They tend to impose their mentality, their values and attitude about human life and human rights on Russians. What's worse, Russians are in no position to defend themselves. As a result, Russia has turned into a somewhat Asiatic state.

not being outright in love with 'others'. That is actually not the case. Just like any dyed-in-the-wool chauvinist, they too are not immune to national prejudice. But by refusing to accept this fact, these people are actually robbing themselves of an opportunity to correct their views.

There are certain psychological tests that involve a secret question. Let's say that the respondent, among

an interest in other's ethnic heritage. In Russia, such questions are not outright taboo but the answers are expected to be extremely circumspect. Unfortunately such a strategy works in 'dormant' societies, which are too passive to engender any serious conflict. Modern Russian society, on the contrary, is extremely unstable.

In the first years of this century, the Russian authorities made a very serious mistake. Instead of bending over backwards in order to resolve the major problem of today's Russia – that is to provide a social elevator enabling ethnic Russians to pursue a career in culture and politics and to enable Russian people, on the whole, to participate in the redistribution of post-Soviet wealth – they chose to just ignore it. So none of this happened. Repressing the issue means that it was basically internalised. Nonetheless, this problem has yet to manifest itself in the future.

There is a conflict brewing within society between the Russians, who constitute up to 83% of the total population, and the 17% representing the so-called 'Soviet people', which is composed of heterogeneous and often somewhat spurious ethnic groups. The latter term does not imply any 'inferiority'. The thing is that due to the fact that many of them have sovereign states of their own, these people (with the exception of specific Jewish communities and perhaps Ukrainians and Belarusians) are, by definition, politically unreliable. Any Georgians and Uzbeks enrolling in the Russian police, army, tax collection or state statistical service should necessarily be regarded as potential spies or saboteurs.

Ironically, those who are exposed to the latter attitude within the Russian Federation are the ethnic Russians. The state fears them and this constitutes a fatal mistake on the part of government authorities. Certain unease, exhibited towards Russians by the Soviet authorities, was justified both politically and demographically. But today, this inherited coolness very well may eventually bring those in the Kremlin to a standstill. ■

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In our country, Asians – particularly from Caucasus – are still mainly in charge. They tend to impose their mentality, their values and attitude about human life and human rights on Russians

But the worst consequence of this Asian domination is the degradation of national culture. In this context, European Russia has truly established itself as a great power and a number of Russian writers and poets have become a part of world heritage. Ask anyone in London, Paris or New York who is Rasul Gamzatov and they will not be able to produce an answer. But ask them about Dostoyevsky or Chekhov and you will get a response at the drop of a hat because they know them from their textbooks.

One needs to take into account that, when it comes to the national characteristics of a people, the human mind operates according to prejudices rather than logic. Ethnicity is something biological, like sexual drive. What does it mean to be 'politically correct' then? The word itself implies that one has to behave properly and little more. What one thinks in the meantime is nobody else's business. What is crucial in terms of being 'politically correct' is to not show your personal dislikes at the level of social interaction. In the USA, nobody actually expects – let alone demands – whites to like blacks or vice-versa: they are only taught that it is indecent to enter into an open conflict over certain things such as race. And that *is* definitely correct. In Russia, unfortunately, the attitude to such kind of issues is still largely barbaric. Folks that advocate internationalism claim that they have absolutely no national prejudice – if

other, things is asked: have you ever committed a petty theft in your childhood? In the case that the answer is negative, then we know that he is cheating. Because kids invariably usurp other people's property: whether it be toys or eating Grandma's cookies without asking or pinching one's parents change to buy ice cream.

Are Russians truly Europeans? I've approached this question, which I was asked to contemplate, in an extremely polite way. But if one takes a closer look the very wording of the question is charged with xenophobia. It is, in a way, similar to asking a man with Caucasian features whether or not he is a negro? The question itself infers an insult, which will logically elicit frustration and rage. In other words, this should ultimately result in a chain reaction of xenophobia.

At the national level, such xenophobia will not go away until the minorities that serve as the head of states are replaced by individuals representing the dominant ethnic groups. In order to avoid xenophobia, **the head of state should be a person representing the majority ethnic group**. Otherwise, ethnic clashes will never cease, and this is something that we have yet to understand.

The national question requires utmost tactfulness. People tend not to answer questions implying ethnicity and consider it indecent to show