

MULTICULTURALISM FORMS THE BASIS OF RUSSIAN SOCIETY

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A peculiar heart-warming tradition has recently emerged within the Russian media to take kind jabs at European democracy from time to time to the effect, for instance, that one day they are going to abolish the words 'mother' and 'father' (in order to appeal to gender equality), then they want to rename Christmas as the 'Winter Holiday' (so as not to offend the feelings of non-Christians).

And it does not matter that, in the first instance, the fuss was caused by a deputy of PACE in a presentation he gave, in which he merely discussed gender stereotyping by the press, or that, in the second instance, leaders of British Muslim communities requested that Christmas not be deprived of its traditional features.

The main thing is that the readers are lively laughing out loud: here we can observe the grimaces of political correctness. This is all the more so when we see it peer through the laugh-

ter: may we never come to such a state of affairs.

Meanwhile such peculiar cases of political correctness in Europe, if they ever occur, happen to not be entertaining to the reading audience. Tolerance and political correctness are inevitable companions of the European policy known as multiculturalism. In the case that such policy were to disappear, Europe would become a battlefield for different ethnic and cultural groups (originally on the media scene, but we actually do not know what would follow).

As for the present-day, European political correctness is obligatory, and for Russia, it is still rather desirable. Attempts to introduce it legitimately are still rare and are not systematic. Moreover, sometimes they are met at knife-point by various strata of the population, which also contributes to political correctness making such a slow advance to our lands.

But for the federative, multi-confessional and ethnically multicultural Russia, political correctness is as important as it is for Europe. Even if the policy of multiculturalism is not clearly stated in the regulations on domestic policy of the Russian Federation (primarily due to the lack of a formal national policy as such), it nevertheless does exist tacitly. And **it is thanks to such a policy that nationalists' attempts to make themselves widely known appear marginal.**

But the more we laugh at the notorious 'grimaces of political correctness' and the further we divert from this policy, the stronger the nationalists become and their language of discussion is absolutely different from that of tolerance.

Russian nationalists are captivated by the illusion that, in accentuating and emphasising the bedrock role of the Russian ethnos within modern Russia, they are effectively saving the country from decay.

Some time ago, they also had another illusion that the other ethnic groups populating Russia are eager to become part of the Russian people. But nowadays, such a standpoint is becoming

rarer and rarer. Nevertheless, this illusion is so strong that the nationalists are even working out a criteria code for regulating Russianness.

Meanwhile, it is not actually like that at all. Yes, the Russians are the majority ethnic group in Russia but in a number of regions, they actually comprise less than half of the population. Besides, many non-Russian ethnic groups recall within their historical memory the fact that they were conquered by or integrated into Russia. This detail is coupled with resentment about the present relationship with the Russian centre and the somewhat secondary role that is awarded to non-Russian ethnic groups within Russia.

The above statement refers not only to the North Caucasian peoples, but also to the Yakuts (Sakha) and Tuvians (population of Tuva), for instance, as well as the Chuvashians and Maris. Certainly none of these nationalities would like to lose their unique ethnic heritage. At the same time, if it eventually occurs that they begin to be taken away by force, these groups will also respond with force.

The only step that would allow Russia to remain within its present borders and state is to hedge its bets on the existence of sub-ethnic identities in order to unite all of the peoples living in Russia - for instance, to hedge its bets on a civil nation. Nevertheless, nationalists (not only Russian ones, but all other nationalist types as well) will refuse to listen.

The Russian Federation is not a country of immigrants. The peoples and nations living on its territory are connected with their cultural and historical past through the durable threads of national traditions. **Representatives of Russian ethnic groups will not want to sever these threads – as is often done in the case of immigrants to new lands – and any attempt to do this by force is, at the very least, cultural genocide. ■**

*Recorded by Ksenia Kolkunova.
This is a short version. The full version can be found at www.russ.ru*