

Citizenship and Civic Values in Modern Russia

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Abstract

The chapter is concerned with questions of civic values and civic identity as they are experienced by Russian people in the context of political-economic transformations of the last years, and especially during global economic crisis 2008-2010. Empirical findings from Russian Public Opinion Research Centre, Levada-Centre, Edelman Trust Barometer surveys are used to outline how tensions, distrust and civic irresponsibility expressed by respondents in the context of financial instability may amplify understandings of 'citizenship' and 'civic identity'. There are several trends characterizing citizenship and civic identity in modern Russian society. The first is transformation of the common sense of 'wellness' in case of individualism's growth and increasing reduction of trust to economic, political and low institutions. The second is the problem of new values formation: while the 'official' political discourse admits more and more inclusive patriotic ideologies, 'everyday-life' and 'network' discourses develop estimative and ironical judgments of the official discourse. The third is citizens' emigration intentions and the 'status of citizenship' characterizing self-perception of people as 'citizens' in relation to 'non-citizens', which is particular relevant to labour migration problem.

Key Words: Civic values, civic identity, citizenship, social transformations, Russian society.

1. Citizenship, Civic Identity and Social Changes

The subject of citizenship and civic identity in Russian society has been very important recently and attracts not only the scientists' attention, but a wide range of public. These terms are used in science literature, political declarations, mass media and daily intercourse. The question about the meaning of these concepts and about development of points, common for government and society, defines the field of public debate. The problem of reality and wide range of opinions, social behaviour and its consequences is more actual in atmosphere of everyday life of contemporary human. Nowadays in Russian society the problem of cognitive and emotional choice is worsening, in spite of the experts (the representatives of theoretical and practical knowledge, developing theoretical and applied aspects of civic identity phenomena) are trying to control it.

Generally, the civic identity is regarded as dominant in the hierarchy of components of individual and partly group identity. It personifies the degree of subject relations to the most important socio-political institution – the state.

As generally known need in self-identification is more actual in the periods of reorganization of social relations, break of former ideology and forming the new one, and instability of domestic and foreign policy. Thereby, it is very important how the socio-economic phenomena influence the processes of forming the civic identity. Many analysts connect the crisis of civic identity in Russia with consequences of disintegration of the Soviet Union and forming new principles of interaction the subjects of Russian Federation and also review of ratio between the particular and the general in the context of national culture.

The denial of national characters, disintegration of collective memory, presented by traditions, loss of faith in tomorrow, disharmony between descriptive and regulatory means of interaction with government, inferiority complex regarding more developed countries are the main factors of civic identity crisis. We emphasize that it is about civic identity exactly, not about cultural or national ethnic identity (though both these concepts are defined as overlapping).

Using the term ‘civic identity’ we mean not only allegiance towards government but also the concept of community citizens, their values and orientations. Besides, the civic identity can be distinguished by two moments of cultural policy. Firstly it is the policy directed towards minorities (the neutrality towards ethnic subcultures, or the support of separate minority groups, that implies ensuring of individual rights, first of all, and not the ethnical groups). Secondly it is the policy of multiculturalism that means keeping and development of ethnic subcultures and absence of set for cultural assimilation.

Civic identity is the complex phenomenon that is very hard to be viewed in the conditions of routine socio-economic relations. Meanwhile, actualization of very tendencies, that can be empirical markers of theoretical method given, occurs in complicated socio-economic situations. The nearest example of such ‘fracturing’ situation is Global Economic Crisis. However we don’t mean the real economic processes, financial problems, and so on. We mean socio-psychological design, a cultural archetype, a result of social construction of reality. In Russia, people use the word ‘crisis’ in the context having nothing in common to the economy. The term ‘crisis’ has acquired a high range of connotations, owing to the massive reproduction of the term in mass media and statements of economists and politicians. So it is impossible to define what individual means talking about the crisis.

Actually, we have not just the crisis, we also have ‘crisis’ becoming an integral part of everyday communication, clear and available interpretative system, logic and most likely supported in the network of almost any social group answer to the question ‘What’s happening?’

At the beginning ‘crisis’ as a definition of situation, undoubtedly, as base markers of civic identity, initially was formed by statements of politicians and economists, broadcasted through the media. But the word ‘crisis’ became a label so promptly, that attests its breakthrough in the sphere of everyday life . ‘Oh, it is

crisis!’ – in this utterance more and more life situations are shown. The problem why crisis is so popular in everyday life, because the everyday life itself appears as a result of everyday processes, education forms, development of traditions and consolidation of rules.

These processes of ‘everydaylifenessing’ (‘Veralltaglichung’¹) have been described repeatedly and superficially in scientific and socio-philosophical literature. Everyday life exists as the appearance of meaning and designing of rules. One needs time for addition something new in existing cognitive schemes, unusual for general integrative procedure.² Moreover, as B. Adams says ‘None that we know the type of mind, even in the slow-growing civilizations, cannot adapt to the environmental changes so quickly, how the environment itself’.³ But in crisis situation we observe the practices of its rapid inclusion in the sphere of everyday life, routine and habits.

The term ‘crisis’ unutilized and perceived only in symbolic aspect nevertheless becomes an heuristic model sui generis, imposing the world and events occurring its vision. An importance of symbolic aspects in processes on-going are supported with form and content, regarding the question ‘What to do?’ This question, alongside with definition of situation is very important for the construction of personal identity and choice one or another role-set. So crisis as construct is formed chiefly, on the base of constant retransmission of texts and cultural codes, that can be understood as meaningful sequence of semiotic symbols used in different forms of communication, and not on the reflexion of actual social processes. The rate of formation of stable cognitive schemes affects inevitably on the quality of interpretive possibilities. As a matter of fact in that case we can explain situation only saying ‘because it is crisis’.

‘Crisis’ is the universal explanation of problems existing, the situation and comprehension of current situation in the state. It embodies the peculiar scientific motive of description of substantial and procedural aspects of civic identity phenomena. Here we can denote a range of tendencies that reveal how economic crisis influences the forming of civic identity in Russian society.

2. The Common Concept ‘We’

In experts’ opinion the global economic crisis has caused the most dangerous social crisis – the crisis of confidence. Where the confidence between economic subjects towards their governments, world financial structures ends, there the global distrust of citizens to the economic and legal national and international institutes appears. The results of surveys show the common pessimistic character of social interaction potential in the period of crisis.

The survey made by Edelman Company showed that crisis in Russia had shaken the faith of active part of society in business. For 2009 the faith in business reduced by 10 points and amounted 42%. Thus much a faith in power reduced, and the level of faith stopped on 38%. It’s the most considerable decrease of faith level

among European countries, surveying in the network of Edelman Trust Barometer Program (for instance, in France the faith level increased by 9 % (to 43 %). Sweden is the faith growth leader (from 36% to 60%). Thereby, the majority of people examined are convinced that it's impossible to overcome recession effects without increase the government role in world economics.

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These factors correspond to what is happening in the field of civic responsibility. The public opinion poll in 2006 has shown that almost 80% of population feels the responsibility about what is going on in their yard or micro-district, anyhow. And 40 % feel the responsibility to a considerable extent. Regarding what is happening at work the appropriate numbers amount 66% and 45%, and the same things regarding the city or region – 52% and 15%. 33 % feel responsibility about what is going on in the country (to a full or considerable extent – 10%). The data of 2010 witness about the subjective sense of responsibility. 63% feel responsibility about what is going on in their yard or micro-district, (26% feel responsibility in a full or considerable extent). Regarding what is happening at work the appropriate numbers amount 53% and 37%. Against a background of the data a sharp jump of liability about what is going on in the country is interesting. 62% feel it to a full or considerable extent.⁵

3. Power Interaction and Forming Citizen Values

Long line of research in Soviet and then Russian science declares that creation of civic identity is task of the state. It is the state who coordinates ethnic networks, historical generality of territory, laws, equality of citizens, adherence to the appointed system of concepts, confidence to the political institutions, community of civic culture and ideology. It is the state who provides visible forms of civic identity by which structures, including schemas, rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for 'patriotic' behaviour and reflects establishment of trust between the community and the state. In other words, the civic identity *should be formed*.

In researchers' opinion in official ideology that form a civic identity in the beginning of XXI century in Russia, idiologemes of powerful state dominated, of majesty and security, when keeping the idiologemes of citizens welfare, worthy place in the world, focus on European values, that combine liberal-democratic and national-patriotic ideas.

'Crisis' and 'post-crisis' official discourse of civic identity is turning to the moderate national-patriotic idiologemes, keeping democratic values at a low degree. Thereby system of crisis overcoming has become an important reason of power interaction with citizens: for example, the booklet 'How to prevent ourselves from financial crisis' was prepared by United Russia party. This party is

aimed at help of average Russians to overcome economic troubles. Like the following:

No matter how long is the crisis, it is not the whole life – United Russia encourages and advises to begin with family finances review and planning costs. So, the party advises to get a special notebook for a start and to distribute money to the ‘envelopes of special purpose.’⁶

4. Migration Intentions and the Status Level of Citizenship

Emigration intentions (and exactly, a wish to move to another country in the foreseeable future) pretty clear describe the citizens’ self-awareness in the context of comparing with another countries. It is one of the ways how people endeavour to cultivate a civic optimism and faith in ability to realize new opportunities. Here a model of economic crisis is demonstrative – first of all because of the global references. The crisis has touched all the developed countries, and desire to move in this case depends on the subjective view whether one or another state is capable to dissolve it.

The research data show that in spite of the media image of crisis had been connected with move to another country (in 2008 the slogans ‘Spend your crisis time in Thailand’ or ‘Overcome crisis in Goa were popular’), potential emigration activity hasn’t changed in the crisis period at whole. At the same time, according to the opinions of representatives of the consulate, there is a tendency towards increase of one who wishes to move to the Western Europe countries and USA ‘because of crisis’.⁷

In this case we can see one another marker – the status level of citizenship which indicates self-awareness of people as citizens towards non-citizens and is interesting first of all in the context of social mood analysis in large cities. According to the polls, the tendency of delegation of low-skilled labour (connected with physical one) to the immigrants from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan is consistent enough. At the same time for those living in megacity who identify themselves as Russians, even the danger of job loss is not the considerable reason to do the manual labour. ‘White-collarism’ of Russians who live in the city is very interesting and important factor of quality content of civic identity.

5. The Effect of Mental Inertia

While analysing the impact of economic crisis on the forming of civic identity, it’s necessary to take into account the inertia effect, typical for the Russian society in forming the social moods. A socio-historical memory has so profound effect, that situation from the nearest past moves to the present. Actually, it is the adaptive mechanism of setting social attitudes: when the trend turns towards pessimism the process is inhibited essentially by inertia effect. It means that for the first 3 – 4

months from the moment of awareness the fact of crisis, a fall in social attitudes has been coming slowly enough because it was based on the previous subjective certainty in the improvement of situation. That's why, considering the trends marked, it's necessary to take into account a temporary reserve between objective change in the situation and its subjective awareness.

'Crisis' as a cognitive scheme is developing in a different way as compared with real financial-economic crisis. The metaphor of crisis has turned to a simple, obvious way of overcoming of 'complex of unusual',⁸ so popular in modern world. In conditions of constant forcing reflexivity, that comes from the outer world, most likely, it would be incredibly hard for the individual to refuse from that interpretative magic wand. Struggle with crisis and struggle with 'crisis' are two different things. And if the search of way-out is a business of politicians and economists, overcoming of 'crisis' is the task of representatives of humanitarian and social knowledge, to a large extent.

In 1940 R. Park, interpreting The Great Depression, to which the modern negative trends in economics can be compared, wrote: 'A deplorable situation, in which there were at present America and the world seems to be a problem that has, if you look at the root, not economic or political but cultural character'.⁹ The level of culture of crisis base has been added up to the reduction of value of traditional norms and values in society, historically maintaining a social cohesion. Undoubtedly, Park's views were based on observation of nonexistent world. The modernity of 2000 is defined by intensification of communication flows, virtualization of social projects, transformation of personal and group social ties. But from our point of view the modern trends only confirm Park's thesis about interdependence and mutual influence of economic and socio-cultural phenomena – for instance such as global economic crisis and civic identity.

Notes

¹ B. Waldenfels, *In den Netzen des Lebenswelt*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M, 1985, p. 545.

² K. Hammerich & H Klein, *Materialien zur Soziologie des Alltags*, Kolner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, Opladen, Westdeutscher Verlag, 1978, pp. 177-219.

³ E. Mayo, *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization*, Routledge, London, 2003, p. 204.

⁴ Edelman Company Data, 17.06.2010, <http://www.edelman.com>.

⁵ The Fund Of Public Opinion Data, 14.04.2010 <http://www.fom.ru>.

⁶ Polit.Ru – Analytics, 13.02.2009, <http://www.polit.ru>.

⁷ American-Russian Business Council, 17.04.2009, <http://www.russiancouncil.org>.

⁸ E. Goffman, *Rahmen-Analyse. Ein Versuch über die Organisation von Alltagserfahrungen*, Frankfurt/M, 1977, p. 18.

⁹ R. Park, 'Physics and Society', *Essays in Sociology*, C. Hart (ed), University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1940, pp. 1-18.

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