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## **UNITY OF RUSSIAN SOCIETY. THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING SOCIAL COHESION IN CREATING THE STATE'S POSITION IN THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER**

**ABSTRACT:** A sense of unity in any society is of great value. A united society often provides strong support for rulers and their policies. Public support often legitimizes the actions of rulers and social unity is built based on shared values and beliefs. This study is focused on analysing these categories in the context of their importance for building social unity. Such a goal has led to the question: What is the importance of these categories in building social cohesion for Russians? To analyse these problems, theoretical methods were used. Russians are convinced of the uniqueness of their society. This sense of uniqueness affects the sphere of security. It gives rise to their unwillingness to participate in formal alliances and international organizations if Russia is not in a dominant position. Such views are deeply rooted in the consciousness of Russian society. Simultaneously, Russia airs grievances against the West, claiming that it does not recognise its uniqueness.

**KEYWORDS:** social solidarity, patriotism, respect for authority, Russian Federation, Russian society

### **Introduction**

Russians are convinced that they live in a unique state which has a special civilizational mission to accomplish, continuing the traditions of the Byzantine Empire. This society is characterized by a specific unity, which is cemented by a community of historical fate, attachment to the values of the Orthodox faith, and a sense of cultural and civilizational superiority over the Western world (Paliy/Kosintseva/Klushina et al. 2019, 542-547). No less important is the patriotic attitude shaped from childhood and attachment to the national tradition.

Since 2004, Russia has celebrated its National Unity Day. This public holiday commemorates the liberation of the Kremlin in 1612, captured by Poles in the Russo-Polish War of 1609-1618. On the day before the day of celebrations, public opinion researchers ask Russians questions concerning their values and national unity. According to opinion polls, the public holiday is supported by 60%

of Russians. Moreover, they also reveal that citizens' unity is concentrated around three key categories, for example, sensitivity to social justice, respect for ancestors' achievements, and trust in a strong leader (Dayosh' narodnoye 2016, 4; more on Russian historical commemorations: Omelicheva 2017, 430-442).

The author of this article has focused the study around these three categories mentioned above (social justice, respect for ancestors' achievements, and trust in a strong leader). The assumed goal of the research is focused on analysing these categories in the context of their importance for building social unity. Such a goal has led to a question: What is the importance of these categories in building social cohesion for Russians? In this question, the general research problem was included. Considering the scientific goal and the research problem, the author assumed that Russians are united by the strong leadership achievements of their ancestors, social justice, and Russian society identifies strong leadership with the power of the state. The ancestors' achievements on the battlefields are especially unifying. Social justice in Russia has an anti-business dimension, and to analyse this, the author used theoretical research methods in the form of analysis, synthesis, and reasoning on the subject literature available in this field. This article also examines how Russian administration has used social unity to create a stable state and support society's development. The author tries to prove that some peculiarities of Russian society set it apart from Western societies. This applies to the political and strategic culture of society and its values. The conclusion is also that Russia will not be satisfied with the status of large regional power. In the past, Russia only succeeded in becoming a world power in 1993, and only in one criterion – military power (Białoskórski/Kiczma/Sulek 2019, 34-38; Sulek/Białoskórski 2018, 9-32).<sup>1</sup> In Russia, failures of the government and the political system are normal. Nevertheless, in the consciousness and beliefs of society and the ruling elite, it deserves a special place in the world as a unique state.

## 1. Social Justice

Sensitivity to social justice might result from the strong internalization of slogans regarding equality and justice, which were the theoretical essence of the Communist ideology. The privatization might have also influenced the above perception of values in the 1990s, which gave rise to a new social class, the oligarchs, and caused the pauperization of the remaining part of society, including the intelligentsia, who lost the prestige and respect which they had had in the times of the USSR (Black/Kraakman/Tarassova 1999, 7-20).

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<sup>1</sup> In 2017 Russia had the status of a regional power (based on two criteria: military and geopolitical power), and local power (based on economic power).

The sense of social justice and social conscience indicated by the opinion discussed above is largely anti-business. A lack of a positive attitude towards private business activity represents the thinking in terms of the state economy and the devaluation of the market economy, which prevails in society and the caste of bureaucrats, including the defence and law enforcement institutions. With considerable public support, they can affect any business.

In Russia, after the collapse of the USSR, the institution of private property protection was not created. This is an obstacle to developing legal mentality and political culture. Private property, judicial power, and a democratic political system constitute a unified triad everywhere. Courts are indispensable for defending private property, whereas democracy is essential for the proper functioning of independent courts. In other words, democracy exists only if independent courts are protecting private property. However, these rules are not observed in Russia. Business activities, for example, production, can be launched by people who are related to those who are in power. There is little chance of developing business activity if one is not connected with the authorities.

On the other hand, the state tries to support business if political considerations justify this. A good case is agriculture, which developed dynamically as a result of state intervention. It should be observed that, both in the USSR and in Russia, there was no major turning point like this until recent years. Then, there were massive investments made in this sector, which openly infringed the rules followed by the members of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Although administrative malpractice, corruption and bribes accompanied the entire investment operation, Russian agriculture is now relatively efficient, and the surpluses are exported (Sergeyev 2016; see more: Mukhametgaliev 2019, 162-165).

The state continues to fulfil the planning, prescriptive and distributive functions, informing who is good or bad, just like in the so-called Socialist economy. However, it must be admitted that despite the flaws of such a system, Russia managed to repay its debt to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at the beginning of 2005, and in the summer of 2006, the final instalment at the Paris Club (Sputnik International 2008a). The middle class grew to 25% of the Russian population (Russia's Daily online 2008). In the years 2000-2005, the Russian Federation's average citizen grew by 26% annually. In comparison, Chinese income grew 10% annually at the same time (Sputnik International 2008b).

Considering the role of the state in the economy, one needs to consider Russia's bloated bureaucracy. Not having private property and not being encumbered with financial responsibility for their actions, bureaucrats make decisions on behalf of the state. What is more, they are not restricted by any requirements concerning the efficient administration of public resources. Therefore, they exercise the right to make subjective decisions. Because of this, while allocating public resources, they are highly susceptible to corruption, bribes, and commissions. This is the

main source of becoming rich while holding a public office and the major way of accumulating wealth that is not proportionate to one's earnings. This has created a situation in which bureaucrat's decision is highly prized (Solovyev/Zlobin 2014, 14; Pavroz 2017, 145-155).

Thus, a certain mechanism of correlation between money and decision was created. A citizen of the Russian Federation can have considerable financial resources. However, paradoxically, he or she cannot conduct any major financial operations or make a large purchase of any assets without prior consent expressed through an administrative decision taken by a bureaucrat. It even happens that ministers of foreign affairs from Western countries ask the Russian government to safeguard the private property of Western business entities so that it will not be taken over or confiscated by zealous Russian bureaucrats. It is also interesting to observe that combating the corrupted bureaucratic system is not a part of presidential or party election manifestos (Solovyev/Zlobin 2014, 14). This system makes it impossible to fight against corruption and an army of arbitrary bureaucrats, whose greed and rapacity go beyond the bounds of decency (see: Lanskoj/Myles-Primakoff 2018, 76-85).

Corporate interests in Russia and worldwide were shocked by the attempt to seize the profitable Moscow Domodedovo Airport from D. Kamenshchik (Telegina/Michailova 2016). To accomplish this, the terrorist attack that happened at the beginning of 2011 was used, with top representatives of the public authorities involved in this unlawful take-over of a profitable company. It became evident that it was impossible to protect oneself against "raiders" or shady groups, who would demand money in return for protection. These criminal groups solved business people's problems with public bureaucrats for a commission or political or financial profits (Solovyev/Zlobin 2014, 17).

In other words, in Russia, people related to business have the status of the dregs of society. The average citizen is not ashamed to be a scholar, an office worker, an employee of Gazprom, or a Western company, or to collaborate with the police or secret service. However, one is ashamed to admit that he or she is conducting an independent business activity. For years, a negative image of people related to business was created in television programs. From the Russian perspective, social justice means as much equality as possible (Solovyev/Zlobin 2014, 17).

## **2. Proud of Ancestors – a Binder of Russian Society**

The next category uniting Russian society, respect for ancestors' achievements, is connected with courage on battlefields and pride in Russian accomplishments related to science and culture. For instance, significant Russian scientific

achievements include the construction of the atomic bomb, Yuri Gagarin's space voyage, Sergei Korolev's achievements regarding the construction of ballistic missiles, rockets, and spaceships. The reason for pride concerning culture is Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy, and the mastery of the Bolshoi Theatre and Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, Prokofiev Rachmaninoff, and Shostakovich. Some artists who have maintained detachment from political events think that classical music, theatre, painting, and literature are the only areas in which a positive image of Russia exists and that culture might be more significant than petroleum (Matsuev 2016, 8).

According to research conducted in 2016 by the Russian Public Opinion Research Centre, most of society perceives Russia as a fortress besieged by enemies. Therefore, one reason to be proud is the strength of the armed forces and military successes, both past and present (see: Kaszuba 2019, 66-83). The highlighted military achievements include, for example, the victory of Alexander Nevsky over the Teutonic Order in the 13th century and the defeat of the Golden Horde by Dmitry Donskoy in the 14th century. What is more, there is the conviction that Russia has always won wars, and if it is necessary, it will also be victorious in a contemporary conflict (Byzov 2016, 8).

The liveliest and most cherished by the state is the history of World War II, which is called in Russia the Great Patriotic War (Ermolov 2019). Its worship takes the form of a state ideology, not to say religion. The arguments that indicate political mistakes and disregard for information on threats, which led to the surprise and rout of the Red Army in the first days and months of the war, are ignored. This is also true of arguments concerning unnecessary losses, often caused by the desire for operational and tactical success on the October Revolution's occasion. Furthermore, rapes committed by Soviet soldiers against the inhabitants of the captured and occupied territories are shameful and carefully concealed. According to the available figures, just in Berlin from the spring to autumn of 1945, 110,000 girls and women were raped, with other sources claiming about 80,000. 20% of the raped women became pregnant, and half of them gave birth to babies conceived by rape. Approximately 5% of the children born in the Red Army's territories were called "Russenkinder" (Basistov 2010, 269). Any critical approach to the Russian involvement in World War II is considered, in the official and social assessment, as an attempt to discredit the effort and cause national remorse aimed at weakening Russian morale and unity.

One form of building up patriotism is the "Immortal regiment" (*Bessmertnyy polk*) initiative started in 2012. It is a march that occurs on Victory Day in which the participants carry photographs of soldiers fallen during the war. In 2016, there were 16 million citizens of the Russian Federation taking part in the march. Focusing on the unity concerning the ancestors' achievements, a psychological profile of the Russian nation is built under the banner of "Russians do not surrender" (*Ruskiye ne sdayutsya*). The slogan implies that no other nation can match Russians

in heroism, and has been so for ages. Consequently, the fact that the Western values of individualism do not meet with a favourable response in Russia is no coincidence (Dayosh' narodnoye 2016, 4).

According to service members, even in the difficult moments of the 1990s, society showed respect to its army, which they believed the West was trying to destroy. They argued that one of such attempts were the provisions of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), which was signed by Russia (Treaty on Conventional 1990). At that time, Russia was weak and did not have the resources to make investments in the military, which was not equipped with modern armaments. However, thanks to the professionalism and commitment of its officers, the destruction of the army was prevented. This fact was reflected in the song entitled "Officers of Russia" by Russian singer Vika Cyganova, whose songs often have patriotic lyrics:

Officers of Russia,  
You are our only hope.  
Nobody will be second here,  
Everybody will only be first,  
And God will issue to you  
The most important order.

According to the statements made by reserve colonel Fyodor Yakimchuk and published in *Arguments and Facts (Argumenty i Fakty)*, the effects of the neglect of the Russian armed forces in the 1990s were seen during the operation in South Ossetia. However, despite the shortcomings in military gear, the soldiers completed their task. On the other hand, while discussing the war in Syria, the officer stated that

[f]or our many partners (Western countries – author's note), during the operation in Syria, the potential of our forces was an unpleasant surprise. It was the right decision to enter Syria. If we had not done that, they (the terrorists – author's note) would have come to our country (Yakimczuk 2016, 9).

It is painful for Russians that neither Europeans nor Americans treat Russia as an equal partner with such a sense of pride. Vladimir Putin clearly expressed this feeling in an interview for *Time Weekly*, which had chosen him for the Person of the Year in 2007. He stated that "America does not need any friends. We have the impression that the USA needs vassals that can be given orders." (Person of the Year 2007).

### 3. Strong Hand Governance

Finally, the third category that unites Russian citizens is the trust in a strong leader, a distinct feature of Russian society (Ruutu 2017, 1153-1162). This has become a discriminant of the Russian character that is often articulated during talks with Western partners. Such an argument was used, for instance, by Vladimir Putin at the beginning of his first presidential term of office during meetings with Tony Blair and George W. Bush. It is also vital to realize that it is one leader that is significant for Russians. If there are more leaders than one, there is rivalry, which consequently leads to a crisis. As Marian Broda observes, the current president of the Russian Federation has been accepted by the majority of Russian society since the beginning of his term of office, marginalizing the size and significance of the opposition. It is also possible to say that he has become a peculiar cult figure worshipped as a restorer of the long tradition of Russian autocrats – “Tsar Vladimir” (Broda 2011).

Since Putin’s fourth term of office, many new monuments have been erected to people who rendered great service to Russia. For example, National Unity Day, celebrated on 4th November 2016, was the time when numerous monuments were unveiled. In Moscow, Vladimir Putin unveiled a monument to his namesake Vladimir the Great. The monument is 16 meters high, and it stands near the walls of the Kremlin. In Russia, one can hear remarks that the president had the monument constructed to himself since both Vladimir the Great and Vladimir Putin bear a resemblance to each other. There might also be a symbolic dimension: Vladimir the Great baptized Kievan Rus’, while the currently ruling Vladimir restored Crimea to the motherland.

Moreover, the Russian Orthodox Church also contributed to this narrative. Patriarch Kirill, one of the closest supporters of the Kremlin authorities, stated that “St. Vladimir helps all people who bear his name and who glorify him with their deeds” (Putin metaforyczny 2016, 8). The figure of Vladimir the Great is the subject of a historical dispute as well as a *de facto* political dispute between Russia and Ukraine. In 2015, during the proceedings of the 1,000th anniversary of Vladimir’s death, Russia claimed that he had laid the foundations for creating a strong centralized state, whereas Ukraine argued that Christianity accepted in the Crimea in 988 A.D. was the first of Ukraine’s many pro-European choices. According to Ukrainians, Russia has stolen Ukraine’s historical heritage, and Kievan Rus’, with its power centres in Kiev and Veliky Novgorod, had been developing intensely before there was even the first mention of Moscow (Putin metaforyczny 2016, 8).

On the National Unity Day in 2016, there were also monuments unveiled to Ivan the Terrible in Oryol (a town in the western part of Russia on the Oka River) and in Alexandrov, Vladimir Oblast (on the Moscow Uplands) and in 2017



in Moscow (Business Standard 2016; The Moscow Times, 2017). The Kremlin believes that the reinforcement of the national and historical myths shows that the state is strong. Moreover, the myths will unite the citizens around the state. The Russian elites have always regarded Russia as an empire which was concentrated around strong leaders. According to the influential and opinion-forming writer, Alexander Prokhanov, there have been five such empires. The first one was the Kiev-Veliky Novgorod empire, embodied by Vladimir the Great, who introduced Christianity in Kievan Rus'. Second, the Grand Duchy of Moscow was established by numerous Grand Knyazes, with the most significant one being Ivan the Terrible. He abolished the independence of wealthy noblemen, annexed the Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan, reformed the administration, and created a strong and centralized state stretching to the Pacific Ocean. Next, the third empire was Russia ruled by Peter the Great, while the fourth one was Stalin's Soviet Russia. Finally, the fifth empire is Russia under the rule of Putin, whose monuments are already erected while he is alive (Interview with Russian writer Alexander Prokhanov 2016, 3). One of them was built in Agalatovo in May, 2015, 20 kilometres away from St. Petersburg. The bust of President Putin depicts him as a Roman emperor (Kazimierczuk 2019). In the opinion of the abovementioned writer, the president deserves the statue for his achievements, especially the restoration of Crimea to Russia. From the third and current fourth term, which began in 2018, Russian society has become increasingly critical of Putin. He is maliciously called a "natural phenomenon", and during the protests against the arrest of A. Navalny in January 2021, after returning from Germany from treatment for poisoning, "the duffer in the bunker" (Kułakowski 2017, 29-37). This is an allusion to an obsessive fear of coronavirus infection (Domańska/Rogoża 2021).

There are concerns about how these leaders' atrocities are justified. For example, Stalin committed appalling crimes, whereas St. Vladimir the Great murdered pagans. While a strong state is being created, there is a battle going on against both external and internal enemies, and it has always been so. "When Russia was under strong-arm rule, and its rulers had blood on their hands, the country survived. However, when the rule was soft, just like in the times of Nicholas II or Gorbachev, the country collapsed and disintegrated" (Tseplyaev 2016, 3).

At the end of 2016, there was a decrease in trust in all state institutions: the government, the State Duma, political parties, and the mass media. The only exception is the president and the armed forces. There is still a high level of trust placed in them. It is not without significance that an exceptionally efficient propaganda machine exists, which skilfully manipulates public opinion according to needs (Strzelecki 2017, 20).

The corrosion of the political environment can be illustrated by the fact that the level of trust in the Russian Orthodox Church has dropped to 43% (Kostikov 2016, 7). For decades, the Russian Church was an important institution that cemented Russian



society together (Chawryło 2016, 9-1). For comparison, in 2012, 73% of respondents believed that the Russian Orthodox Church played a positive role in the life of the country, while about 64% trusted it (Wiara.pl 2012). The fall in trust stems from the fact that within the last few years, the Russian Church communicated with its congregation not as an independent moral institution but as one of the elements of the state's political machinery. With this wave of social concerns regarding everyday survival, Russians reminisce about how morning radio and television broadcasts started in the times of the USSR. Society was then administered a dose of everyday optimism. Work in factories was accompanied by propaganda and artistic activity. Even tragic situations were often discussed in a way that was positive in tone.

Careful attention was paid to the songs, assuming that they were the most comprehensible parts of the propaganda for society. There existed a whole set of cheering and optimistic songs. The following songs were constantly broadcast in the morning: "My Country is a Broad Country" (*Shirokaya strana moya rodnaya*) or "The Party is Our Helmsman" (*Partiya nash rulevoy*). In the evening, the Soviet motherland lulled its citizens to sleep with songs about waiting for enduring happiness. In the State Tretyakov Gallery, in one of the rooms, there was a painting entitled "Morning of Our Motherland" (*Utro nashey Rodiny*) by Fyodor Shurpin, painted in the 1940s. It depicted Stalin in white clothes with a coat draped casually over one arm. In the background, one could see tractors and pylons in kolkhoz fields (Soviet Art. USSR Culture 2021).

In contrast, the mornings and days of the contemporary Russian citizen are full of completely different content. Citizens are woken up by programs about NATO military exercises, an aircraft carrier sailing across the Baltic or the Mediterranean Sea, a tank biathlon, or the launch of new generation missiles (Tickle 2020). Television shows announce the establishment of new military bases. It is true that the USA and European NATO countries also conduct military exercises, usually in response to Russia's actions. Moreover, they also introduce new types of armament and send vessels and aircraft to demonstrate their combat capability and readiness.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, the Russians are convinced of the uniqueness of their society. It should be observed that it is not a characteristic that makes them stand out from other nations. The same feelings of uniqueness can be found in the USA, France, the UK, Japan and Germany. Nevertheless, the Russians, like none of these societies, need strong leadership, which they identify with the power of the state. At the same time, they declare admiration and loyalty to a leader who can pursue Russian

national interests, even in an unfavourable international environment (Minkina 2019, 34-50).

The Russians live in the sense of social solidarity but in their opinion, it has primarily an antibusiness character, which negatively affects the development of entrepreneurship in the state. Russians' sense of uniqueness gives rise to their unwillingness to participate in formal alliances and international organizations if Russia is not in a dominant or special position. Such views are deeply rooted in Russian society's consciousness and are additionally fuelled by the educational system and state propaganda. Simultaneously, Russia airs grievances against the West, claiming that it does not notice its uniqueness. It seems that this creates a certain cognitive dissonance in many Russians, which consists of the confrontation of how they perceive themselves in terms of their pride, on the one hand, and the living standards of Western societies on the other. However, at the same time, Russia tries to establish connections with the West, as it is aware that they cannot be avoided for many different reasons ranging from the economy and security to culture and everyday life.

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