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Ethnic Self-Consciousness and Interethnic Relations in the Poly-Ethnic Region: A Research in Tatarstan

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Abstract

The article investigates the state and dynamics of the national development and international relations in the course of 28 years in Tatarstan. It touches upon different and sometimes contradictory points of view on these processes. The article also represents the dynamics of the changes in the evaluation of these matters. Besides it studies the dynamics of opinions on issues related to the status of Tatarstan, the use of Tatar and Russian languages, etc.

Methods of a longitudinal research allow making a comparative analysis of the empirical data that have been accumulating for several decades since 1989. The last empirical survey was conducted by us in 2017. This survey of Naberezhnye Chelny residents aged over 18 was carried out according to a stratified (regionalized) sample (n = 650), and ensured representativeness.

Keywords: Ethnos, Nation, Poly-ethnic environment, International relations, Ethnic self-consciousness.

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Introduction

The specificity of Russia lies in a complex tangle of its internal conditions and external factors. Joining global processes and respecting universal human values, our country should do it in its own way preserving all its cultural wealth, heritage, unique spiritual achievements. But within the country itself the striving for common goals and values and unity shouldn't lead to general monotony, the disappearance of ethnic and cultural identity, and thus result in social uniformity and the notorious "blurring of borderlines". At the same time the support for multiculturalism, multi-ethnicity, multi-confessional and social diversity, ideological pluralism, personal uniqueness should not lead to the atomization of individuals, nations, religions, social groups, which is generally followed by their opposition and unmanaged conflicts. Our society has to constantly search for the optimal interaction of social and individual, of the national diversity and all-Russian fundamental values, traditionalism and the necessity to modernize. The success of this work is paving the shortest path to the economic and cultural development of the country, while the consequences of its failure are leading to devastating social upheavals.

Data and Methods

Theoretical problems in the field of ethnic studies concentrate primarily around the concept of ethnos and ethnic identity. There are many works in which the nature of these concepts is being debated, however the authors argue that there is a certain set of characteristics more or less observed in each ethnic group. In this case, the dispute is about which of the characteristics of an ethnic group is decisive or predominant, although it is recognized that neither of them should be absolute. These characteristics usually include: ethnonym (self-designation of the ethnic group), ethnic and cultural peculiarities (rituals, customs, family life), the unity of the territory, genealogical criterion (common origin), psycho-anthropological peculiarities, common goals, language, religious affiliation, axiological factor (ethnic system of values), ethnic identity, type of management, etc. The problem of ethnic identity is perhaps the most controversial.

The scope of this work does not allow to widely consider theoretical issues because it is more important here to transfer the analysis of this problem into the applied sphere.

In 1989, we conducted the first investigation of inter-ethnic relations in the city of Naberezhnye Chelny. The results were quite consistent with the violent and disturbing atmosphere of that time. It was a period of profound social changes, lofty expectations, when the search for new historical perspectives was accompanied by painful damage of old foundations, and the explosive growth of national consciousness against the background of international tolerance often manifested itself in the form of ethnic radicalism. At the early stages the city development was obviously one-sided: the rapid economic growth, huge migration flows were not accompanied by the same increase in general culture. And the traditional principles of Tatar, Russian and other nationalities' culture were paid only minimal attention to. In 1996, 2002, 2008, 2014 and 2017 we carried out new researches, which goals were to examine the dynamics of the changes in public attitudes and moods. At all the stages of the investigation we included within a large range of problems the assessment of inter-ethnic situation, the attitude of the citizens to learning and the use of the Tatar language, to the status of the Republic, etc. Some of the results are presented below.

Results and Discussion

In 1989 the question was raised about the state of inter-ethnic relations in the city. The received responses to the full extent reflected the complexity, uncertainty and inconsistency of that situation. The largest number of respondents (44.2%) had admitted worsening of those relations, 39.6% had not noticed

any changes, and only a small proportion of respondents (1.6%) admitted their improvement. But even more significant was not this fact in itself, but those very remarkable differences in the assessment of the situation, which were given by various national groups. For example, at that time in Naberezhnye Chelny the deterioration of national relations was noted by twice as many Russian people (57.5%) than by Tatars (29.5%). On the contrary, much more Tatars (49.9%) than representatives of the Russian population (28.8%) did not notice any serious changes.

This discrepancy in the estimates was reflected in the respondents' explanations of what changes, in their opinion, were taking place in the national sphere. Half of the residents (49.2%) saw in them the revival of the Tatar language and culture, but not a small part (37.0%) evaluated those changes as the rise of nationalism. Moreover, among the Tatar respondents the largest part (59.7%) placed the emphasis on the development of their own nationality, national culture and traditions, while among the Russian population this point of view was shared only in every third response (33.3%). And 14.9% of Tatar and 45.9% Russian population were inclined to see in those processes the growth of nationalism. The data of the survey of 2017 showed an essentially different picture: then the largest part of the citizens (58.4%) believed that the interethnic situation in the city was stable, and those who believed that it had improved (19.1%) were somewhat more than those who thought that it was getting worse (16.3%). The convergence in the estimates of the two main ethnic groups was not less significant. The situation was considered to be stable then by more Russian (60.9%) than Tatar (54.4%) citizens, deterioration was observed more by the Tatars (20.2%) than by the Russian (17.4%) population. And if in 1989 almost nobody was speaking about improvement, in 2009 it was noted by 21.7% of the Russian citizens and by 22.1% of the Tatars. However, it should be mentioned that the data of the survey in 2014 looked a little bit more positive. Perhaps the current economic crisis brings additional tension to all processes, including inter-ethnic ones.

At the same time, the research of 1989 showed that it was mainly just the difference in the estimates, and least of all it was the reflection of the nationalistic stereotypes. For when interviewing young citizens, it was found out that only 7.4% of them were guided by a national approach when choosing friends, while for the vast majority (81.5%) that factor did not matter. According to the survey of 2017, 87.3% Chelny citizens did not choose their friends on the basis on ethnicity.

In addition, in 1989, 61.6% claimed they did not attach importance to the ethnic composition of the team they work with, and other 11.8% wanted their team to be certainly multicultural, and only 15.7% preferred to work mainly with the representatives of their nationality. According to the study of 2017 those data looked accordingly like this: 69.3%, 7.7%, and 16.3% respectively. Differences of opinions between the main national groups in this matter are negligible.

Answering the question of what factors should be considered for the appointment to a positions of trust, almost all the Russian respondents both in 1989 and in 2017 marked only professional competence. Though there was less unanimity among the Tatars, the vast majority of them (84.0% in 1989 and 81.6% in 2017) looked at the problem the same way. However, a large part believed that the appointment should take into account the knowledge of the Tatar language (14.1% in 1989 and 17.0% in 2017), and some (1.9% in 1989 and 1.4% in 2017) even thought that nationality should be taken into account. However, one of the unexpected results of our survey in 2017 can be considered as follows: now among the Russian nationality 19.2% of respondents believe that nationality should be paid attention to when appointing a person to a position of trust.

Another issue that is being constantly with varying degrees of intensity discussed in the Republic of Tatarstan is the one concerning its status. It was particularly violently and actively debated in the late 80-ies, when the then leaders of the autonomous Tatarstan were striving to gain the status of a Union

republic within the Soviet Union. According to our data, in 1989 about half of the citizens (49.5%) had a positive attitude to that idea, and only 28.5% treated it negatively. But the differences between the major ethnic groups in that matter were very considerable: 71.6% of the Tatars supported that endeavor, and 14.7% did not want it. Among the Russian population 29.7% would have liked to see the Republic being a Union one, but 43.6% treated that idea negatively, realizing that it actually meant the secession from the Russian Federation. According to the survey of 2017 the predominant part of the citizens treats this issue with interest, but not so sharply as before. Most people believe that the current situation in the republic as a whole is optimal, although even today (2017 data) about half of the citizens (48.1%) believe that their republic should have more autonomy within the Russian Federation (39.1% Russian citizens and 53.4% Tatars), and almost as many (47.3%) believe that the rights they already have are quite enough (56.5% Russian citizens and 36.2% Tatars). In addition, 5.4% of Tatars believe that Tatarstan should be an independent state. Compared to 2014, the two national groups slightly enlarged the number of those who would like to increase the degree of independence of the Republic.

Although language is not the main characteristic of their ethnicity for all the people, many researchers consider it to be the defining feature of ethnicity [1; 2]. In the modern world, language processes are among the most vulnerable and are deeply woven into the context of ethno-cultural, socio-economic, geopolitical, and demographic shifts.

Ethno-linguistic processes in Russia and the ongoing policy of language education in Tatarstan attract the attention of researchers from different countries [3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8]. At the same time, one of the most serious and difficult problems, which is ambiguously interpreted and solved differently in different regions of Russia and the world, is the problem of bilingualism. Speaking about bilingualism, the well-known American sociolinguist Joshua Fishman highlights four main parameters that determine the individual choice of language: the participants in the conversation, the relationship between them, the topic of the conversation and the situation [9].

The empirically fixed attitude of the population to this problem was one of the significant indicators of the state and possible prospects for national development and interethnic relations in the city and region.

In 1989 there existed a split between the main national groups as well as within them on the issue who should study the Tatar language at schools. Among the Tatar respondents 24.6% believed that it was necessary for all the children of the Tatar nationality without fail, and among the Russian ones only 9.6% thought so. But more Russian citizens (24.7%) than Tatar ones (17.7%) believed that it was necessary for all the children of the Tatar nationality if their parents had no objections. The majority of the Russian respondents (52.3%) were inclined to believe that to teach children the Tatar language irrespective to their nationality was possible only at the will of their parents. And 41.0% of the Tatars agreed on that. And 14.3% of Tatars were confident that their native language should be taught to all children without fail, but this point of view was shared only by 8.0% of Russian population. In 2017 we again asked the question about the level of the Tatar language teaching in the schools of the city. And if in 1989 71.2% of Tatars believed that the level was not high, and teaching should be improved, in 2017 only 48.2% thought so. Among the Russian citizens, on the contrary, there appeared more of those who would like to improve the quality of teaching (32.2% in 1989 and 34.7% in 2017). 12.1% of Tatars in 1989 and 34.7% in 2017 believed that everything should be left as it was. These data are likely to indicate a certain satisfaction with the state of affair in this area.

In this regard the practical application of the Tatar language becomes also important. In 1989 30.2% of the Tatars spoke only Russian at home, 15.1% – only Tatar and 54.7% used at home both languages. These data for 2017 looked respectively as follows: 34.1%, 18.9%, and 47.0%.

In communication with friends in 1989, 41.1% of the Tatars spoke only the Russian language, 1.8%, – only the Tatar language, and 57.1% used both languages. According to the survey of 2017 these data was respectively as follows: 43.3%, 3.2%, 53.5%. At work in 1989 only the Russian language was used by 52.7%, only the Tatar language – by 1.8%, and both languages – by 45.5% of the Tatars. In 2017, respectively: 46.7%, 2.4%, 50.9%.

Conclusion

The results showed that learning of the two languages at school had led to greater satisfaction with the Tatar population of the city, but did not result in any significant change in the use of the Russian and Tatar languages. [10, p. 249–250].

"There is a contradictory trend observed: with the increase in the number of young people who studied the Tatar language at school, the proportion of people using it in everyday life decreases" [11, p. 12]. To settle language problems it is important to use the experience of bilingual education, which was gained on the territory of modern Tatarstan in the pre-Soviet period [12], and also the Russian experience of ethno-pedagogical training of teachers for working in modern poly-ethnic environment [13].

Ethno-social sphere – is a sensitive barometer of political processes and economic situation of the society. At the same time it itself is an important factor influencing them. It has been proved that inter-ethnic relations in the region depend both on external conditions and internal factors. At the end of the 80-ies of the last century, against the background of general destabilization of the country which led to devastating results the unsolved problems were getting more and more evident. They were mainly connected with the Tatar language, education and culture. Since then the national groups have been overcoming the enormous difficulties endured by all the Russian society with joint efforts, not allowing ethno-radicals to use them for destructive purposes. Although it is too early to speak about the solution of all the problems in this area, there has emerged a clear understanding that development shouldn't be limited to industrial growth; it must be harmonious and comprise all aspects of culture, including its traditional aspects.

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Footnotes

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