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**Modernization of the Russian Education Under the Geopolitical Realities of Modernity:  
The Problem of Formation of the Russian Identity\***

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**Abstract**

The obvious contradiction between a modern geopolitical course of the country to multi-polarity, to the Eurasian vector of development and the strategy of modernization of Russian education according the Western (European) model derivative of the idea of uni-polarity, embedding the Russian education in a valuable semantic paradigm of the Western civilization is being implemented till present. The contradiction related to the strategic geopolitical vector of development of modern Russia and the strategy of its state institutes, education, in particular, leads to the fact that in the Russian society the complex unresolved humanitarian problems will turn into a serious crisis in future. One of such challenges in Russia aggravated due to the global opposition between Russia and the USA is the problem of national unity of Russian society, the formation of Russian national identity. Variants of the pedagogical solution of the given problem actualizing the idea of multi-polarity and the paradigm of the Russian Eurasian civilization corresponding to it, in particular, the Cossacks phenomenon are considered in the article. In this aspect, the Cossack culture appears as a spiritual and ideological phenomenon of Russian civilization, as the national value, actualizing the idea of the personifying the idea of Russianness in the Eurasian vector of development of Russia, creating the traditional basis for Russian identity formation among the younger generations at present and in future.

**Keywords:** Modernization of Russian education, Geopolitics, Multi-polarity, Eurasianism, Russian civilization, Russian identity, Pedagogy of Cossacks.

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## Introduction

Now the tangle of world contradictions is concentrated in the field of geopolitics –the fight of superpowers (the USA, China, and Russia) for the model of development of humanity defining a vector of civilization planetary development for many decades ahead. The existing geopolitical reality means that uni-polarity presented by the Western civilization led by the USA today, according to the Western ideologists is the fact and the result of the victory of the collective West over historical alternatives of social development of humanity, accomplished by the beginning of the third millennium of modern times (Dugin, 2014). However, recognition of the fact of uni-polarity does not mean recognition of its positive content, the sovereign national states' positivity.

The ruling elite of Russia accepted the unipolar world under the domination of the USA and appreciated it as the world of global goodness in hope of receiving significant preferences from the collective West in socio-economic and political spheres. However, West viewed the situation in a different way considering that guarantee of strengthening of the American uni-polarity is weakened and separated Russia which under no circumstance will not be capable to unite other countries around itself (Brzezinski, 2019).

The strategy relating to uni-polarity demonstrated its impossibility to be realized in modern Russia, being in obvious conflicts with historical, political, spiritual bases of the Russian civilization (Dugin, 2014). In fact, such a strategy can be implemented under one requirement – treachery of national interests and disintegration of the country. Admission of the further weakening of the country and its transformation into a resource colony of the West meant self-defeating. This fact determined the people's support of the new political course of President V. Putin based on strengthening of territorial integrity of the country, modernization its all life aspects, restitution its status of the "great power".

In the new policy of Russia, the lines of other geopolitical strategy are visibly determined – multi-polarity–which foundation is laid in the Decree of the President of Russia V. Putin "the concept of national security of the Russian Federation" where it is directly defined: "Russia will promote ideology of formation of the multipolar world ..." (About the Concept of National Security, 2001).

Multi-polarity excludes the domination of one-two powers over the whole world, maintains the effective competition between civilizations. The strategy of multi-polarity has been determined from the need of the asymmetric response to the collective West that defined the formation of the Eurasian Union assuming inclusion the majority of the CIS states - one of the most important priorities of the Russian foreign policy in the nearest future. Along with other poles — American, Chinese, European, Indian, Turanian, the Eurasian Union is supposed as a pole of the multipolar world.

The Eurasian Union, in its theoretical bases, relies on the Eurasianism ideology acting as its methodological basis and claiming to be “multi-polarity philosophy” (Dugin, 2014). The philosophy of Eurasianism interprets the idea of Russian civilization within the meaning of its special features not only as a country of both European and Asian culture, but as a rather autonomous civilization, where the Turkic, Finno-Ugrian, Muslim ethno-social, cultural and religious traditions, and structures were of great importance as well as the prevailing East Slavic and Orthodox factor (Baluev, 2001).

In the theory of Eurasianism, the Russian cultural expanse and the Russian civilization are far from being confined by borders of the present Russian Federation, but include all the post-Soviet field, which civilizational unity is supported by the social pattern similarity, mental characteristics of peoples who live there, remaining educational space, historically emerged economical relationships, energy interests, and strategic military challenges.

The continuity of the multipolar world, Eurasian Union and Eurasianism appears to act by the tangible features of the nearest future, where political integration force of the Eurasian civilizational poles will finally lead to emerging of a powerful, planetary force, which will be capable to actively resist to the unipolar monopoly of the USA and collective West (Dugin, 2014). Nowadays the alternative of the above issue is given quite accurately: either we will assert the right for maintaining and developing our original civilizational patterns, or we will lose independence and disappear as the subjects of history and culture.

### **Education Crisis in Russia**

The socio-cultural phenomenon of Russian education also appears in the geopolitical paradigm of multi-polarity in a different way. Despite the permanent modernization of the Russian education, continuing for the last quarter of a century, it remains in crisis, which was pre-determined by the strategy of incorporation of the Russian society social institutes in the wake of the occidental civilization, chosen in the middle of 90s and continued to be actual till present. Hence, blind assimilation of the Western patterns and forms of educational activity comes, aimed at utilitarian, economical centric approach and obliviousness of traditions of the Russian (Soviet) education, established for centuries, consolidated in the past into the civilizational pole of the Russian civilization (Bondarevskaya, 2015; Belozyortsev, 2004).

There is no need to repeat about “painful points” of modern Russian education, not resolution pendency of which led to, for example, the emergence of the parallel tutor education, without which entering a higher education institution is impossible. The other definite “achievement” of the modern education in Russia is the signs of social differentiation of the society, introduced to the educational sphere and determined liquidation of the social interfusion mechanism. Pertinently, the above

deplorable fact facilitated the dismantling of the principle of nationality, national school, which was an obligatory requirement and result of Russian and Soviet education development in the past.

Teachers do not maintain the reforms, the essence of which reduced to the paperwork, to the double and, sometimes, triple duplication of the process and results of training. The result of overwork (one and half or two wages), which is involuntarily taken by a school teacher in order to somehow financially be aligned with the subsistence minimum, is the loss of their health, neglect of the educational and health-saving functions of education and; hence, decrease deterioration of the Russian education competitively on the global market (Bondarevskaya, 2015).

The crisis also extends to higher pedagogical education. 15 year later it can be said that the hopes for modernization of the higher education, associated with the entry of Russia into the Bologna process, failed since apriority specifics of values and senses of the Russian education has not been considered. The competency-based approach, one of the main principles of the Bologna system, getting close with the Russian bureaucratic tradition, now is absolutized, unitized, and formalized (Bondarevskaya, 2015). The Bologna process and its declarations for publicity and universalism under the conditions of the European and American sanctions have proven to be almost folded as the transparent educational area for the Russian Federation. The teachers of higher school are pressed by necessity to draw up to issue various plans, programs, reports, presentations, rankings, etc. Being in conditions of permanent alarmism, in their valuable time, teachers dedicate to the self-realization in a “paper” variant of professionalism, which is strangely appreciated by the numerous authorities as the main criteria while inspecting and controlling the educational institutions. Having studied the relationships of teachers of the higher school to the real processes of its modernization, Mrs. E.V. Bondarevskaya expresses that “We are still ‘catching up’, not America, but Europe say the teachers. They characterize the contemporary educational situation as ambivalent, conjuring the expression of converse feelings, – hopes for positive changes and disappointments, caused by hard and unpopular nature of innovations in the higher education, its bureaucratization” (2015: 50).

The crisis phenomena are also expressed by obvious critical overloading of the civic and professional potential of educators because of problems accumulated for decades (professional burnout, the loss of pedagogical workers from the educational sector) becomes worse.

The above analysis shows that the Russian educational aim contradicts in itself. On one hand, the education strategy is catching up with the Western model to increase its efficiency – but the Western model has a unipolar approach; on the other hand, the Russian educational system wants to continue its multipolar approach.

Uncertainty and contradictory, related to the strategic and geopolitical vector of the modern Russian development and the strategy of her national institutions and education in particular, lead to accumulation of a big scope of unresolved humanitarian problems in the Russian society, restricting progressive development of the country and accompanied by a severe crisis in the foreseeable future. One of these global challenges to Russia in her historical and cultural retrospective is the problem of the national unity of Russian society, the formation of the Russian national identity (The Strategy of the State National Politics, 2012).

Nowadays Russia counters the US-led unipolar world, defending the paradigm of multi-polarity and its ideological expression – the Eurasianism. In fact, we have been declared a new “cold war”. Each of the sides is looking for the weak points of its rival. It is common knowledge that the USA considers the Russian multinational and polyconfessional structure as one of these weak points, which in fact for a thousand years made up the unique character of the Russian civilization. Indeed, there are some problems here that millennial Russian nation-building was depreciated by the years of Soviet governance, which has taken the national and territorial principle as a basic one, what has finally become one of the reasons for the USSR dissolution. One of the problems, which has recently become actual in the Russian scientific discourse within the context of “The Russian Federation National Security till 2020”, is the task related to the formation of the Russian national identity. It is stressed that neither Russian identity in particular nor Tatarian or some other national’s, but namely Russian in common, which is able to overcome intrastate ethnic and religious contradictions in the state (Lubskiy, 2015).

Increasing educational awareness might solve the above-mentioned problems. The education may help to form a national and civilizational identity by considering the multi-cultural aspects. From our point of view, one of these aspects, reflecting the Eurasian character of the Russian civilization, is the culture of Russian Cossacks (Andrienko et al., 2018).

## **Methods**

In the context of new challenges faced by Russia, during the analysis of the phenomenon of Cossacks, it seems to us advisable to rely upon the methodology of civilizational approach, orienting the researcher to a semantic, motivational, moral and ideological understanding of the Cossacks’ nature, mobilizing the deep backgrounds of this phenomenon. Within the framework of civilizational approach, we focus attention on the phenomenological conception of the Cossacks’ history philosophy, which predetermines penetration in its fundamental nature. We believe that getting around to the initial nature of this phenomenon, understanding of its significance during establishing and strengthening of the Russian civilization in the past, lay the real groundwork for understanding of

the Cossacks' meaningful role in the issues of the Russian national identity formation at present and in future. Below we'll dwell on the theoretical development and confirmation of the above-offered fundamentals.

### **Discussion**

Historiosophic understanding of the Cossacks is, first of all, addressing to its moral and ideological nature (Melnikov-Razvedenkov, 1996). Phenomenological studies, conducted by us in this direction, show that characteristic of the Cossacks, engrained in scientific discourse as an ethnic and class phenomenon, obscures its another, truly popular, moral and ideological ground (Lukash, 2014). First of all, the explanation is that the Cossacks' phenomenon, due to its powerful influence to the social and political life of Russia, has always come under ideological pressure, acquiring stamps and stereotypes.

In fact, for tsarism the Cossacks was a support of the supreme power on the one hand, remaining unchanged and attractive example of sovereignty, relativistic freedom-will, progressing land relation on the other hand. Here hence comes clamorous endeavor of the autocratic government to preserve and support in every possible way the Cossacks military-class status quo and suppress any attempts of its change from the underside. The Bolsheviks inculcated ideological blinders in regard to the Cossacks even more actively. During the period of struggle for power, in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> – the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Cossacks were named “suppressors of freedom”, “whip men”; during the Civil war there was a decree of Y. Sverdlov on the elimination of the Cossacks; in the era of industrialization and collectivization - the struggle with the Cossack mentality; the Holodomor (extermination by hunger) in 1932 - 33 years; during the post-war period - a stereotype of “the Soviet Cossacks”(“The Kuban Cossacks” movie).

An active appeal to understanding of the ideological origins of the Cossacks begins during the first wave of emigration to the West, when takes place an assessment and analysis of the path covered and the reasons for the defeat of the White movement in the Civil War. At the end of 1920s, the Board of the Cossacks Union (in Paris) carried out the questionnaire about the past, present, and future of the Cossacks (The Cossacks, 1928). Analysis of the statements of the questionnaires' authors shows that the Cossacks are understood by them as the expression of the best qualities of the Russian people and, more broadly, the Russian nation. In fact, in the context of the questionnaire about the past, present, and future of the Cossacks occurs the continuation of the search for an acceptable form of life of the Russian people, the search for the ideal image of a person of Russian culture.

This search process started much earlier. The great Russian writers (A. S. Pushkin, N. I. Gogol, M. Yu. Lermontov, L. N. Tolstoy) in search of examples of the best national fates referred to the Cossacks, to

its social device and values. In the Cossacks, they saw acceptable forms and meanings of life for a large part of the Russian society, thus forming in the public consciousness a perfect image of a person of Russian culture (Lukash, 2016). The appeal of humanity geniuses to the Cossacks' moral – ideological backgrounds is worth much. As the Russian historian fairly writes: "The Russian people, coming out of the state bounds, were searching in the Cossacks for a new, different social order" (Kostomarov, 2007: 525).

Consideration of the Cossacks from positions of civilizational approach leads to some important conclusions with regard to its participation in the national building. In the process of its cultural Genesis, the Cossacks developed some certain social paradigms which have acquired multicultural character that go beyond the sub-ethnic and class essence of the Cossacks. A striking expression of one of these paradigms, which forms the original model of the Russian national identity, is the concept of the "Russianhood", proposed by scientific and pedagogical School of the Caucasus' of the academician V.B. Vinogradov (2006).

The culture of the Cossacks, acting as the frontline of the Russian geopolitical expansion, was a typical manifestation of the paradigm of the "Russianhood", a proven algorithm of "cooperation" of Russia and the peoples included in its orbit. The interpenetration of the culture of the Cossacks and peoples included in the structure of the empire occurred not only at the level of the daily mentality, but also contributed to the formation of a multi-ethnic and, sometimes, multi-confessional sub-ethnos.

A typical example of the issue is the ethnic confessional structure of the Tersk Cossacks' Army. The research, conducted by Professor A. A. Golovlev, sheds light on the formation of the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional sub ethnos of the Tersk Cossacks. In its composition, in addition to Greben, Don and Volga Cossacks, peasants and retired soldiers of the Caucasian army, enlisted in the Cossack class, including ethnic groups of the Kalmyks, Ossetians, Kabardians, Georgians, and Tatars. A.A. Golovlev writes: "The Kalmyks, the overwhelming majority of Ossetians and Kabardians Cossacks adopted the Orthodox faith. A small part of Ossetians-Cossacks and Kabardians-Cossacks and all Tatars-Cossacks preserved Islam. In sequence, polyethnic and multiconfessional sub ethnos of Tersk Cossacks have been developed, which before had been ruined and dissipated during Civil War and after the final victory of the Soviet regime on Terek" (Golovlev, 2017). Similar processes happened also in other Cossacks troops, which had multinational and multi-confessional structure.

The conclusion, that follows from the analysis of these processes, is quite natural: the Russian Cossacks, as national movement, at the early stages acted as a certain national model of nation-building, introducing the peoples of Russia into the cultural and historical field of Russian civilization, acting in the formation of the Russian national identity as a kind of "melting pot". The October

Revolution interrupted the natural process of nationwide Russian construction. However, the integrative nature of the Cossacks' phenomenon appeared again during the period of Cossacks revival in the 1990s. For a short period, stamps and stereotypes of the Soviet period towards the Cossacks were rejected. This period of 25-30 years ago, marked with the outstanding support of the Cossacks representatives by the people of Russian South during direct elections into all structures of the Russian legislation power (from the local authorities to State Duma), has not been appreciated in the Russian historical, social and political discourse.

The revival of the Cossacks opened its other side – pedagogical and educational potential of the Cossacks' culture, in which the civilizational mission of the Russian Cossacks' culture in the formation of the Russian national identity continued in the modern phenomenon of the Cossacks' pedagogy (Lukash, 2014).

Currently, the pedagogy of the Cossacks is a dynamically developing social and pedagogical process, that goes far beyond the traditional educational system of the Cossacks, uniting into an innovative spiritual and educational space of the territories and regions of the Russian South: the Cossacks-oriented classes, the Cossacks' schools, cadet corps, youth Cossacks' clubs, pre-school institutions with the status of "The Cossacks" (Doluda, 2011). The main ideas of the Cossacks' pedagogy are: education of a person of the Russian culture, spokesman of the Russian civilization ideas, establishment of a freeman personality, rooted in his/her birthplace, education of the young generation in the spirit of patriotism, the "Russianhood"; organization of the general Eurasian cultural vector of the young generation; formation in the youth consciousness of the psychological readiness for service to the Motherland with total dedication.

## **Conclusions**

Modernization of a domestic education system according to the Bologna requirements meets in the Russian reality the natural barrier at the level of mentality of society, issued in the form of the Russian (Soviet) educational tradition, acting in this case as a certain "soil" basis. In the Russian historical retrospect, this paradigm is expressed in the well-known historical and cultural confrontation between Westernism (unipolarity) and Eurasianism (multipolarity). According to the geostrategic way to multipolarity, chosen by Russia, it is necessary to add the existing paradigm of modernization of domestic education with a new vector, in which Russia is considered as the Eurasian civilization; to decide on substantial filling of the Russian civilization as inflorescences ethno-social, cultural–religious traditions; to reveal the sociocultural phenomena which for centuries have been working for unity and identity of the Russian society, educational opportunities of these phenomena in modern conditions; to develop the pedagogical models and technologies of training and education, which are based on meanings and



values of the Russian civilization. The task consists in the development of the idea of multi-polarity and the paradigm of the Russian, Eurasian civilization, corresponding to it in modern Russian education, to fill this vector with the system science and practical inventions, which satisfy the Russian (Soviet) educational traditions.

In the context of understanding of the development of Russia as one of the poles of modern multipolar geopolitics, as a Eurasian civilization, some Russian socio-cultural phenomena appear in their new quality. An example of this is the phenomenon of the Cossacks, which is greatly enriched and expanded in its phenomenological, historiosophical consideration from the standpoint of the civilizational approach. In this aspect, the Cossacks' culture appears as a moral and ideological phenomenon of the Russian civilization, as a national value, which embodies the "Russianhood" idea in the Eurasian vector of development of Russia. This thesis opens in front of the Cossacks' pedagogics the new perspective possibilities, which establish a traditional foundation for the Russian identity formation with the young generation at present and in the future.

#### **Conflict of interests**

The authors confirm that the presented data does not contain any conflict of interest.

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