

## Development of a Common Russian Identity as the Basis for a Single Civil Nation, Given the Multicultural Academic Environment in North-Caucasus

Alina A. Levitskaya<sup>a\*</sup>

\* Corresponding author: Alina A. Levitskaya, rector@ncfu.ru

<sup>a</sup>North-Caucasus Federal University, Pushkina 1, Stavropol, Russia, rector@ncfu.ru, +7(8652)956932

### Abstract

<http://dx.doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2016.07.18>

The task of shaping a civil nation, requires the support of the University pedagogic community, to develop innovative technologies that would allow for an educational effect on young people's personalities, taking into account the specificity of the three sides of their identity – Russian (civil and civilizational), ethnic (ethnic-confessional), and regional. In the traditional North Caucasian societies where the family network and the religion make up for the personality basics that will be maintained through life, the ethnic (ethnic-confessional) identity presents a crucial factor for socialization.

The level of the *regional identity* – a second part of the civil identity – reveals different degrees of development in different parts of Russia. In the North Caucasus many Russians, including ethnic Russians, as well members of Diasporas identify themselves as North Caucasians regardless of their specific ethnic and confessional group. From here we could state that, the regional factor of the civil identity, along with the ethnic-confessional “profile” is an important condition for shaping a common Russian identity.

A contemporary variant of the Russian identity does not act as a fully valid integrating origin for developing a common Russian identity. The multicultural Russian society needs a deeper level of integration involving not just supra-ethnic and supra-confessional nature of the respective identity, but also socio-cultural unity based on common values. Such unity may only be due to civilizational identity that implies a deep penetration into the area of national cultures, into the system of vitally important values that lie within the “responsibility zone” of the ethnic and the confessional identities.

© 2016 Published by Future Academy www.FutureAcademy.org.uk

**Keywords:** Shaping common Russian identity; single civil nation; multicultural academic area; ethnic-confessional identity; regional identity; civilizational identity; educational activity.

### 1. Introduction

When applied to the Northern Caucasus Federal District, the idea of Russia as a civil nation with a unique thousand-year old civilization resource, fits perfectly with the typical North Caucasian socio-cultural mentality.



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

## **2. Problem statement**

The socio-cultural mentality of the Northern Caucasus is a mentality, which is patriotic, state-oriented, sticking to the spirit of collectivism.

## **3. Research questions**

The task of raising newer generations of the national intellectuals in all the peoples of the Caucasus, shaping a new type of management elites, requires the pedagogic community of Universities to develop respective humanitarian and social technologies that would allow forecasting the effect that education.

## **4. Purpose of the study**

Education would have on youngsters in view of the three sides in their identity – ethnic-confessional, regional, and Russian (civil and civilizational) self-identification.

## **5. Research methods**

In the traditional North Caucasian societies where the family network and the religion make up the personality basics that will be maintained through life, the ethnic (ethnic-confessional) identity presents a crucial factor for socialization. Sociological research projects carried out by a group of scientists from the North-Caucasus Federal University and from the Southern Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences (held within 2009-2014), focusing on determining an “identification matrix” for the North-Caucasus society, show that the Russian civil identity in the youth of the region is stable, but not as meaningful as the ethnic and the confessional identities.

## **6. Findings**

83.6% of the respondents referred to the ethnic identity as to “very important” or “important”, while 55.9% of the respondents mentioned this profile of the identity as “very important”, which is significantly above the value attached to the civil identity (35.2%). Even though the civil and the ethnic identities are not mutually exclusive and are part of the same “identity portfolio” for a Russian person nowadays, they still act in the North Caucasus as competing factors. This increases the value of shaping nothing else but a common Russian identity.

Confessional belonging is also extremely important for the peoples of the North Caucasus (67.4% noted that this is “very important” while another 23.5% referred to it as “important”, with a total rate reaching 90.9%). The data obtained reveal tightly interconnected ethnic and confessional identities in the North Caucasus (under the conditions of religious Renaissance!), as well as it shows some emerging complicated and rather stable ethnic-confessional identity profiles, which are important to

take into account when working with young people in terms of developing strategies for shaping their common Russian identity.

Another feature specific of the North-Caucasian society is the huge impact that family has on self-identification. The values instilled through the family are some kind of parameters for shaping one’s own world view. Family, in many aspects, lays the basic algorithms for the life strategies and behavior stereotypes, which young people will implement afterwards.

Table 1 offers a view on the data obtained from polls conducted among Russian student community from the Universities of the North-Caucasus Federal District, and the outcomes prove the family’s great impact on self-identification.

The students were offered the following question: “Which of the following groups do you refer to when saying WE ARE...?”. The options for the answer included: CITIZENS OF RUSSIA; MYSELF AND MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY; PEOPLE BELONGING TO MY ETHNIC GROUP; RESIDENTS OF MY TOWN / VILLAGE; PEOPLE OF MY RELIGION / CONFESSION; PEOPLE FOLLOWING THE SAME TRADITIONS & CUSTOMS; MY FRIENDS AT WORK / UNIVERSITY FELLOWS.

Several options were allowed to be selected by one respondent. Table 1 offers the data that confirm the meaning that the family has for self-identification of young people, and which is far ahead of the civil identity. Identity can be found in the table below.

**Table 1.** Answers provided by students when asked: “Which of the following groups do you refer to when saying WE ARE...?” (several answers allowed)

	<b>Family members (%)</b>	<b>Citizens of Russia (%)</b>
Daghestan	70.3	45.5
Ingushetia	91.6	35.7
Kabardino-Balkaria	79.2	36.8
Karachai-Circassia	78.5	46.5
North Ossetia	80.5	33.9
Stavropol Region	76.7	48.3
Chechen Republic	70.1	25.0

The specific features of the ethnic (ethnic-confessional) identity, which develop through the family institution are among the top important conditions for shaping the Russian civil and civilizational identities in the North-Caucasus Federal District.

The importance of maintaining the connection between ethnic-religious and civil profiles of the identify, was stressed in the speech delivered by Vladimir Putin at the Session of the Second International Club VALDAI (September, 19, 2013; Novgorod Province): “*The development of nothing else but of the civil identity based on common values, patriotic awareness, civil responsibility and solidarity, respect for law, involvement in the life of the motherland with no loss of the ethnic and religious roots – this is the important condition to maintain the unity in our country*”.

The level of the regional identity – a second part of the civil identity – reveals different degrees of development in different parts of Russia. In the North Caucasus, many Russians, including ethnic Slavic Russians, as well members of Diasporas, identify themselves as North Caucasians regardless of

their specific ethnic and confessional group, i.e. they feel themselves to be the representatives of a region that has its own special mentality and culture.

This is why we took into account the **regional factor** of the civil identity as an important condition for shaping a common Russian identity, which is no less important than the ethnic identity. Proof to the importance of the regional

**Table 2.** What are the students' associations connected with the notion of MOTHERLAND? (Multiple answers are accepted)

	<b>My region (%)</b>	<b>My city / town (%)</b>	<b>Russia (%)</b>	<b>A spot on the map (%)</b>
All	56.7	31.6	51.6	3.8
Dagestan	53.1	33.1	52.4	5.5
Ingushetia	29.2	20.8	32.6	1.4
Kabardino-Balkaria	77.0	37.4	56.8	0.7
Karachai-Circassia	69.4	36.1	64.6	2.8
North Ossetia	60.9	38.3	60.0	4.3
Stavropol Region	37.4	27.0	77.4	5.2
Chechen Republic	67.4	29.2	24.3	6.9

As we can see, youths in the North-Caucasus Federal District do not associate their motherland with Russia in the vast majority of cases.

The data and some other statistics, as experts believe, show that the contemporary type of the Russian identity does not act as a fully valid integrating origin for developing a common Russian identity. The multicultural Russian society needs a deeper level of integration involving not just supra-ethnic and supra-confessional nature of the respective identity yet also socio-cultural unity based on common values.

Such unity, as we see it, may be only due to civilizational identity, which implies deep penetration into the area of national cultures, into the system of vitally important values that lie within the “responsibility zone” of the ethnic and the confessional identities.

The development of such a macro-identity shall be possible, only in cases where a certain **socio-cultural dominant** is selected, around which in-depth cultural and value-based integration of Russia's peoples may take place. As the Strategy for the State National Policy of Russia until 2025 states: “The State of Russia developed as a unity of peoples, where the ethnic Russian people has been historically the main core. Thanks to the uniting role of the Russian people, the long-standing inter-cultural and inter-ethnic interaction, a unique cultural diversity, and spiritual integration of numerous people, unity has developed now in the historical territory of Russia”.

This episode from the Strategy is extremely important for understanding those complex processes in the ethnic-cultural sphere, which are taking place in Russia nowadays. Indeed, the Russian socio-cultural space was initially developed as an area where many ethnic-cultural elements, as put on the Russian ethnic nucleus, were seen not as something external and strange but as an integral part of one socio-cultural and civilizational common unity. The ethnic-cultural diversity has always been maintained, yet, in the history of Russia it has never been of absolute nature. The differences that were

there have never played any decisive role because thanks to the soft and sensible Russian policy, they were naturally integrated into the commonly shared Russian civilizational fundamentals.

Here we can comfortably quote the words of Ivan Ilyin – a famous Russian philosopher, lawyer, and writer of the early XX Century, who spoke of the specific nature of the Russian national identity: *“Not to eliminate, not to suppress, not to enslave another blood, not to choke other tribes’ life but to let them all breathe, and to have a great Motherland ... to value all, to bring them all to peace, let them all pray their own way, and work their own way, and select the best ones to build the state and the culture”*.

For this reason the ethnic, cultural and religious differences in Russia’s peoples have always been based not on ideas and practices of ethnic, cultural and religious exclusiveness, but on a common cultural and civilizational platform, which, above all, contains the Russian culture (in its wide meaning).

In the NCFU, we attach a lot of importance to the idea of developing the Russian civil and civilizational identities, and we pay a lot of attention to the work in this area, which is among the priorities in academic, educational, and scientific activities carried out by our teachers (*Nowadays we have over 24 thousand students of 86 ethnic group coming from 52 areas of Russian Federation, and over one thousand students representing several dozens of ethnicities from 51 foreign countries*).

The feeling of patriotism, the culture of inter-ethnic and inter-confessional interactions, the culture of the Russian verbal and written speech, the culture of social responsibility, legal culture, and other personal features, which are socially meaningful in the North Caucasus, are developed in students not just through their involvement in extracurricular activities. Although, first of all, in academic activities when studying an interdisciplinary module, which includes over 110 innovative academic courses develop by the teaching staff of the NCFU (from 48 departments); 19 courses of them are mandatory through all training areas while the following ones are offered as optional courses at pedagogic degree programs.

We believe that this area of our performance is of strategic importance, because these civilizational orientation points to the contemporary younger generations, who will determine the choice that the Russian society makes when selecting its civilizational way of development in the globalizing world, and determine the historical destiny for Russia as a civilization-country.

And in conclusion I would like to note that on August 20, 2013 (*newer version of February 22, 2016*) the Government of Russia adopted a special Federal Program (Decision №718-p) on ENFORCING THE UNITY OF RUSSIAN NATION AND ETHNIC-CULTURAL PROGRESS OF PEOPLE OF RUSSIA (for the years of 2014-2020), which clearly outlines the aims and objectives for the public policy in this area for the nearest years, and which states that; *“the traditional types of spirituality and ethnic culture of the people of Russia are the basis for the general Russian identity, so enhancing the unity of the Russian nation, shaping general civil identity of Russians, ensuring dynamic ethnic-cultural and spiritual development of the peoples of Russia, counteracting to ethnic-political and religious-political extremism are the important factors for further sustainable development of the country”*.

## 7. Conclusion

It is obvious that the Russian national system of education can never stay away from implementing the Government's policy in this area, and it is more than any other social institution should be involved in resolving the following issues:

- developing a common Russian civil and civilizational identities relying on the regional and ethnic identities;
- preserving and developing the languages and the cultures of the peoples residing in the Russian Federation;
- understanding the historical, moral, and spiritual basics bringing all Russian people in a single civilizational unity;
- enhancing the stance of Russian language, as the common national language that shapes the single educational and cultural space, which consolidates us to a single civil nation;
- developing the awareness of the national system of values through the historical continuity through generations;
- getting the youths prepared for living in a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional, and multicultural environment.

Successful solutions for these tasks will undoubtedly allow us to have a real impact on enforcing our country's national unity.

## References

- Avksentev, V.A. & etc. (2014) Russian civilization: search for a new identity. Stavropol : Alfa-Print, 2014, 200.
- Drobizheva, L.M. (2011) Russian identity and the trends in interethnic settings in 20 years of reforms. *Russian reforming: Annual Newsletter-2011*, 10, 72-85.
- Kharchenko, M.V. & Astvatsaturova, M.A. (2014). Agenda of Russian civil identity underp ethnic-cultural, ethnic-confessional and ethnic-political stratification in the North-Caucasus Federal District. *Newsletter of the Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University*, 4, 283-286.
- Shaykhislamov, R. B. (2013) Civil identity: regional dimension of globalization. *Newsletter of VEGU*, 3, 79-86.
- Tishkov, V.A. & Barash, R.E. & Stepanov, V.V (ed.) (2014). Russian students: identity, life strategies and civil potential. Moscow: IEA RAN, 342
- Vshivtseva, L. N. (2014). Developing Russian civilizational identity in the North Caucasus Region: monograph. Stavropol: Alfa Print, 190.