

**UNIVERSITY OF TURKU**

Faculty of Humanities

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**Master's Thesis**

**APPROACHING THE RUSSIAN SOUL: CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE OF THE IMAGE OF NATIONAL LEADER THROUGH PECULIAR FEATURES OF RUSSIAN NATIONAL MENTALITY**

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EVSTRATOVA, EKATERINA: Approaching the Russian Soul: Construction and Maintenance of the Image of National Leader through Peculiar Features of Russian National Mentality

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The Thesis considers the question of reasons for a higher public appeal of national leaders with the case study of popular appeal of the President Vladimir Putin among the Russian population. The concepts of nation and national mentality are contemplated to reveal the process of construction of the image of a national leader. In the thesis the author considers the issues of nation and the process of its formation; constructivist and primordialistic approaches to the nature of nationalism and problems of national mentality; genesis of Russian nation and peculiarities of national mindset. Theoretical concepts are applied in the analysis of a TV-program with the participation of the President: Direct Line with Vladimir Putin. The author applies a method of interpretive content analysis, which lets answer the research question of how specific characteristics of national mentality are used for the purpose of creating a positive image of the head of state. The program is analysed from the emotional perspective and demonstrates how the basic traits of the Russian national mentality are operated within communication between the nation and the national leader. The analysis is divided into several subsections where different topics are discussed, while specific emotions and peculiarities in national mentality are appealed. As follows from the analysis, the influence and power over a nation is constructed through the intimate knowledge of the nation's mentality specifics. The research comes to the conclusion of inevitability to comprehend the nation, its history, culture, and system of values for a national leader for the construction of public approval and loyalty.

**Keywords:** nation, nationalism, national mentality, national identity, constructivism, primordialism, public appeal, religion, historical experience, national leader, emotions, TV-program, positive image.

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## **1. Introduction**

A well-known quote « toute nation a le gouvernement qu'elle mérite » (Latham 1906, 181) belongs to Joseph de Maistre, a Sardinian ambassador to Russia in 1803-1817, who is considered to be one of the founders of the European conservatism. De Maistre was famous with his anti-democratic and pro-absolutist views, which probably was one of the reasons for his successful relations with the Emperor Alexander I. The diplomat-philosopher had lived at Russian court 14 years of his life, and apparently experienced the essence of Russian cultural peculiarities, as this statement of a nation having the government it deserves, occurs to be more than relevant to the following discourse in this Thesis.

Russia's vast territory, massive deposits of oil, gas, diamonds and other mineral resources, its active participation in international affairs assured the country a profile of one of the richest and most powerful countries in the modern world. For many centuries, this country has been retaining the status of a great power, and the whole world takes into consideration Russia's position on many issues of international politics and economics. Russia is an influential member of the Baltic sea region, which participates in numerous regional projects. However, a higher influence on the whole world's decisions does not involve a greater level of the Russia's population life: in the multiple international life quality indexes (as of March 21, 2020, Numbeo's page listed). Russia holds rather low positions. One would expect that for the country where population stays unsatisfied with the work of its government, the most evident option would be to change this government. However, the President's more than 20 years in power tell us another story: among Russians Vladimir Putin retains the status of the most popular politician.

### **1.1. Research question, objectives, and methodological frame of the research**

The image of the president of Russia in the foreign mass media is drawn with a severe brush – a tyrannic governor, willing to rule the whole world. However, according to the data of Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), 66.1% of respondents approve of the President of the Russian Federation (as of March 6, 2019, VCIOM's page

listed). Similar results can be seen in the surveys of the other independent, non-governmental polling and sociological research organization Levada Centre: 64% as of February 2019 (as of March 6, 2019, Levada Centre's page listed). The public rating of Vladimir Putin almost never goes down in spite of unpopular activities of the government and higher level of corruption neighbouring the growing level of poverty of the country's population. This state of things only brings me to one obvious question: why do Russian people keep on trusting and supporting their leader? To answer this question, I will also need to define the principal objectives of this research: first, to explain, how the public approval and loyalty are constructed; then, I need to define, what are the specific traits of the Russian national mentality; and finally, how these specific traits are used for the maintenance of positive image of the country's leader. To achieve these objectives, a case study approach will be applied to analyse one of the major TV-programs with the participation of Vladimir Putin, live broadcast nationwide phone-in, or a Direct Line with Vladimir Putin.

The work on this Thesis starts with the coverage of the previous studies and research to get clear understanding of the subject. First and foremost, I start with elucidating the concept of nation, what can be qualified as a nation and what approaches to the concept exist in the present-day science. Then I elaborate the problem of national mindset and what this notion comprises, what influences the formation of the mentality of a nation. After this I continue with the Russia's case and consider the process of development of Russian nation, the first appearances of national feelings and circumstances of shaping these categories, as well as peculiarities of Russian national mindset. This being done I switch to the very research question – how these national peculiarities are used for sustaining a positive image of the Russian President and reproducing it within Russian media culture. This requires a short introduction on the circumstances of Vladimir Putin's coming to power, which I provide as the beginning of the third section of the Thesis: it is important to understand what was the image of the current President since his very first months of rule yet in the position of the Prime Minister, and why he gained the popular appeal so extremely fast. After I present a general picture of Russia's situation at the turn of century, I conduct an analysis of the tools which let Vladimir Putin retain his higher level of people's support, and a TV-program as one of the most spectacular evidence of theoretical conclusions made in the previous section of the Thesis.

The Thesis represents a qualitative research aimed at revealing the mechanisms of manipulation people's rapport to the state's first person through peculiarities of their national mindset. To reveal such tools and mechanisms it is necessary to focus on the process of communication and interaction between the head of the state, in this case, the President Vladimir Putin, and people living in the country.

Working with regard to such an abstract issue as national mindset requires a deep research of the topic to create necessary context, or theoretical frame, for the designed analysis. To create the required theoretical frame I conduct a detailed overview of the previous research on the topic and analyse such concepts as nation and the process of its formation; types of nationalism and problems of national character; genesis of Russian nation and peculiarities of national mindset. I also provide a story and circumstances of Vladimir Putin's accession to the power.

Further, to answer my research question, for subsequent empirical research I focus on a TV-program, which is a specific form of television interview, where Russian President Vladimir Putin answers questions and appeals of Russian people addressing him through text-messages, video-letters, live broadcasts etc. The whole TV-program lasts over 4 hours which would produce enormous scope of material for the designed analysis. The video recording belongs to public domain and is available at the website of Channel One (as of February 21, 2020, Channel One page listed), whereas its full transcription can be found at the website of Kremlin (as of February 23, 2020, Kremlin's page listed). Being publicly accessible these materials do not require any permission to be used for the purpose of analysis.

The program contains elements of a television interview - a genre which is valuable with such an important quality as audience appeal and spectacularity. The audio-visual nature of television communication provides not only the speech with all the richness of its rhetoric, intonation, emotional colouring (like on the radio), but also mimics, gestures, the behaviour of the interlocutors, and often their environment (room interior, landscape surrounding people, etc.) as the source of information for the designed analysis. However, richness of such content and its complexity require appropriate procedures for transcription, description, and interpretation both in their discursive succession and in their presentative simultaneity (Raab & Tänzler 2012). Since video material represents a multidimensional source of information, I shall analyse both audio-data, which is the transcribed

text of the program, and visual data, with the aim to evaluate and interpret images, effects and symbols of what is being broadcast to Russian people on an annual basis by the main federal channels.

In my analysis I shall focus on connotative meanings, or latent content of the material. The material contained in the TV-program to be analysed is rather extensive, however, it seems to be impossible to divide the content into fragments, since it can result in the loss of context, which is important for interpretation of connotative meanings. This is why traditional coding rules are not applicable in my case; instead, to assure more holistic approach, I perform interpretive content analysis, which “has the flexibility to take context more fully into account” (Ahuvia 2001). As connotative meanings represent individual elements intertwined to reveal the meaning of the whole, interpretive content analysis will be an effective method to answer the research question, how specific characteristics of national mentality are used for the purpose of creating a positive image of the head of state.

## **1.2. Literature and data used in the research**

It is reasonable to note here, that some of the sources used within this research were written over 50 years ago, which does not diminish their importance for the research. Given the fact that the phenomenon of nationalism, as well as national consciousness and national character, are comparatively young, the scientific interest and research of these concepts was initiated in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

To answer the research question and to reach the objectives set out for the Thesis it is necessary to create a theoretical framework that will include concepts required for the subsequent analysis. A research of the issues of mentality requires first and foremost representation of the term nation itself, and accordingly the work on the Thesis started with getting acquainted with the theory of imagined communities of Benedict Anderson (1983), whose work is considered to be a fundamental input into the theory of nations and nationalism. Anderson considers a nation and nationalism as phenomena of the New Age and the era of capitalism. The emergence of a nation recreates for the individual a meaningful and understandable picture of the world, lost after the decline of the religious component of the worldview in the era of the Reformation and Enlightenment. According to

Anderson, the phenomenon of nationalism redefines concepts power, time and society. Although Anderson's theory demonstrates only modernists' approach to the problem of nationalism, his work defines the basic notions and provides exhaustive illustrations of how present days' nations had been forged and what were the possible incentives for their appearance.

Another meaningful source that provided the basis for the theoretical framework of this Thesis is the book "Nationalism. Five roads to modernity" by Liah Greenfeld (1992). This source represents a comprehensive analysis of the development of the concept of nations and the formation of national identity in Russia, England, France, Germany and the USA. The author exhaustively considers the prerequisites, which led to the emergence of nations and what kind of events influenced this process. In his fundamental work, the author deeply analyses these processes in the historical and culturological context, from the birth of nations till the present day.

"National consciousness in eighteenth-century Russia" by Hans Rogger became a substantial contribution to the work on the development of categories of national character and national consciousness in Russia, implying by the latter "...striving for common identity, character and culture by the articulate members of a given community" (Rogger 1960). The book provides the circumstances of the process of crystallization of Russians as a nation and their realization of their being a unique, independent people. The book provides an insight into the conception of national feelings through analysis of the process' reflection in literature, historical events and social discourse. Nowadays its ideas seamlessly resonate with the many aspects of cultural and historical memory of Russian people with regard to the period of rule of Peter I and Catherine II, and their historical heritage. The author is very illustrative of how national consciousness was gaining its shape through comparing with foreigners after Peter had cut his window to Europe, through realising of being different and striving to prove their being not worse, but at least, equal to the progressive Europeans. The work of Hans Rogger provides a brilliant example of constructivist approach the concept of nationalism which I elucidate in the following chapter.

The issues of nationalism and national character have also been addressed to in numerous academic articles, such as "Anthony D. Smith on nations and national identity: a critical assessment" by Montserrat Guibernau (2008); "'Russian Tsar" in the matrix structure of

Russian traditional consciousness (experience of philosophical reconstruction)”, by Andrey Myasnikov, 2012, “At the Origins of a Russian National Consciousness: Eighteenth Century Roots and Napoleonic Wars” Marc Raeff (1991); these articles also contributed a lot as a meaningful basis for theoretical frame of the research.

Formulation of research question required verified statistical data, which were obtained from such research organization as VCIOM and Levada-Center. Both of them regularly conduct sociological polls that let construct a clear understanding of the current situation in the Russian realities. In the Theses there were used two sources of sociological data for the purposes of avoiding a biased presentation of the data, since of the two VCIOM is an official, state-owned organization, while Levada-Center is a non-governmental organization. Thus, the use of these two sources lets us get a balanced idea of an actual public opinion in Russia. The references to the data provided by these statistical agencies are grouped into the block of primary sources in the reference list. This block also includes the links to the website of First TV-Channel with the recorded video of the Direct Line with Vladimir Putin, as well as its full transcription provided by the website of the Kremlin.

Finally, when discussing the level of public approval of Vladimir Putin, I refer to several both Russian and foreign newspapers’ publications, which illustrate how his activities are covered in mass media, promoting the positive image of the national leader.

## **2. Nation and national mentality**

Nowadays the term *nation* is widely used in mass media: United Nations Organization, national interests, national heritage, national identity... Therefore, to initiate an investigation into the issues of national character, national consciousness, and peculiarities of the Russian national mindset, the inevitable first step would be to operationalize the definition of the term nation itself. What can be defined as a nation, what are its core characteristics and what originates nations, gives birth to them and determines their destinies? It is a crucial point here since it is vital to understand the distinction between a nation and other sorts of communities, as well as the difference between a nation and an individual, although they share many common traits, as will be seen hereafter.

## 2.1. History of the term nation

The concept of nations is being discussed for the last several centuries. One of the most remarkable first uses of the term can be exemplified by the name of Holy Roman Empire of the German *Nation*, which was introduced in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century to represent a supranational unity of Italian, German, Balkan, Franc and Western Slavic states and peoples. Thereafter, the term found its way into the works of diverse philosophers, writers and historians. It remains unsurprising then that research into the nature of nations has a long history. Moreover, the meaning and connotations of what constitutes a nation have been constantly changing. The semantical evolution of the notion of a nation has been graphically described by Liah Greenfeld in her book entitled “Nationalism. Five roads to modernity” (1992). By introducing the concept of “semantic change zigzag pattern” she traces the transformation of the term’s meaning and identifies several stages in the understanding of the idea of a nation. (Greenfeld 1992, 9).

The term nation itself has origins in Latin (*natio*) where among ancient Romans it stood for a group of foreigners whose origins derived from the same place. Greenfeld in her work on nationalism finds that this connotation remains in force and spreads to Western Europe, where several centuries later it could mean a group of students who came to Parisian universities from all parts of Europe. Additionally, Greenfeld highlights here that the students’ national identity was simultaneously connected to their status as students and was lost upon termination of their studies (Greenfeld 1992, 4). Therefore, these students themselves left an imprint on the term, which later acquired a new gradation: it was interpreted as a community unified by similar opinions.

The next transformation related to the idea of a nation occurred when the previously mentioned community of similar opinions migrated from the universities and eventually arrived in the form of religious elites, from whence the idea then spread to the political, cultural and social upper classes. In her analysis of a “zigzag” semantic transformation of the word “nation,” Liah Greenfeld explains the process and consistent pattern of such changes in the use of the same construct. Essentially, she believes that this process is continuously redirected via societal change, in which the evolution of social relationships makes possible the shift in the word’s connotation, giving room for a slightly new concept of a nation (Greenfeld 1992).

The next stage in the development of the idea of nation can be traced back to the sixteenth

century when in England the term gained an implication of the whole population of the country. As Greenfeld (1992, 6) states, “*this semantic transformation signalled the emergence of the first nation in the world, in the sense in which the word is understood today, and launched the era of nationalism*”<sup>1</sup>. However, this shift can hardly be called an evolutionary change, since it is undoubtedly a revolutionary one: it meant that people’s (or plebs’) position, to some extent, became equal to that of an elite. Therefore, a person no longer needed to belong to a privileged class to be a part of a nation, as it used to be before. The members of this community realized their more equal status compared to the previous situation of the elites, and social classes and stratification gradually began to lose their former significance. Although, this levelling did not completely remove distinction, rather it laid the groundwork for the development of future democratic values, since the average person now felt involved in the honour of being a nation. What is more, people as a nation acquired the status of the bearer of sovereignty, which signified a transformation of political consciousness as well as the birth of such a notion as the national identity – a feeling of belonging to a nation. Thus, national identity - an essential trait in the phenomenon of a nation in a sense we use it nowadays – gained the meaning of such belonging and being a part of this unity that formerly had been available only to the elites.

This was not, however, the last episode in the evolution of nation’s meaning, and after it gained the connotation related to “sovereign people” in England, it gradually began its migration abroad, spreading to Europe and further, where populations had their own distinguishing political, territorial and ethnic traits. This expansion resulted in a new transformation related to the implication of a nation, which eventually acquired the meaning of a “unique sovereign people” (Greenfeld 1992, 8). This uniqueness, not only the role of a sovereign representative, but being particular and different from other countries’ populations, was the main distinction in the new way to approach the word “nation” that had been adopted from England. During the process of such adoption, the term again slightly changed and bore a new concept of the phenomenon. While the English population remained as the first nation, it held to the constructed meaning of the term, which consisted of the sovereignty of the people. The notion borrowed from England by other peoples added an implication of uniqueness. Therefore, it seems reasonable that the same sense of English national identity cannot apply to the French, Russians, or Finns, as they realized they were different, and this difference then provided the basis for the construction

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<sup>1</sup> Original text in italics

of a new type of nationalism.

This revised way to understand the phenomenon of a nation has never replaced its predecessor, and despite significant difference in their nature they both coexist in the modern world, being referred to as a nation, or nationalism. It is hard to argue with Greenfeld's conclusion that these two different types of nationalism implied "... radically different forms of national identity and consciousness, and two radically different types of national collectivities – nations" (Greenfeld 1992, 9). This statement finds endorsement in multiple studies introducing two schools that consider the phenomenon from the position of constructivism and primordialism, and this fact deserves a more detailed consideration, which will be further provided.

## **2.2. Constructivism vs primordialism in defining the concept of nationalism**

These above considered developments of representation of nationalism can serve as a basis of what nowadays is referred to as primordialist and constructivist approaches to the problem of nation and nationalism. The terms, or even methods of categorisation of concepts can differ, as Liah Greenfeld, for example, in her work introduces the terms of civic-ethnic and individualistic-libertarian vs collectivistic-authoritarian types of nationalism. But first and foremost, at this stage of research the problem will be to focus on the key standpoints of the two approaches.

The constructivist school is presented by a wide range of concepts, where the concept of imagined communities is one of the fundamentals of the approach. This concept was offered by Benedict Anderson in his work "Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism" (1983). Whenever the research refers to the idea of nations, the views of Anderson can be considered as an essential stage in the development of representations on nationalism.

Anderson begins his most famous work with claim of the absence of any sound definition of a nation and offers a concept of a nation as "...an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 1983, 6). One can see an unconventional term 'imagined' which implies the fact that although the members of this community do not know each other personally, they realize themselves being united by

the feeling of the national brotherhood, i.e. the community exists only in the imagination of its members. According to Anderson's theory, the idea of a nation appeared to replace the dominating position of religion about two hundred years ago; the changing status of languages and rapidly growing print capitalism contributed to the transmission of the idea of a nation as something that is common for other people within limited borders. Anderson offers several ways of the nationalism gaining its position in the people's perception of their place in the world, and thus compares the spread of nationalism in Americas, in Europe and Russian Empire and in the colonial Africa and Far East. For the purpose of this research in the next sections we will particularly emphasise the specifics of official nationalism and russification, where the latter is also applied by Anderson with regard to other countries than Russia basing on the common for many European dynasties ambitions to retain the power by joining with the national ideas.

As one can see from the above, constructivist approach considers nations to be artificial products of people's imagination. The core of constructivism consists in the idea that it is nationalistic policies of the state elites that create nations by means of certain tools (system of education and study programs, a network of mass communications, print capitalism, propaganda of some specific linguistic representations, use of emotional factors etc.) There exist no any original, inherent traces of a nation; it is constructed in the consciousness of the people through manipulation of this consciousness. It is of utmost importance to note here, that constructivists' views are often also referred to as modernists' ones: according to the underlying premises of this school it is common to think that nations were artificially constructed only in the period of modernity, when there appeared the need in such construct.

In his "Imagined communities" Anderson poses a key question to which he endeavors to find an answer: why do people choose to die for these products of their imagination? (Anderson 1983, 7). How do national feelings cause such an affection that people agree to sacrifice their lives? This question of the inner value for an individual reveals a range of perspectives for the study of relational fundamentals of our society, including such a comprehensive phenomenon as a nation. Being a constructivist, Anderson attributes the leading role in formation of nations to the political and intellectual elites and almost ignores the significance of cultural aspects, and his reflections are constructed regardless of singularities of ethnical cultures as a complex of developed traditions and psychological

peculiarities of the people. However, to answer the question, posed by Anderson in the beginning of his research, it is crucial to remember that without any connection with psychology, ethics, traditions and customs and other constituents of the communities' life it seems to be impossible to explore such a category as national emotions, which seems to be viable, since nation is not a mechanism acting according to a set algorithm, but a community of individuals with their feelings, memories and convictions. Such observations inevitably lead us to the other school that adheres to the views, opposite to the one of constructivist, and in the modern ethnological and anthropological science is called primordialist. Before proceeding with deliberation on the essence of primordialism, it will be reasonable to make one remark: although there exists a decided difference between the terms of "nation" and "ethnos", where the former implies political connotation and can refer to multiple ethnicities, and the latter involves more cultural categories and more often means one particular ethnical group with its own unique culture, language and customs; according to the literature reviewed in this study, it is more common for constructivist to exploit the term of nation, while in the primordialist discourse the notion of ethnos is met more frequently, while they mainly imply the same phenomenon under those terms.

Primordialism gained traction during so-called second wave of globalisation – the period when intensive invasion of western capitalism destabilised traditional societies and resulted in multiple conflicts, whose structure and dynamics were impossible to investigate. According to modern ethnologist Sergey Kara-Murza, primordialism was born within the study of ethnic conflicts, whose emotional charge and irrational fury were not able to conceive any satisfactory explanation in European sociology and seemed to be something "natural", prescribed by the genetic structure of those people (Kara-Murza 2015, 53).

Within primordialist school one can identify two main perspectives, which are social-biological and evolutionary-historical ones. Social-biological concept considers ethnos as a community of individuals, which is based on biological principles, modified into social principles. Extreme cases of social-biological primordialist approach can easily turn to racist discourse, since its ideas are founded on the categories of blood and flesh, finding ethnicity to be a material substance, included into the structure of genetic apparatus of an individual. Nowadays, this perspective significantly lost its ground and does not count any significant number of adherers.

Evolutional-historical primordialism' adherents regard ethnos rather as a community

where reciprocal affection does not represent a consequence of biological developments but is achieved and firmly enshrined through social conditions. Here ethnos is represented as a community of individuals who share the same name, same myths about their ancestors, with common history and culture, associated with specific territory, and possessing the sense of solidarity (Smith 1996). Sergey Kara-Murza supposes that the main idea in primordialism is that it gives ethnicity the meaning of ontological entity – a general implication of being, numinous and beyond rational (Kara-Murza 2015, 59). He adheres to the opinion that most of the scientists accepting the primordialist approach, consider cultural structures, imprinted during childhood, to be an inherent given.

According to these principles, the belonging to one's ethnicity is conceived as primordial, original fact of reality, which means that the everyday consciousness of people is imbued with the ideas of primordialism. What is of utmost importance here is that, according to previous studies, in conditions of crisis and social and state turmoil ethnicity becomes the most effective and fast-acting means of political mobilization. Appeals to the issues of common blood and solidarity of ancestry are easily perceived by the human consciousness, manipulates the feelings and calls up collective memory. To cite Montserrat Guibernau: "Members of a nation tend to feel proud of their ancient roots and generally interpret them as a sign of resilience, strength and even superiority when compared with other nations unable to display a rich past during which the nation became prominent" (Guibernau 2004, 137)

Another meaningful postulate of primordialist approach consists in a fact that a people's character – in this context, national character – always stays the same, and it can never be modified, and no new traits of this character can be artificially developed; this is why it is common to think that some peoples cannot hold rights (such as the right for democracy) which do not correspond with their natural constitution. Sergey Kara-Murza cites the words of Ivan Sikorskiy, who is considered to be the main theorist of Russian nationalism in his speech delivered in a ceremonial meeting of the Slavic charitable society on May 14, 1895: "The traits of national character, its accomplishments and weaknesses are handed down to the following generations: in thousand years we meet in this race the same specifics of the national character". (Sikorsky 1895, 5)

One of the most comprehensive works on the issues of nationalism, and of the Russian nation in particular, belongs to Ksenia Kasyanova, who attributes a great importance to

the ethical aspects in the formation of the nation. Although her views are not distinctly primordialist, they are more prone to these narratives, and it would cause a considerable shortcoming not to include her perspective on the question of nature of a nation.

According to Kasyanova, nation represents one of the stages in the development of a society, which initially forms a tribal community, and then transforms into an ethnos; the nation appears at the moment when the community is already significantly eroded in ethnical aspect – through mixed marriages and multiple long-term migrations - and the key ties are seen in culture, legends and traditions, as well as sustained hierarchy in the way of life. And then, at the critical moment of crisis and ruin, which inevitably comes at some point in the life of every society, where the state and social structure find themselves to be unable to survive the trial, it is the nation, that got mature enough to reveal itself, goes to the rescue and lets overcome the hard times. This is why not all the ethnos survive and stay in the past, only being mentioned as an episode of the country's history. As alleged by Kasyanova, the nation arises in a specific situation i.e. particular conditions where an independent human personality is formed, and consequently for the genesis of this ethnical entity the national identity is a prerequisite. (Kasyanova 1995). National identity, expressed in the sense of belonging to one nation, is thus a compulsory element for the ethnic entity to mature.

In other words, on this stage a range of value structures appear in the community and occupy a niche where all of the community's members unconsciously follow those values and share them. This system of ideals and aims, deeply connected with the ethnical complex of values and representations is a stem that draws everything round it, and around which the nation gets crystallized. Ksenia Kasyanova compares these value structures with grammar in linguistics and states that it is the intellectuals who are to assume the responsibility in development of this "grammar of social behaviour". Here we can follow how the idea of higher role of intellectuals closely echoes with the one of constructivist Anderson's ideas with his intellectual elites, transmitting ideas of nation: a person could be considered as a member of intelligentsia, i.e. a person, responsible for the nation culture and the future of one's society (Kasyanova 1995).

When the social entire goes beyond kin or local groups, then the blood ties, the ties in language and territory, which used to hold the ethnos and provide it with the common way of life, cease their connecting role, and then it is ideas and values, plans and projects

that are to come forward, a representation of a nation of itself and of the society – how it wants to see and create itself. Nothing will be developed and formed without these elements; otherwise everything will gradually fall and collapse, notwithstanding the outer formal ties of the state.

As we can see, Ksenia Kasyanova holds to the perspective that a nation is not an artificial construct, created by an initiative of higher elites; neither she considers a nation to be a consequence of genetic and historical conditions, an implicit primordial entity. She assigns the key value in the genesis of a nation to the cultural elements and the maturation of the national identity. Not going to extremes of taking a nation's existence for granted and seeing it as an artificially constructed entity, Kasyanova assumes the possibility of not-forming of a nation, if favourable conditions and its opportune time have not come. This perspective is the closest to the one that the author of this research tends to adhere: each of the schools and perspectives has in its disposal sufficient arguments, supported by reasonable examples of the present-days nations. The further detailed analysis of genesis of the Russian nation will become an evidence of the fact that one cannot deny the significance of the role of governmental initiatives in the formation of a nation within an imperial state, while the cultural essential of such community defines what way the nation will follow, what choices it makes on this way and what hardships it will face. And if the influence of ruling institutions is more or less comprehensible, this forementioned essential cultural aspects require a more intensive study.

### **2.3. Mentality and national character**

The work on the Thesis resulted in long-lasting pondering over the terminology to be employed in its text. The problems, which are to be discussed here, reveal lots of abstract notions, such as national identity, national consciousness, national character, national feelings and cultural memory. All these refer to a nation's formation and its conscious and unconscious self-perception and require utmost accuracy when being used in the Thesis. These inherent nuances caused significant difficulties and probably made this chapter, and the whole terminology aspect the most complicated for me.

It would be appropriate to point out here, that, in spite of the fact that in the Russian discourse the term of national character is considered to be obsolete to some extent, I

initially held to the term “national character” to refer to the way a nation experiences its place in the world and the complex of values and its underlying philosophy, while the word *mentalitet* arose as a substitution. However, its translation into English offers the term “mentality”, which also implies the issues of mental development and mental stature, and thus distorts the main idea of this study. Oxford living dictionary provides this meaning for the term “national character”: personality or cultural characteristics which are taken to be peculiar to or particularly characteristic of a certain nation or racial group (as of March 10, 2020, Oxford living dictionary page listed). At the same time, for “mentality” there is the following meaning: the particular attitude or way of thinking of a person or group (as of March 10, 2020, Oxford Learner's Dictionary page listed). While working with the Thesis’ objectives, I shall concentrate on such categories as the nation’s system of values and its way of perceiving and interacting the existing reality, which means that the term “mentality” is more relevant within the context of this research. However, cultural elements (for instance, cultural memory) are indispensable for the development of a nation; the cultural experience of the nation, which started accumulating during the centuries of its existence, and even before it matured to be a nation, made this nation peculiar, and this is national peculiarities, that are to be addressed to while answering the research question. This brings me to a conclusion that the term “national character” also deserves to be carefully used in the discussion, however for the purpose of avoiding misunderstandings and contradictions, the term “mentality” (or “mindset” as its rightful synonym) will be further used within this paper while addressing the research question and the objectives of the research.

A list of literature used in this Thesis serves an evidence to the fact that research into the issues of national mentality has been provoking interest for the last several decades. Not only the idea of mentality turned out to be in high demand in the modern Russian realities, to some extent it became convenient to explain or excuse some current developments, thereby revealing both elucidating and ideological functions, such as an excuse of Russians’ inability to live according to western patterns (Yurevich 2013). The peculiar traits of national mindset are also important to consider, since implementation of reforms developed in pursuance of a borrowed model can produce an unexpected and unpredictable effect.

As has been said before, research into the issues of mentality is inseparably followed by

specific difficulties: the concept lacks clarity and is often approached to as a vague and blurred notion; therefore any research about mentalities and national character always requires context, otherwise it risks resulting in conclusions that can be applied with regard to many nations, instead of revealing distinct characteristics. Furthermore, the study of national character implies the risk of devolving to national stereotypes, which undermines the idea of national character itself (Smith 2008, 477).

Subjectivity is another danger in the study of mentalities. For example, Igor Kon quotes the reflections of Michel de Montaigne about the views on barbarian peoples of his time: ‘I find that these peoples, based on what I was told about them, have nothing barbarian and savage, only if we do not name a barbarism something that we are not accustomed to. Since, frankly speaking, “we have no other standard of proper and reasonable than beliefs and customs of our own”’ (Kon 1971). Similarly, Robert J. Smith describes anthropologists’ research in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which the specificities of national mentality were studied in relation to the encrusted cultural terms and the apparent differences were found and explored “from their own cultural experiences” (Smith 2008, 466). This inclination to consider and estimate the nature and traits of other cultures and other peoples through the prism of the cultural traditions and values of one’s own ethnic group in sociology and ethnology is referred to as ethnonationalism.

A scientific study into the issues of mentality and national character can never be based on such assumptions; by contrast, one of its main tasks consists of critical analysis of everyday consciousness representations. And this study does not have its main purpose in identification or evaluation of separate cultural elements of characterological traits, rather it aims to analyse the symbolic meaning of mentality within particular social unity and reveal the circumstances of its construction and the grounds of its specific characteristics. The research concerning national psychology is located at the confluence of several disciplines, and thus, the methods of such research stem from the traditions of different scientific schools: the ethnographic approach regards observation and description of different nations’ life and manners to be of paramount importance; the psychological approach aspires to analyse the mentality by means of diverse tests and interpretations of symbols, etc; the cultural-historical approach builds on analysis of cultural symbolism and popular art creations; and finally, comparative linguistics serves as a valuable source of the nation’s underlying psychological processes.

In the most comprehensive research about national mentalities, these approaches intertwine, communicate and complement one another. Investigating the mass of literature addressing the problems of a nation's mentality peculiarities can be everlasting, however the scope of this research lies outside an exhaustive analysis of all the existing means to study this concept. What is more pertinent, in this research, is to grasp the significance of the term 'mentality' and the contents of the idea, as well as the factors fostering the development of specific traits therein; moreover, the intent of this research is to contextualize these specific traits in modern Russian realities and analyse their conscious use for the purposed of fostering the positive image of the national leader.

For adherents of biological interpretation of national character, peculiar psychological traits of a nation represent something primordial, genetically determined and can be inherited by the following generations. These attempts to link the traits of national character to biological determinism surprisingly well resonate with biological primordialists' view on the idea of a nation. However, my starting point coincides with the position of researchers who claim that an individual is never born with a ready set of interests or a value system typical for his nation, but rather acquires them via education and socialization, is considered to be more solid and convincing for the author of this study. To quote Russian psychiatrist Andrey Kurpatov, "we are determined by the social environment where we grew up" (Kurpatov 2018). A child born of one ethos, brought up from the cradle in another social and cultural environment will hardly reveal the traits typical for his fellow countrymen, but inevitably will adopt peculiarities of people around him. Ethnocultural factor influences the peoples' character regardless the colour of their skin, their height or eye shape. Many researchers agree that both intrapsychic predispositions and social experience as the product of socioeconomic environment are crucial, where the source of specific features of such an environment are provided with a historical basis (Smith 2008, 470). For example, Denis Podvoisky (2004) claims that national character is not a psychophysiological phenomenon: according to his ideas, specific empirical traits of character in specific nations mainly represent the product of social and cultural determinism; moreover, he finds ethnopsychology to be determined *par excellence* by social and historical experiences of the ethnos, as well as by its extensive cultural memory. The phenomenon of cultural memory is one of the essential concepts in this Thesis, and it would be reasonable to introduce here the ideas of Jan Assmann, who found it to be a deliberate creation of a culture from which it arises, rather than a natural product. He

believes that “the contents of this memory, the ways in which they are organized, and the length of time they last are for the most part not a matter of internal storage or control but of the external conditions imposed by society and cultural contexts» (Assmann 2011, 5).

A. Yurevich in his work on determinants and evolution of mentalities offers the following key influencing factors: ethnic qualities of the community, natural-geographic circumstances of its existence, and the products of interaction between the community and the outer social and cultural environment (Yurevich 2016, 106). First of all, population endowment, temperament, whether the nation is monoethnic or polyethnic, – researcher includes all these factors into ethnic determinants of the mentality construction. On the other hand, he claims that it is climate conditions and the territory scale that determine the ways of adaptation and even key political institutions of the state. The third system of the national mindset construction drivers is the dependency on the products of centuries-long interaction between the community and social and cultural conditions of its inhabitancy: according to Yurevich, these factors influence the development of the fundamental social-economic ways and types of life-sustaining activity.

This list of determinants is hard to disagree with, although their importance in the formation of specific cultural traits will inevitably vary and alter. An endeavour to provide an insight into peculiarities of the genesis of Russian nation and specific traits of the Russian national mentality will be undertaken in the following section.

## **2.4. Russia: nation and national mentality**

This section will inevitably bring us to a tour into specific periods of Russian history, since any present-days nation has its past. The nation’s history, as a constructed narrative, retains lots of answers to the questions arising nowadays, which makes it reasonable to start this section with the overview of circumstances and process that characterize the consolidation of Russian nation, which is then followed by an analysis of determinants of the Russian national mentality and its peculiar traits.

### **2.4.1. History of Russian nation**

Most of the researchers agree that Russian nation together with national consciousness

began consolidating in the 18<sup>th</sup> century during the rule of Peter I and Catherine II, whom L. Greenfield finds to be responsible for inculcating the idea of the nation in the Russian elite and stimulating the sense of national pride (Greenfield 1992, 191). However, it would be reasonable to presume that the first signs of national characteristics display can be traced back to the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century: the Time of Troubles, the misfortunes and losses of the strife, "...made all the Russian in all the parts of Moscow state realize themselves to be not only Muscovites, or natives of Ryazan, or Yaroslavl or Tver, or Bryansk, but first of all - Russians" (Popov 2003). These can be interpreted as the first glimpses of national identity, and that time a ceaseless range of strifes and troubles did not overpower a young nation, but brightened the society, brought it the idea of necessity to save the faith that was threatened by the external enemies, and the state, threatened by the inner enemies. By that time Russian ethnos had accumulated sufficient common experience, complex of assumptions and was ready for transformation towards a nation (Kasyanova 1995).

However, it is in Peter's rule the notions of "otechestvo" (fatherland), "gosudarstvo" (state) and "narod" (nation) were introduced in the vocabulary of his decrees and imposed upon the native Russians, who gradually adopted the new ideas. How intentionally did Peter initiate these innovative steps, was it in his design to organize people into a consolidated community, which could be more effectively ruled over – hard to say, since his reforms knew no limits, and what is more, as we know from the previous sections, the idea of such phenomenon as a nation was not that widespread in Europe and only was gaining its tractions. But, following Anderson's theory, it was the ruler, who imposed the idea of nation from top to bottom, and obviously, this "bottom" was already mature enough to accept the offered idea.

Further, as if in pursuance of Anderson's ideas on the role of printed capitalism in the spread of nationalism, Peter established the first Russian newspaper "Vedomosti", where there were once published his rather nationalistic views, justifying the war with Sweden: "... Not only Swedes, but also other and remote peoples, always felt jealousy and hatred towards the Russian people and attempted to keep the latter in the earlier ignorance..." (Greenfield 1992, 197). Sergey Kara-Murza supports the idea, arguing that a politician that is forced to settle some burning issue, almost always speaks the primordial language, since this is the only way to find common ground with an ordinary person, who is a natural

primordialist, because he is familiar with the social reality in its finished ethnic form (Kara-Murza 2015, 61). This manoeuvre of national pride incitement will look very familiar to those who follow the present-day internal politics discourse in Russia.

Catherine II, famous with her correspondence with Voltaire and being one of the most literate monarchs of her age, in her turn, enhanced the sense of national pride and contributed to the consolidation of the Russia's cultural elite. One should remember that, according to constructivist idea, it is cultural and intellectual elite who was responsible for the spread of nationalism in masses.

Liah Greenfeld's work contains an extensive analysis of Russian nobility situation in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the result of Peter's and Catherine's initiatives: a deep crisis of nobility's identity caused by modifications in the ennobling procedure. The crisis had plenty of implications, but at some point, it has morphed into a seed of nationalism: while being in limbo, without a solid status, it was the new idea of a nation that came to substitute the old-times' state of mind, ruined by Petrine and Catherine's reforms. According to Liah Greenfeld, "... Russian aristocrats ... were beginning to experience therapeutic effects of national pride, and their identity as nobleman was giving way to the national identity of Russians" (Greenfeld 1992, 220).

Peter and Catherine fostered Russia's focus towards Europe, and their main interest was no more in Poland, rather it was in the Western Europe: France, England, and the Netherlands. The nobility representatives were urged to travel abroad where they observed the respect towards the nobility and their sense of dignity; they also tasted there more crystallized phenomenon of a nation (Greenfeld, 1992). As can be followed from the written above, from the very beginning, the basis of the national consciousness and national idea stemmed from the categories of national pride, opposition to the possible enemies and perception of the Russian people's primordial uniqueness. These factors are important to bear in mind while discussing the crystallization of the Russian national character.

Petrine and Catherine's rule witnessed the proliferation of education: the first educational institutions, such as Naval Academy in St. Petersburg, Imperial Academy of Sciences and Moscow University were established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. First noblemen who were sent to visit Europe, and then the graduates of these institutions "...were among the most ed-

ucated men of their country at the time, and an important part of the emerging intelligentsia” (Greenfeld 1992, 237). As acknowledged by many scholars, it was *intelligentsia* who adopted the nationalistic ideas and developed it into a mature idea of the Russian nation. Intelligentsia was a new stratum in the Russian society, which needed an identity and satisfy their aspirations; the idea of the nation came to meet these demands and help intelligentsia representative to become patriots (Greenfeld 1992, 239).

There are the signs of national consciousness in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century literature and science. Hans Rogger analyses the demand and interest towards the creation of a profound work on Russian history, since until the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century such attempts had been made only abroad and their results were considered to be slandering the glory and the honour of the Russian state. One could follow the struggle of the patriotic impulses of Mikhailo Lomonosov striving to confute the Norman theory and prove Riurik’s Slavonic origins<sup>2</sup>, and Gerhard Mueller’s honest and diligent attempts to prove Scandinavian parentage of the ancient Rus’. The fact that the events that had taken place nearly one thousand years ago resulted in an intense public controversy serves as “...a measure of the growth of a national consciousness in Russian society” (Rogger 1960, 202). Nikolai Karamzin creates the "History of the Russian State" - one of the first generalizing works on Russian history, discussing the origins of Russia as a nation.

Eighteenth century became a transitional period where Russians first faced their being different from the West, tried to imitate and borrow to recompensate the gap between them, then turned around and focused at themselves to discover one being unique and independent people, different, but equal to those of Europe. Russian national identity was fashioned in this striving to protect the good image of the country and the right to be different, to preserve traditions, at that not being beneath the West, who served as a touchstone. In the words of Hans Rogger, at that moment, “all the elements were at hand for the elaboration of a nationalist theory” (Rogger 1960, 137).

If to follow constructivists’ dogmata, intelligentsia was further responsible for delivering the ideas of nationalism to the rest of the population. Aristocracy of education and intellect, which had impressive extremal European influence, were the carriers of national

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<sup>2</sup> According to the Norman theory, Riurik was a Norseman, invited to be the Novgorod prince, and the ancestor of the princely, which later became the royal, dynasty of Riurikovich in Russia. Often regarded as the founder of the Old Russian state.

consciousness (Rogger 1960). Did it cope with the task? What was the destiny of the phenomenon, which had gained its shape and had been formed, ready to be accepted by the people? Or, is it possible to claim that the national idea has ever been formed at all? The answer to this question would be rather positive, due to the fact that Russian society can be considered consolidated as a nation, judging by the events of the Patriotic war of 1812, when the nation marched off together, as an integral whole, to defend their patrie. Marc Raef in his work on origins of Russian consciousness (1991) articulates the terms of national pride and patriotic feelings during this period, highlighting, in particular, that the demonstration of common people's and peasants' national sentiments became a "discovery" to the educated elites. The war witnessed an upsurge of national feelings and guerrilla movement, as a testimony of common people staying shoulder to shoulder with the nobles, and it was the desire to serve and to save their Fatherland against the outer threat.

However, not everything went that smoothly with the process of the nations' formation in Russia. We can see the evidences of constructivist processes in the elites and the role of the government (the Tsar) in the development of the national consciousness. The role of language and culture, and especially deliberate policies, that fostered the national feelings during the 18<sup>th</sup> and further 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, can never be denied. But to grasp all the specifics of the process, it is essential to be aware of the realities of the Russian society in 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

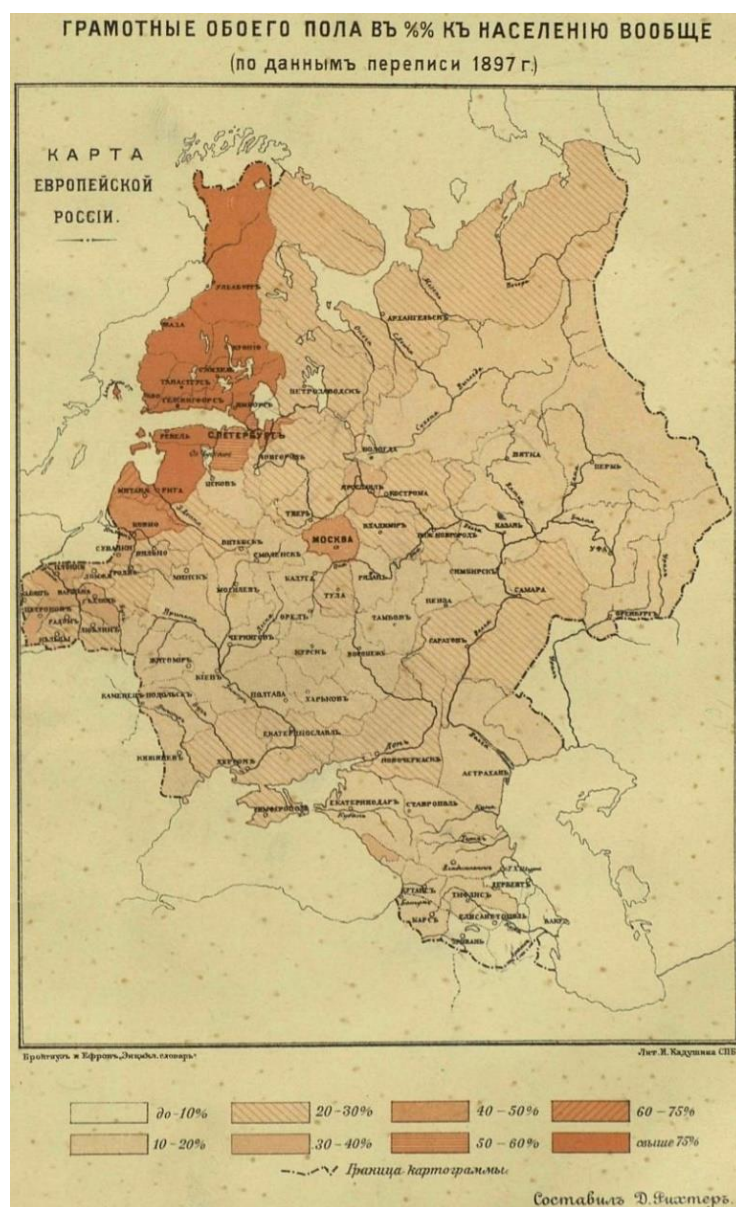


Figure 1 Percentage of literate population of both genders (according to population census of 1897)

Encyclopaedic Dictionary (page listed)

Education was no among priorities in the inner politics of Tsarist Russia. Only in 1920s Bolshevik government made education compulsory and fostered proliferation of literacy among the population (Mironov 1991, 76). Therefore, until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century most of common Russians were not able to absorb the idea of a nation from newspapers, they knew no poems or odes, and no teacher was there to explain them their being part of a unity called Russian nation. It means that whatever polemics existed between Slavophiles and Westernists<sup>3</sup>,

<sup>3</sup> Westernism and Slavophilism were the currents in Russian social and philosophic thinking of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, differentiating on the basis of origins and future destiny of the Russian nation: Westernists held

As can be seen at the figure 1 – which demonstrates only the European part of the country, since its parts eastwards of the Ural mountains remained uninhabited till the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – overwhelming majority of the Russian population stayed illiterate, in spite of all the progressive 18-century rulers' endeavors. This fact brings us to the conclusion, that the idea of nation, successfully formed within intellectual elites of the Russian society, could not be effectively delivered to the population. About 80% of Russian people represented rural population (Rashin 1956, 85-103), mainly peasants, who could barely read and most of them never attended schools.

Education was no among pri-

its outcome would never reach the targeted audience, who did not ponder on common good or human rights, *liberté* and *égalité*, all they worried about was the stuff of life and the duties towards the landlord.

But nevertheless, the nation has matured, as the troubles to come had not ruined it, but only reinforced. The success of the maturation can be presumed in the primordial predisposition of people, hammered with the social and historical processes, fortified by the Eastern Christianity and cultural traditions and customs. The Russian national consciousness of common people developed in parallel with the spread of ideas of Fatherland and patriotism among the noble stratum. This split between the social top and bottom serves as characteristic peculiarity of the Russian society nowadays.

As the circumstances of the Russian nation's formation have been examined above, and the overall pattern of what are its basics and pillars, it reveals us an opportunity to proceed with the deliberation on what Russian national mentality consists of and why it acquired its colours and shades.

#### **2.4.2. Peculiarities and determinants of Russian mentality**

The search for national character in Russia was initiated slightly after the national feelings had been conceived. Russian national myth has birth to common traits that can be attributed to the Russian people, creating the following image, in the words of Hans Rogger (1960, 269):

... a nation which was simple and unspoiled, straight-forwards and honest, loyal and God-fearing. It may have been a bit coarse, this people, but the absence of polish and elegance was possibly an added guarantee of genuine sensibility and generous soul.

The given rather flattering description is only one example out of many existing, and

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to the Norman theory and offered to follow the European model in the upcoming reforms, while Slavophiles claimed the originality of the Russian nation and its having its own, specific way to be followed.

within this research the main question involves more profound peculiar traits of the nation, the determining principles that guide the Russian people throughout its history. The range and significance of determinants in the development of the Russian mentality is rather vast, which makes it challenging to proceed to their analysis. Among the key determinants of the Russian national character one could mention East Christian, or Orthodox, church, geographical situation, and historical experiences of the country and its people; these are the factors of key significance in the origins of peculiarities that will further be discussed.

I will start with a factor, the influence and the presence of which can hardly be questioned, since it existed long before the first Slavonic tribes appeared in the East European Plain: geographical situation. Here one would include both location and climate conditions. Their role in crystallization of national character is not as apparent as particular historical events or the choice of confession and can easily be ignored when approaching one or another nation's peculiarities. However, following the given analogy with an individual's character, the physical conditions of life indirectly predispose the future views and attitude to rigours of life; similarly, the natural situation of Slavonic tribes' and the Russian people's existence set a direction towards their present-day image. The very first Russian historiographers and philosophers found natural factor to be an important determinant; they described and assessed its value differently. N.A. Berdyaev assumes that geographic position of ancient Russian state predisposed formation of a country with an extensive territory, therewith that territory was easy to conquer, but extremely hard to organize and sustain the order in it. The philosopher believes that "...the size of the country set exorbitant task and took most of the people's energy, keeping it in eternal stress" (Berdyaev 2008). Berdyaev found eternal field and snows dominating over the Russian soul, suppressing initiatives and giving birth to laziness and underdeveloped sense of responsibility. V. Kliuchevskii assigned the tendency towards melancholy and contemplativeness to the picturesqueness of the Russian landscapes (Kliuchevskii 1956). It may be added, that changing and unpredictable character of the climate over the Russian territory contributed to the resilience and adaptivity: it is more common for Russians to make a tentative plan, which later gets adjusted to outer circumstances and is finally almost never followed. The presumable deadlines in the projects are seldom observed, and the work is usually done with "an arrhythmic diligence – rush changes of working energy and idleness" (Dumnova 2013).

These traits can be found in representations of Russian people to a certain extent; however, there exists one more peculiarity in the way of Russians' perceiving the world, which is predetermined with the country's location. Russia is situated between Europe and Asia, forming the border between West and East; an introduction to the lecture in Russia's geography would have started with the statement, that Russia is European by its population, and it is Asian in its territory. This being "in between" resulted in what could be characterized as a pendulum development of the country and its people, swinging from West to East and back. Russian history witnessed several such reversal in the development pendulum, and thus we come to the following determinant of the national character – the nation's and the state's history. Historical experiences of a nation inarguably represent a meaningful constituent in the construction of its self-perception, since, according to the Professor of Politics at Queen Mary University of London Montserrat Guibernau, history "...represents the cradle where national character was forged":

The selective use of history provides nationals with a collective memory filled with transcendental moments in the life of the community, events and experiences that allow people to increase their self-esteem by feeling part of a community which proved capable of great things and that might also be ready to become again a beacon to the world (Guibernau 2004, 137)

In Russia tradition to use the country's history dates to the Petrine rule: in the Tsar's project history would evolve the concepts of citizenship, civic pride and responsibility; moreover, Peter use history as a justification for military policies. Such a pragmatic approach resulted in a governmental demand for creating official Russian historical narrative in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which coincided with the growing national consciousness and resulted in impressive historical research and the start of Russian historiography (Rogger, 1960). For the last three centuries history in Russia serves as one of main propaganda channels. It is not mere coincidence that the old school course books have been replaced, specifically, at the beginning of Vladimir Putin' first presidential term in early 2000s, and then in 2016, soon after the events in Crimea.

Since the limits and the objectives of this study do not allow us to make a detailed tour into Russian history, we will further consider several events in the country's destiny, which very possibly, affected the outcomes of the nation' mentality.

It is hard to deny that the period of the Mongol-Tatar Yoke (1243-1480) played a crucial role in the history of Russian state. The period of Russia's being under the rule of the Tatars resulted in a 200-years stagnation. While other European countries were moving on, passing through the consecutive stages in their historical development, making mistakes and learning from them, and thus doing more and more steps forward, Russia stayed on its knees, trying to survive the dominance of the Asians. It is not a surprise then, that after having spent several centuries under the Yoke, then consolidating into the Muscovite state for several other centuries more, when Peter cut his window from Russia to Europe, which was about to become a Europe of the Enlightenment, imbued with the ideas of John Locke and Charles de Montesquieu, Russia got blinded with its backwardness and underdevelopment.

With these prominent social and economic consequence of the Yoke, it is not surprising that, being under an Asian dominance, Ancient Rus' gained so much from its occupant. Boris Akunin states an idea of the Hord's being the second of two parents of the modern Russian state, where the first one was Ancient Rus', whose existence stopped with the invasion of the Tatars (Akunin 2017, 386). He believes that the key "Asian" heritage for Russia can be witnessed in sacralisation of state power as a guarantor of stability and, as a result, limitation of personal liberties. In the Russian narrative the enlightened idea of social contract is inconceivable, since the state never serves its people, vice versa – people are in service of their state – this is the principle, which lied in the grounds of the Russian internal policies (Akunin 2017, 386). We remember the deliberations of Liah Greenfeld on the Russian aristocracy unstable and insecure situation whose position was not far from the one of slaves: their manors were granted at the ruler's will for only temporary possession, as well as their favourable position could be undermined at any time.

During this period Asian values of community, at the expense of personal interests, got inherent in the Russian mindset. European *égalité* and the rule of law, equal for everyone, is foreign to the Russians, for whom integrity of hierarchy, where higher position means a larger range of rights, is of greater importance, and all this comes from the years that Rus' spent under the dominance of the Mongol-Tatar Yoke. Opinion of the family and society will always prevail over individual's views, and any expression of initiative will face condemnation; a saying "no initiative ever goes unpunished" is so common in Russian folklore for a good reason.

Probably, this shift from West (according to B. Akunin (2017, 345) a pre-Mongol Rus' belonged to Europe) towards East was the first significant swing of the Russian historical pendulum. Russia will keep on turning from Europe to Asia, and liberalization will be replaced with cracking down, reforms – with counter-reforms. The next remarkable shift happens with Peter I, who imposed European values and reforms to his uncivilized country; however the way he did it was undoubtedly Asian – Peter was cruel, no lesser Impaler than Ivan the Terrible, and obviously for him his choice of the end covered choice of the means: Russia became an acknowledged participant of European politics.

During 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries Moscow and St.-Petersburg witness the proliferation of European culture; French, English and German are compulsory to be spoken by aristocracy representatives, and the Enlightenment postulates are widely discussed in the intellectual society. But, as we see from the Figure 1, most part of the territory and population of Russia stayed illiterate, and thus Europeanisation reached the two capital cities and some regional centres, whereas the rest of people survived with Eastern values and views on the world. Again, we can observe the split: while the cities tried to turn, with an alternate success, to the West, the rest of the country lived in the East. Russian history will face many other alterations of Western and Eastern orientation, but what is most important here, that this inconsistency and the lack of certainty about what tomorrow brings, bore a sense of anxiety, which is one of the key characteristics of the Russian mentality (Dumnova 2013).

Liah Greenfeld in her work places an emphasis on resentment towards Europe - and later, the United States. She argues that this "...existential envy of the West – and the values which were to constitute the Russian national consciousness and later to be embodied in the Russian national character were a result of the transvaluation born out of this resentment" (Greenfeld 1992, 250). Hans Rogger also provides an extensive narrative of 18<sup>th</sup>-century-Russians' being "always painfully aware of the fact that the Russian present was not nearly as enlightened as that of the West (Rogger 1960, 187). Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century European countries were the Western adversary for Russia, while during the 20<sup>th</sup> century this role is assumed by the United States. Ivan Kurilla in his lecture on Russian-American relationships states that to explain its contents and nature a state uses its opposition to another nation, and very often this constituting "Other" is a neighbour (as of October 7, 2019, Arzamas academy page listed).

Another influential landmark in Russian history and in the formation of the future Russian national character is the choice of Eastern Christianity in 988 by Vladimir the Great. Religion is apparently one of the most unquestionable and simultaneously complicated factors in crystallisation of the traits of national psychology. It is interesting that the choice in favour of Eastern Orthodoxy was also conditioned by geographical and geopolitical situation of Ancient Rus', whose ruler intended to build up strong cooperation with Byzantine Empire (Tsurikov 2013). This amalgamation of constituent factors is one more evidence of complexity and versatility of the crystallization of mentality. Without going into a detailed analysis of principal ideas of Eastern Orthodoxy, we will concentrate on the main consequences of the Christianisation in 988, which can be identified in today's Russian population's character. A noteworthy detail is that although the present-day Russian nation can be not as religious as the one of 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and even if the church dogmas do not represent a strict code of behaviour for the modern young people, a one-thousand-years-old history of Orthodoxy in Russia left an indelible imprint on the way the nation perceives itself in the world: the qualities, determined at some point by the Orthodox religious devoutness, constitute the basis of the Russian mentality within the context of irreligious society. (Dumnova 2013, 85).

Most authors (Sorokina, Berdyaev) agree that Eastern Christianity invested Russians with a specific certainty about their messianism, being a chosen nation. This tendency is not a new one, many nations used to conceive of themselves as of the chosen ones, however for Russians the fall of Byzantine Empire and inheritance of leadership in the Eastern Christian world, followed by the release of the Mongols resulted in a persistent idea of Moscow's being the third Rome. This is where enormous ambitions and imperial manners of Russia's rulers stem from, and this is how its people find it reasonable that Russia is charged with responsibility for sustaining the world's order. This messiah's frame of mind of Russians led to a conviction of their being a priori aware of how others should live, and even more – striving to help other people, even without concerning of whether "others" need this help (Tsurikov 2013, 419). This belief gave birth to a peculiar Russian patriotism, and the narrative of Russia's special path and destiny has been regularly employed by the government, seeking for support and approval of intervention as the basis for its foreign policies. Such an appeal to the national feelings reminds us of primordialistic ideas in definition of the basis of a nation.

N. A. Berdyaev in his works pays particular attention to the role of Eastern Christianity in the formation of future Russian mentality. He notes, in particular, that the key requirement and virtue of the Orthodoxy is represented by humility, which is seen nowadays in the absence of social responsibility and lack of initiative; the state of inner slavery is immanent in a Russian's perception of himself. The basis of an orthodox universe is in solidarity and fraternal affection, and never it involves efforts to defend one's rights or a self-sufficient personality, while demonstration of initiatives and independency have always been considered to be something immoral. (Lyuks 2018). I would conclude here that religious postulates, fostered by hierarchical relations imposed during the period of Mongol-Tatar Yoke, resulted in the image of humble, faceless personality of individual of no value, so different from rational and strong-willed image in the West. It thus will be reasonable to define the choice of religion to be one of principal factor in the construction of the narrative of individual as a mechanical tool serving its sovereign.

As a matter of interest, Christianisation deepened the dualism of Russian mentality. Orthodox Christianity, borrowed from culturally developed Byzantine with long history, inherited from Antique Rome and Greece, was imposed on a one-hundred-years-old state with florescent heathen customs, although fast-developing and growing. As the result, Christianisation of Ancient Rus' did not mean the adoption of byzantine culture and law, and everyday traditions intertwined with the newly borrowed Christian values.

One can follow the image of Russian mentality getting more and more distinct; nevertheless, to achieve a more comprehensive representation, it is necessary to study one more aspect – specific attitude to the ruler. Through centuries Russia's Head of State had been represented by Tsar, General Secretary of the Party and President, however, individual – power relations model stays unchanged till nowadays.

It is crucial to bear in mind that the idea of autocracy was borrowed in the end of 15<sup>th</sup> century from Byzantine Empire with the purpose of creation of a unified centralized Moscow state with an absolute power of the Grand Prince. Andrey Miasnikov in his analysis of the image of "Russian Tsar" (2012) describes the position of Tsar<sup>4</sup> in the top-down governance between the God-Father and the birth father together with motherland, and therefore Tsar (who embodies all the possible forms of the Head of the State) holds a

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<sup>4</sup> Ivan IV became the first Russian Tsar, and thus the title of the Grand Prince of Moscow was replaced by the Tsar of the whole Russia

special place and his functions represent a crucial structural element in the Russian mentality (Miasnikov 2012).

The long absence of a mass written culture and the lack of reliable source of political information resulted in a rather positive image of the Tsar in the national consciousness with prevailing symbolic and sacral characteristics. The folklore formed an image of an ideal ruler sent by the God, and in the c17<sup>th</sup> century in the national consciousness appeared a vision of Tsar-*batiushka*<sup>5</sup>, which became afterwards a meaningful ideologeme of the Russian autocratic rule (Miasnikov 2012). Tsar-batiushka symbolises the closeness of the higher ruler towards its people, who is hoping to be cherished, as the birthfather cherishes his own children, as well as belief in his endless compassion. Robert K. Massie, who dedicated his life to the research of the Romanov's history, supports this image of Tsar-batiushka: "The landowners, the police, the province governors and state officials were whole-heartedly execrated by Russian peasants. The Tsar – never. The Tsar, being closer to the heaven than to Earth, could never be wrong: he was batiushka, the father of the people. He did not know about the difficulties his children were suffering from"<sup>6</sup> (Massie 1971, 22). V. M. Pivoev in his article «“Ours” against “strangers”» supports the psychological connection with the archetype of the Father: "The image... was born in mythological consciousness as the ideal concept of a man who can protect “ours” against “strangers” ( Pivoev 1999). For such a hero his duties are considered to be sacred and thus he is entitled to use any means to reach his noble goals. If one considers the extreme natural-geographic and geopolitical situation of the Russian state, such position of the Tsar-hero can be also explained by a historical necessity, since the ruler's undivided authority was necessary for the survival of the Russian people, and the State.

Upon an exhaustive and multilateral analysis of the factors that played instrumental role in the development of the Russian national mentality, as well as the process and circumstances of the forming of the Russian nation itself, we can grasp the essential traits of what lies in the fundamentals of Russian people's attitude towards the rest of the world as well as the perception of their own place in it. Long before it got matured into a nation in every sense of the word, it had had to learn the laws of vertical of power where the

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<sup>5</sup> "Batiushka" is a softer form for "father"

<sup>6</sup> Translation from French by the thesis author

lower an individual is, the less rights he exercises, and the top position means respect and power. The authority of the community, senior members of the society, church, government dominate over the individual's views and mind, and religious postulates, that transformed with ages into social norms, call for staying humble and submissive. Humility is perceived as a reasonable price for a privilege to belong in a state and to be proud of its glorious history and enjoy its rich cultural heritage. A person who leads the country through its life full of challenges and threats, deserves all the trust and magnanimously executes his overwhelming duties, representing the whole nation (his children) with dignity in front of the whole hostile world. This nation blindly loves its motherland, being proud of what She (as Russia is a Mother – *matushka*) had to endure, its cultural and historic memory, and these primordial feelings constitute the core of Russian people's mentality. I will further endeavour to analyse how these peculiarities, underlying the Russian national mindset, are operated to serve the maintaining of the positive image of the Russian President for almost twenty years.

### **3. Construction of the image of Russian president through the specifics of national mentality: Direct Line with Vladimir Putin case study**

#### **3.1. The image of Vladimir Putin in Russian society (Hero)**

After the dissolution of the USSR Russia stepped into the neoliberal reforms era that promised activation of the stagnant economy and a powerful impetus to social and economic development of the young country. The new government was determined to build a country, which would not have any connection with its ancestor – the Soviet Union. Such a radical disposition of the government distilled into a range of thoroughgoing initiatives and reforms, which only deepened the crisis and resulted in serious complications in political, economic and social spheres. The claimed objectives by no means correlated with the results of economic and social policies. Irrationality of political realities in Russia of 1990-s had as the consequence an estrangement between the people and the governmental institutions. The notion of national interest ceased to exist at all, and international image of the country was far from favourable as new government took all possible measure to destroy any positive image of the country's Soviet past, including its hard experiences of the Great Patriotic war and lessons of the October Revolution. The country felt split to "us" and "them", where "them" were those holding the power, who were showing

less and less interest in the destiny and concerns of “us”.

The split between the poorer and the richer sectors of the population has multiplied, at that for the poorer majority liberal reforms turned out to be an abrupt decline in living standards, social status, restriction of subsistence needs and impairment of interests. (Zdravomyslov 2000, 25). The first part of the 1990s was especially marked with extremal inflation growth, when the prices rose 26 times in 1992 and again 10 times in 1993, while the salaries were growing almost twice slower, and were paid more and more often under the table. In 1997 many-months-delays in salary payment concerned around one half of the Russia’s population. (Gordon, Klopov 2000, 28). In 1999 there was a series of explosions in Moscow and other Russian cities as a reaction to the counter-terrorist operation in Dagestan, where hundreds of people died.

In these circumstances Vladimir Putin was appointed to the post of Prime Minister in August 1999. He was unknown, young official who started acting off the reel: plenty of effective and working measures were taken; one of the most remembered moments of 1999 is Putin’s phrase: “We’ll beat them up in toilets”, which he used when announcing the decisive character of counterterrorist actions in the North Caucasus. This phrase, which sounds quite slangy even outside Kremlin, dropped during one of his speeches, can be interpreted as the first demonstration of the new politician’s unusual style of communication with his audience: he sounded frank, open and full of determination to clear out the past decade’s Augean stables. At the same time Vladimir Putin looked humble, slender and sportive which very beneficially contrasted with well-nourished image of a typical State Duma member, seen on TV-screens every day. Boris Yeltsin in his televised address as of August 9, 1999 named Vladimir Putin to be a person who was able to consolidate the society (as of October 21, 2019, Kommersant Newspaper page listed). It is hard to argue that Russia was then in desperate need of a figure who would assume the role of a hero to prevent the young country from an inevitable wrack, approached by failure reforms and any absence of social cohesion, so necessary in growing economies.

Vladimir Putin became this hero at the end of 1999. It is pointed out, that within the period from October to December the share of people experiencing fear and despair lessened more than three times, while the share of people with emotional uplift, has increased (Zdravomyslov 2000, 32-33). According to the historian A. Barsenkov, Putin acted as a person who managed to unify Russians morally and psychologically, and people start

associating the young Prime Minister with the restitution of stability, order and gradual raise in living standards (Barsenkov, Vdovin 2010, 743 – 744). No wonder thus, that in March of the year 2000, Vladimir Putin got his victory after the first round of the President elections. Putin became that very Tsar-hero, who came to protect “us” against terrorists’ attacks, to restore Russia’s international image and to let “us” feel proud of being Russians again. There is no doubt, that one of his most meaningful achievements consists in bringing Russian economy into order within the first years of his presidency. Drawing conclusions to the economic results of Putin’s presidency in 2000-2008, The Wall Street Journal wrote in 2008: “The economy has not only recovered all the ground it lost in the 1990s, but has also developed a robust service sector that was practically non-existent in the Soviet period. Russia has accumulated the third largest monetary reserves in the world after China and Japan” (Graham 2008).

Nowadays Putin’s the most passionate proponents in Russia are represented by those who still remember the hardest period of 90s: they had to provide their families without any perspectives of further improvements or stabilisation of situation in the country; they lost any credibility in their government. These people these days are 45-60 years old, and they constitute the majority of those who come to vote during the President’s elections (as of November 29, 2019, Ria-Novosti page listed). For these people Vladimir Putin is the one who saved the country from a disaster and passed the whole way from the edge of a catastrophe to a stable country, maybe not always prosperous, but still livable. They feel grateful and this is the basis of their many-years-long allegiance. Many of them rear their children through transmitting them the same ideas, thus bringing up a new generation of Putin’s followers.

According to some recent studies, the higher level of public approval is necessary or the regime stability; moreover, “...such popularity may legitimize the regime in the eyes of voters” (Frye et al. 2017). To achieve the required level of public support Vladimir Putin retains the image of a trustworthy, reliable politician, by keeping communicating with his people, commenting on the most burning social-political issues. Among other cases, there is a very illustrative one, when in summer 2018 a new pension reform was implemented, it caused a massive discontent and gave birth to an extremely negative public discussion. In two months, the President addressed to the people with a speech where he articulated the reasons and peculiarities of the reforms, having highlighted its advantages and insisted

on its inevitable character, as well as introduced the softer regime of the reform's implementation (as of March 3, 2020, Kommersant Newspaper page listed; March 3, 2020, Kremlin's page with the address video listed). The softening was presented as the President's initiative, and even though the speech did not settle the problem of the public perturbation, it is very symbolic, how the head of state, *batiushka*, assumed the role of "a good cop".

Just as Josef Stalin in Jeffrey Brooks' "Thank you, comrade Stalin!: Soviet public culture from revolution to Cold War", Putin "...did everything, knew everything and took credit for everything good" (Brooks 2001, 65) in the Russians' life. The news reported of Putin's visits to orphanages, showed him inaugurating the hospitals, presenting the newest ideas and reforms. Moreover, the President starts to address now and then the issues of national glory and pride: celebration of Victory Day gains momentum, which is one more evidence of how appeals to the issues of common blood and solidarity give way to the manipulation of the people's feelings. More and more Vladimir Putin gains the image of the one who returned national self-respect to Russians.

#### PUTIN'S APPROVAL RATING

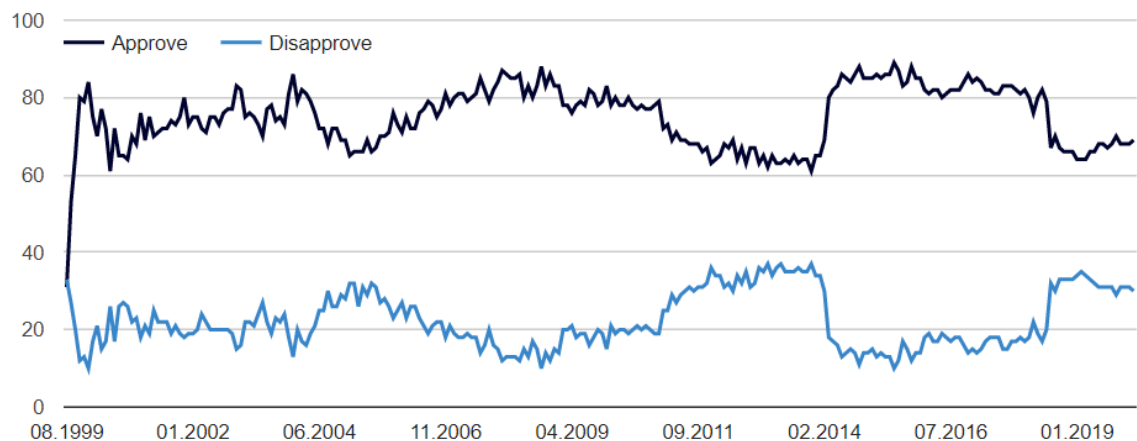


Figure 2: Putin's approval rating 1999-2019 <https://www.levada.ru/en/ratings/>

The fact that Vladimir Putin skilfully manipulates peculiarities of Russian national mentality can also be evidenced with rally around the flag. Figure 2 demonstrates the President's approval rating and one can clearly see how it reaches its maximum in September 2008 (88 %), then June 2014 (88%), and June 2015 (89%). All these indicators coincide

with such meaningful events as Military conflict in Abkhazia and war with Georgia, annexation of Crimea, and activation of the Islamic State with further Russian troops sent to Syria. Being actively exploited by mass media through invoking primordial national feelings of the people, these events are articulated with the final aim to consolidate the President's image of the Hero whose main duty is to protect "ours" against "strangers". Daniel Treisman, among others, in his research also came to a conclusion, that "...Russians have rallied behind the Kremlin at certain moments when Putin has struck patriotic themes" (Treisman 2014).

For better understanding of the nation's attitude to their President, it is crucial to grasp to nature of the relationship between the two. During his presidency, Vladimir Putin has made an impressive way from an administrator to a charismatic leader. Following the previously given ideas, in the President – Country – Nation triangle one can identify distinctly the family relationships matrix: Father – Mother – Children. Many Russian people perceive their President as their father, that is, as any parent-child relationships, their attitude towards him is emotionally coloured to a greater degree. According to Sara Ahmed, "emotions are performative, and they involve speech acts, which depend on past histories, at the same time as they generate effects" (Ahmed 2014). This is why emotions can become as a useful tool in analysing the peculiarities of communication between the nation and the President. Apparently, through appealing to such emotions as love, hate, fear, pain, etc. the President presses the paint points, which enables the redirection of the sentiments of masses.

Among the most effective and large-scaled tools in communicating with Russian people for Vladimir Putin is an annual live broadcast nationwide phone-in, literally – a direct line with Vladimir Putin. This kind of TV-program represents particular interest for this research, as it provides an extensive material for analysis of the image of the President within the matrix of the Russian national mentality and the further chapter will contain a detailed qualitative analysis of the video of the Direct Line with Vladimir Putin as of the year 2019.

### **3.2. Analysis of the Direct Line**

According to Vladimir Putin himself, the Direct Line is the most powerful sociological survey that allows citizens to convey their position and assessment to the country's leadership (as of November 29, 2019, Kommersant Newspaper page listed). The program

takes place annually, where Vladimir Putin answers the question that Russian citizens ask by phone and by means of live television connection from the largest cities of the country, as well as through email and text messages. His answers are broadcast live by the leading federal TV-channels and radio stations. The first program took place in 2001 and was organised every year, except for the years 2004 and 2012; in 2008-2011 the Direct Line also continued existing during Putin's term as a Prime Minister. During the last years the live broadcast lasted around 4 hours, while the President answered 60-80 questions from an audience. These questions mainly concern actual events, current issues in economic and social spheres of the country, and the Direct Line takes on a form of a dialogue of Russian citizens with the key figure in their country.

In 2019 the Direct Line took place on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June. According to Kremlin, there had been received more than 1,5 million of requests and questions from all over the country, of which almost 400 thousand by means of SMS and MMS, while a telephone call stays the most popular way to address the President. It was also highlighted that the requests kept on being processed even after the broadcast finished. Over 5 million people watched the program in 2019. The further analysis will be divided into blocks in accordance with the themes, relevant to the subject of this research.

### ***Visual content of the program***

The program takes place in the studio with invited guests, among which one could see sportspeople, people of arts, actors and successful entrepreneurs. Vladimir Putin takes a seat at a horseshoe-shaped table, where two main anchormen join him; however, they stay far enough for cameras to concentrate the principal focus on the President, which enforces the effect of his having an exam in front of the whole nation. Behind the President there is a large bright-blue screen, which creates an impressive ground-colour for Vladimir Putin, delivering his comments on the most provocative questions. At the moment of a close-up shooting this blue background gives Vladimir Putin's eyes a bluish colour, enhancing the feeling of sincere and whole-hearted conversation.

When answering the questions, Vladimir Putin demonstrates his expert knowledge on every question, by providing figures, dates and names a lot to the point, which boosts the

trustworthiness and reliability of the President's words. As the program unfolds, he constantly makes notes and asks to repeat in case if he misses some words; sometimes he frowns, or nods, and obviously, nothing of what has been discussed in the studio, will stay ignored by the President. The Head of the state provides all his answers and comments in firm and steady voice, which at times gives him an image of a kind teacher who gives a lecture to his students. In fact, Putin indeed lectures Russian people on the issues of inflation and national projects, as if explaining far too complicated issues to those, who stay unsatisfied only due to their poor literacy.

### ***Relations with people: a loving father***

The first observation that can be made while watching the Direct Line – Vladimir Putin seems to be always aware of the problems, addressed to him by his audience: he says now and then that “this problem really exists”, and unfortunately it is not a new one. But what is more, every second case is replied with his agreeing on the gravity of the issue: he *understands*. As if enforcing the image of a fair-minded and caring ruler, the President takes the side of petitioners and thoroughly demonstrates his involvement into their problems and readiness to tackle them. Sara Ahmed suggests that a group (in this context – the nation) stays consolidated through the transference of love to the leader, and such transference becomes the ‘common quality’ of the group; in her words, “it is ‘love’, rather than history, culture or ethnicity that binds the multicultural nation together” (Ahmed 2014, 135). As has been said before, the relations between the nation and the head of the state, have the nature of family ties, where the President is seen to be a father to his children – the Russians. Therefore, emotions of love are the mainstream in the context of relationships between Vladimir Putin and the Russian people. It is known that no love can be endless, as it always needs to be returned. The President-father promises to settle the problems, he acts as a guarantor of future happiness, “‘happiness’ that is always deferred as the promise of reward...” (Ahmed 2014, 196). These promises nourish the people's affection, giving the hope for better future.

### ***Relations with the Government: effective and severe manager***

Just as Joseph Stalin back in 30s, Putin is rather authoritative, issuing orders, thus making

people personally responsible to him (Brooks 2001). Now and then he addresses directly to the high officials – ministers, governors – who have to report on the current situation and assume responsibility for further resolution of the problem. The President gives orders and directives during the TV program and these seem to be more effective and working than official orders, signed in his cabinet beyond streaming. This invests the Direct Line with even more popularity and boosts the image of the program, as well as its main character. Furthermore, while commenting on the discussed issues, Vladimir Putin highlights several times that the responsible officials, who had failed to perform their duties, were dully punished: “By the way, the generals were dismissed”; or, the penalty is inevitable: “...there will be conducted necessary investigative measures for detecting all liable persons...”. During the latter minutes of the program there’s a demonstration of a fragment of conference that starts straight after Vladimir Putin demanded from the regional governor to solve the problem discussed during the Direct Line; the work was in full swing and all this is due to, as the anchorwoman put it, “the magic effect of the Direct Line”.

On the whole, throughout the Program the President now and then highlights his participation in the settlement of the problems discussed in the studio: I’ll have a talk to the Minister, I am taking it under my personal control, I’ll also keep an eye on it, etc. When in the very beginning of the program the Minister of Health is given the floor, Putin makes an impressive statement: “I also want to be heard... because one thing is when the Minister speaks, and when *I* speak – is another”. Hard to imagine, what more could he say to boost his own significance.

Although the President makes a statement of common responsibility for the situation in the country, nevertheless, he actively practices back passing, blaming other governmental structures, so to say, plays good cop-bad cop. When discussion refers the question about banks’ refusing to lower mortgage interest rate to 6%, the President’ reaction is: “This is a real mistake of the Government and relevant institutions” (Government is a bad cop here); then follows such remark: “I had a talk to people in the Government... the problem has been solved” (while the President is evidently a good cop).

This episode confirms the theory of contrasting the Tsar-batiushka to the landowners, as the one who is always there to protect his people against the malicious master. If to look at these episodes from the perspective of emotions, the idea of Sara Ahmed of contraposition of love and hate can be a good explanation: the people’s hatred as a reaction to

injustice is redirected towards the Government officials, while enforcing the love sentiments for the one, who provides the lacking justice: this is an obvious “differentiation between ‘us’ and ‘them’, whereby ‘they’ are constituted as the cause of ‘our’ feeling of hate” (Ahmed 2014, 48).

### ***Reminder on the crisis of the 90s: the Saviour***

Not only the emotions of hate and love are powerful tools in influencing the people’s sentiments, but also the emotions of fear and pain. As has been noticed above, the experiences of the transitional 90s with the profound crisis hold a significant share in the Russians’ collective memory. Fear of desperation and pain of the years of losses and need are still alive in the minds of millions. It is noteworthy, how throughout the program Putin several times reminds the audience of the desperate situation in the country 20 years ago, when he first appeared on the political scene.

First, when answering the provocative question on the intentions of the ruling party, Putin says, that in the 90s “social sphere, industrial sector, the sector of defence was ruined, we practically destroyed our military establishment, brought the country to the Civil war and bloodshed in Caucasus, and led our country to the brink of sovereignty deprivation”. Further, when comes the question of impossibility of any economic breakthrough whilst the decisions in the country are made by the economists of 90s, Putin again goes back to the country’s poor state, highlighting that nowadays “we have nothing common with the 90s”, there is no that inflation rate, there is no that indebtedness and dependency on IMF, instead – our gold and currency reserves are growing.

Later, there comes a storyline of events in Dagestan in August 1999 with a live broadcast from Botlikh, which is a rural locality and the administrative centre of Botlikhsky District of the Republic of Dagestan - is a federal subject of Russia, located in the North Caucasus region. A short report tells us how twenty years ago this place used to be a real battlefield, and everything here reminds of war. The story is delivered very picturesquely with the description of scenes of bloodshed and bombing. The participants of those events address Vladimir Putin with the message: “Dear Vladimir Vladimirovich... We remember the day when you came here, to Botlikh, at the most desperate moment...” The President replies further: “...As for those events, I shall remember them till the end of my life”.

In the words of Sara Ahmed, “...it is fear of anarchy that makes subjects consent to being governed” She continues: “...Subjects consent to being governed: they give up freedom in order to be free from fear.” (Ahmed 2014, 71). Apparently, by evoking the events of

crisis Vladimir Putin appeals to the feeling of gratitude for the rescue of the country out of the 90s nightmare. These manipulations, evidently, are intended to foster the image of the one who knows where to go and how to act, increasing his significance for further peaceful life of the Russians. These constant reversions to the desperate conditions of life in the country twenty years ago say to the audience: if it weren't Vladimir Putin, those would have lasted till nowadays; if we had another ruler, who knows, what the life would have been today; you must remember and you are to be grateful. As has been already mentioned above, in conditions of crisis and social and state turmoil the nation becomes an effective means of political mobilization. It is hard to argue here, that by appealing to the issues of solidarity Putin manipulates the national feelings and intends to refer to collective memory of his audience. According Sara Ahmed, people's priorities are being shaped through teaching them what life would be like without sovereignty: they "... must be grateful for being saved or being brought into civil society" (Ahmed 2014, 193).

### ***Demonstrative participation of blogosphere***

This year the Direct Line is peculiar with active participation of Internet bloggers as the evidence of interest and interaction between the state authorities and popular representatives of social media. The anchorwoman highlights the activeness of blogosphere and every time announces the number of followers for those bloggers, which is, no doubt, impressive: 10 million followers, 7 million followers. The bloggers refer to burning issues, such as the problem of waste disposal and introduction of sovereign Russian Internet. However, upon a closer examine of these blogs, it turns out that that the questions, which they deliver to the President, could hardly sincerely belong to them: a quick look at their profiles will reveal total absence of any involvement into social-political live of the country. These performances are obviously designed as fragments of the program script, and this is supposed to endue the program with more trustworthiness.

### ***Question about fresh water: you are our last hope***

There was a very expressive example of Putin's communication with his people in the story with the absence of fresh water in Tyumen region. The people's appeal took place in the form of video streaming from their place of residence where they complained about the poor quality of water in their town. Their voices are full of sincere despair and even there is a phrase: "Vladimir Vladimirovich, we have a big favor to ask...*you are our last hope!*" The President looks abashed, saying that the total absence of fresh water is a very

unusual situation. But then he drops the following phrase: “On the whole, of course, the problem exists all over the country; unfortunately, millions of people do not have access to drinking water, *millions*.” The phrase, used as an introduction to a long and detailed discussion of the problem with subsequent public reproof of the regional governor, in fact involves a significant underneath meaning. In the context of Russian national mindset, hearing that you are not alone who suffers from such situation can be interpreted as follows: I am only one, insignificant, element in this complicated system; there are millions of others who need help, my problem is not the most urgent; we maybe could be patient for a while. The phrase, in this context, is aimed at the communalism of Russian national state of mind: individual’s (in this case, residents of this particular town) needs are far less important than the common ones. The governor further gives promises to regulate the situation, and when he refers to the necessary procedural actions, such as application and demands, the President claims, especially stressing the “I”: “*I* have demanded for them. *I* ask you: do it as soon as possible. Did we agree?” Again, as many times before during the Direct Line, Putin demonstrated his personal involvement in the problems of his people, which contributes to his positive image around the country.

### ***President who feels ashamed***

In conclusion, the President gets asked: “Do you ever feel ashamed”. To answer the question, Vladimir Putin says that, as any normal person, he happens to experience the feeling of shame; further, he tells a story, where he lost a piece of paper with an appeal of a woman, which he once met. “I will never forget it. I still feel ashamed of it”. When the president tells the story, silence reigned supreme in the studio, the stress is growing. His face is taken in close up, and we see him being very sad, while his voice is trembling. The whole picture is saying: I am a normal person, same as you all, not immune to human sentiments. This scene is a final chord in boosting the personal image of the President Vladimir Putin: responsible, competent, reliable, but at the same time – empathic, very emotional, and compassionate.

We are to remember that the program is anyways a show – even if it has an extremely official, governmental image – it has its producers and script writers – and – a plot. And as any other shows, it has its targeted audience and particular objectives and goals, which are achieved in higher or lower degree: people, living in the country and abroad, see their

President, full of attention towards their problems and ready to do his best to solve all their sorrows and expectations. The Direct Line, as well as multiple day-to-day publications about Vladimir Putin's benignity and achievements, performs several tasks: first, it demonstrates how people trust the President, support him and look for his assistance in mending the difficulties of the country; second, the program serves as an evidence of the President's efficiency, the proof of his rightful presidency; and third, showcasing of this efficiency and mutual respect between the President and the people lets launch impressive promotion campaign to his image, significantly investing public approval of the President.

The foregoing analysis demonstrates how the President use the specific traits of the national mentality for the benefit of his own positive image, which fosters the level of his public approval. Even though the Direct Line is a produced show, millions of Russians take it at its face value. The show works well, and what is more important, there is an obvious demand for such shows. And where there is demand, there inevitably follows supply.

## **Conclusions**

Whenever we try to understand the others' motives of actions or standstill, we inevitably realise that one can't read another man's soul, especially, when referring the strangers' soul. Russian soul has a reputation of enigma for good reason: first vast distance barriers, then political barriers of the iron curtain, then finally, cultural and language barriers make the nature of the Russian people' character a tough nut. However, the negative and hostile attitude of international community towards the Russian President often gets extrapolated to the Russian nation: if these people support their leader, does it mean, that they share his political line, his views, and ideas? No, they do not, and in this Thesis, I have approached this dissonance from the perspective of peculiarities of national mentality.

In my introduction I formulate the research question: why do Russian people keep on trusting and supporting their leader? I answer it by exploring the nature of Russian mentality: to be supported, national leader should give the nation what it is longing to, he is supposed to satisfy its expectations and hopes. Therefore, the peculiar characteristics of Russian national mentalities represent an extensive part of the Thesis. Upon a detailed

research on the circumstances of the development of Russians into a nation I have followed the main influencing factors, which affected the forging of the Russian national mentality. Following the analysis of these factors, geographical position, historical development and the Orthodox branch of Christianity are of primary importance, which resulted in more communal mindset and suppression of the individual interests over the communal ones; humbleness and lack of individual initiative are of no less importance in the construction of the global picture of a Russian. It is also crucial to remember the phenomenal importance of the power hierarchy, where the correlation of rights and obligations diverge: the one holding higher position enjoys his status and full authority, while the one at the lowest niche can barely pretend to claim his basic rights. This being said, one should also remember specific relations between the head of the state and his subjects: these bear more characteristics of relations of father and children, where father protects and takes care.

The performed analysis brings me to the following conclusion: these traits of national mentality are the key determinants to how the public approval is constructed for the one who holds the post of the head of the country. The detailed analysis of the development of Russian nation, the constructivist efforts of the two monarchs two the building of national consciousness, combined with the primordial pre-disposition, and the key characteristics of the result of these process – the Russian national mentality – provides us with an image of people, who feel proud of their past, as they are constantly reminded of the past achievements. These people need a strong, powerful leader, who would assume responsibility for their future and who would tackle all the challenges, imposed by the stranger world. For these people the imperfection of the governmental system only means that the President (or, the Tsar) has not learnt about it yet, and he has all the authority to improve it. For them, their President does not belong to the Government, instead, he rules the Government, too. And even if the system does not work, they hardly will do anything to change it, because taking the initiative is not among the priorities within the system of values in the matrix of Russian national mentality.

Vladimir Putin is exactly this kind of ruler, or, he has been doing his best for the fulfilment of these aspirations. Was it a coincidence or not, at the moment of his accession to power he demonstrated himself being that very person, whom Russians had been waiting for far too long: decisive, authoritative, caring. The Direct Line with Vladimir Putin is the most

spectacular evidence of how the President takes advantage of his knowledge of the Russians' mentality. In the analysis that I have conducted in the third chapter of the Thesis one can see how people appeal to their *batiushka* with their most crucial issues, looking for understanding. Putin accepts the people's love, and, by demonstrating his deep and sincere involvement, promises in return to settle these issues. He knowingly readdresses the expressions of public discontent and confirms the rightfulness of his holding the post of the President.

Not only the program is designed to arrange communication between the ruler and the people: it also works as a powerful promotional event, where the image of the President gains deeper public approval. What is important to get insight into, is that this kind of promotion applies brilliantly for a nation, for whom the President is far more than the highest administrative official of the country – he rather represents a symbol of prosperous future of this nation. Being a national leader irrevocably requires the comprehension of the nation, its history, culture, and system of values. A key to obtaining the influence and power over a nation lies in intimate knowledge of the nation's specifics. This ability to invoke the underlying peculiarities of the national mentality has all the chances to become a determinant in the creation of the public approval and loyalty for the one, who aims to take the helm of the country and retain one's power for long. The case study of the Direct Line with Vladimir Putin demonstrates how important it is to constantly support such level of public approval by communicating with the nation through the operation of principal characteristics of national mentality.

The case of Russian national mentality has demonstrated how the knowledge of historical and cultural past of a nation facilitate the understanding of one; it is crucial to remember that every nation has its own concept of values, beliefs, and perceives the issues of power and state in its own way, which fails to be applied to another nation. And, going back to the quotation of Joseph de Maistre, I would conclude that there is a grain of truth in the statement about every nation having the Government it deserves. Or, rather, some nations have that very Government, because it needs it, and cannot exist with another one.

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