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THE ADOPTION OF STATE SYMBOLS IN RUSSIA: A COMPROMISE OF TRADITIONS

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Abstract

The author considers the process of adopting of a new state symbols in Russia after the collapse of the USSR. This process was influenced by different traditions and by the struggle of different political forces that sought to consolidate their own „own” symbols and values (democratic, national-imperial, communistic, etc.). As a result, the adoption of the new flag, the coat of arms and the anthem was the result of a „compromise imposed from above” which ended the „war of symbols”, but confirmed the uncertainty of the national idea.

Key words

state symbols, identity, image, historical traditions, modern Russia.

1. Introduction. Contents of the Basic Concepts

State symbols, primarily, a flag, a coat of arms and a hymn are, as a rule, officially established distinctive signs of the state, personifying its sovereignty. These symbols often reflect the traditions of the country, as well as the main goals and values adopted by the society at a given historical stage which defines the many principles of public administration.

At the turning points of history the symbols of the country change dramatically, and the choice of new symbols at such moments largely depends on the specific balance of political forces. **The aim** of this article is to try to find out how the balance of political forces and political traditions affected the

adoption of new state symbols in Russia after the collapse of the USSR.

Literature on the Russian state symbols is quite extensive (for example: Пчелов, 2005; Соболева, 2002; Хорошкевич, 1993), but much of the works are a descriptive and historical rather than of analytical. We are interested in the studies where the meaning of state symbols is viewed through the prism of their connection with the identity and the „myths of Russia” (Аймермах et al. (eds.), 2000; Мосейко, 2003; Smith, 2002), as well as the image of the country (Галумов, 2003; Почепцов, 2001; Anholt, 2010).

The subject of symbols is closely related to the problem of **identity**. Identity (from Latin “identitas”) is a property of the human psyche in a concentrated form to express an answer to the question „Who am

l?", that is to determine its belonging to different social, national, professional, linguistic, political, religious and other groups or other communities. As J. Topolski (1999) rightly notes, a great role is played by historical **myths** – simplified and emotionally colored narratives that reduce complicated and contradictory historical processes to comprehensive schemes. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the search for new identities, new historical myths and „state ideas“, new symbols was actively developed. This was clearly illustrated by a series of colloquia conducted in Russia under the leadership of J. Billington in 1996-1999: "What has taken place is one of the most wide-ranging and many-voiced discussions about national identity and political legitimacy in modern times. In broad outline Russia is struggling between its authoritarian tradition and its new freedoms..." (Billington, Parthé, 2003, p. 4).

The symbols of the country largely determine its **image**. By the image we mean an emotionally colored image of the country, purposefully formed in the public consciousness by means of advertising, propaganda, etc. The image of the country has in many respects a „virtual“ character, it is easily changeable although its „core“ is more stable and is formed mainly under the influence of objective factors. When forming the image of a country, politicians often try to use archetypes of public consciousness which are often reflected in the symbols of the state. However, the adoption of symbols is a very complex process where the principles of logic and expediency do not always play a major role. It is often influenced by the traditions formed in earlier epochs, and the struggle of various political groups trying to consolidate their „own“ symbols and values. It was such a „war of symbols“, as the author noted in one of his works (Чернишов, 2010), that occurred during the period of „perestroika“ and the subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union.

2. Prehistory: war of symbols

The former „Soviet“ symbols were discredited in the eyes of a large part of the population, along with the Communist Party which lost its prestige in the society, along with the ideology that was losing its popularity. It was then that previously unavailable information about mass illegal repressions, deportations, and questionable actions of the Soviet leadership in the foreign policy (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Katyn case, etc.) became extremely popular. This immediately reflected on the attitude towards the state symbols. Thus, the sickle and hammer that were presented on the flag and coat of arms,

for example, were used in the cartoons as a kind of swastika. Naturally, there appeared a search for alternative symbols which would have nothing to do with the symbolism of the outgoing socio-political system.

The search for these symbols could be conducted in two main directions: either turn to the experience and traditions of the pre-Soviet periods in the history of the state, or try to create something new using the experience of other states which proclaimed the similar national goals and values. It would seem that the Constitution adopted on December 12, 1993 gave a fairly clear idea of what the Russian state should be: a democratic federal state with a republican form of government (Article 1.1). Thus, one would expect that the new state symbolism will meet the values of democracy, federalism, republicanism and the rule of law (Конституция, 2017). In fact, however, everything turned out to be much more complicated.

The need to „search for roots“, the need to demonstrate the „rootedness“ of the new system in the „age-old“ traditions, the desire not to lose touch with the former „power“ pushed for resuscitation of the old Russian symbols rejected in the Soviet era. This was also facilitated by various political and social trends of a nationalistic, clerical and monarchical nature. Therefore, some of the old symbols were given a more modern character. These attempts to make them more modern were met with a fierce resistance of adherents of the communist system of values. The society split into groups and the reconciliation between them due to the fundamental differences was almost impossible. That is why the process of adopting the new symbols turned out to be so stretched in time (more than 10 years), so contradictory and dramatic. Further we will try to trace how all these processes were reflected in 1990–2001 on the acceptance of official symbols of the state – the flag, the coat of arms, and the anthem.

3. „Democratic“ flag

The modern flag of Russia as well as many other post-Soviet republics (Matjunin, 2000) caused a lot of disputes and ideological battles (fig. 1).

A white-blue-red flag is known to have been introduced under Peter I, but under Alexander II, a black-yellow-white flag was used in parallel. Only the last Russian Emperor Nicholas II in 1896 finally secured the status of the only state flag of the Russian Empire for the white-blue-red cloth. As it was subsequently used in the White movement, in emigration, and then in the troops of General Vlasov, those who

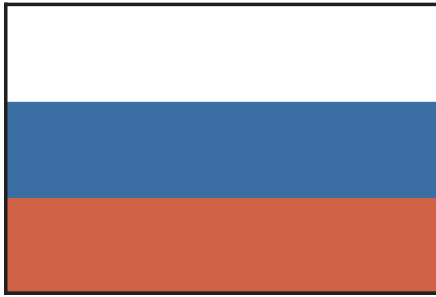


Fig. 1. The modern Russian national flag

Source: Государственные символы России.

shared the communist ideology at the level of the subconscious perceived the flag as clearly an „enemy” one. Hence it caused a categorical rejection on their part. This dislike was reinforced by the fact that this flag became the symbol of the victory of democratic forces after the coup in 1991: it was planted in the place of the former red flag. For some time, the opposition of the „democrats and communists” was symbolized by these different flags.

Three colors of the flag had a certain official interpretation in the Russian Empire: red meant „nationality”, blue is the color of the Mother of God who protects Russia, white is the color of freedom and independence. These colors also meant symbolized the commonwealth of the White, Minor and Great Russia. However, some other informal interpretations are currently in use. Thus, here again we see an attempt to escape from the old meanings.

Incidentally, it can be recognized that the flag carries a much less specific meaning than the anthem. The flag is clearly inferior to both the coat of arms and the anthem on such an important criterion to assess the state symbol as „recognition”. The use of similar three color bands in different combinations occurs on the flags of many other states: the Netherlands, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sierra Leone, France, Croatia, etc. For better identification sometimes, for example, football fans use a combination of three bands and the Russian coat of arms characteristic of the presidential standard. Perhaps, if such a variant of the national flag were adopted at the official level, it would increase the degree of not only recognition, but also the semantic load of this symbol.

4. „Imperial” coat of arms

The coat of arms as an identification mark of the Russian state has a very complex and rich, more than a 500-year-old history. Even before the collapse of the USSR on November 5, 1990, the Government of the RSFSR adopted a resolution on the creation of

the State Emblem and the National Flag. The white-blue-red flag and the coat of arms, the golden double-headed eagle on the red field, were restored on 30 November 1993 by President B. Yeltsin Decrees, however, only on December 4, 2000, President V.V. Putin introduced a draft federal constitutional law „On the State Emblem of the Russian Federation” to the State Duma (Федеральный конституционный закон, 2000a). In the current version, adopted by the State Duma on December 8, 2000 and approved by the Federation Council on December 20, 2000, the emblem depicts a two-headed eagle with crowns, scepter and power; on the chest of the eagle in a red shield there is a rider on horseback, striking a black dragon with the spear (fig. 2).



Fig. 2. The modern Russian national coat of arms

Source: Государственные символы России.

The ancient archetypal images embedded in the coat of arms are perhaps the most rich and diverse. It originally has the image of the Eurasian Empire as the monarchical state, uniting after the Byzantine Empire many peoples of Europe and Asia, the West and the East. Three crowns, according to the variant of interpretation under Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, symbolized „the three great Kazan, Astrakhan, Siberian glorious kingdoms.” The Scepter and the Power emphasized the idea of autocracy. Finally, the scene with George the Victorious brought another set of ideas - Orthodoxy, the victory of the forces of light and good over the forces of evil and darkness. As a result, all these images fully corresponded with the famous formulation of Count S.S. Uvarov, in the spirit of the theory of „official nationality”: „Orthodox Faith, Autocracy, Nationality” (Вортман, 1999).

It should be noted that on modern Russian rubles, until March 2016, the official emblem of the Bank of Russia was the eagle without crowns, as on the coat of arms of the Provisional Government of Russia in 1917, but now the crowns are returned to the eagle (Филимонов, 2016). Three crowns, according

to modern interpretation, personify the sovereignty of the whole of the Russian Federation, as well as of its parts, subjects of the federation. The scepter with the power, which the two-headed eagle holds in its paws, symbolizes the state power and a single state. Thus, the original „monarchical” meaning of the coat of arms is reinterpreted into the idea of state sovereignty.

5. «Soviet» anthem

And, finally, the fate of the anthem was even more difficult. The former anthem of the Russian Empire, written in the melody of A.F. Lvov in 1833, unlike other symbols, obviously was not subject to modernization:

In Russian	In English
<i>„Боже, Царя храни! Сильный, Державный, Царствуй на славу, на славу нам! Царствуй на страх врагам, Царь православный! Боже, Царя храни!”</i>	<i>„God save the Tsar! Strong, Sovereign, Reign for glory, for glory to us! Reign for fear of enemies, The Orthodox King! God save the Tsar!”</i>

However, the Soviet anthem (music of Alexander Alexandrov, text of S.V. Mikhalkov and G.A. El-Registan, 1944) in the textual part was too closely connected with the ideology of the departed state:

In Russian	In English
<i>„Славься, Отечество наше свободное, Дружбы народов надежный оплот! Партия Ленина – сила народная Нас к торжеству коммунизма ведет!”</i>	<i>„Be glorious, our free Fatherland, Friendship of peoples is a reli- able stronghold! Party of Lenin - the strength of the people We are being led to the triumph of communism!”</i>

In 1990, a government commission was formed which approved the „Patriotic Song” by M.I. Glinka. This choice was fixed by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on December 11, 1993 (Указ, 1993). A contest for the text was announced, more than 6000 variants were received, and 20 were selected. In November of 1997, B.N. Yeltsin introduced the federal constitutional law „On the State Flag, Emblem and National Anthem of the Russian Federation” for consideration by the State Duma. However, the State Duma rejected the law in the first reading, in January of 1998 (Законопроект, 1997). At the same time, the alternative project „On the State Anthem of the Russian Federation” submitted by the Communist Party faction was rejected. It included

a return to the anthem to the music of Alexandrov. There was a deadlock in the stakeholder talks: it was decided that it would be expedient at the present time to remove the problem of legislating the state symbols from the agenda since there are polar points of view both in society and in parliament.

The new president of the Russian Federation tried to cut this „Gordian knot”. On December 4, 2000 V.V. Putin submitted to the State Duma a draft federal constitutional law „On the State Anthem of the Russian Federation” with a version of the anthem to the music of Alexandrov (Федеральный конституционный закон, 2000b). The law was adopted with references to the fact that „the Russian Federation is the continuer of the USSR according to the principle of “continuity” and the melody of the USSR anthem is well known to the Russians. On December 30, 2000 V.V. Putin signed a decree on the text of the national anthem of the Russian Federation for new words by Sergei Mikhalkov (Указ..., 2000). This decision caused a lot of protests among the public, but by March 2001, the federal constitutional law on the anthem came into effect.

6. Results of compromise

So, the anthem was adopted the last, and it resulted from the „imposed compromise” by V.V. Putin. The left forces actually agreed to endure the coat of arms and the flag „alien” to them in exchange for restoring the Soviet anthem dear to them (though with the words hastily rewritten). This compromise had both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, it completed the prolonged uncertainty in the issue of state symbols and somehow met conflicting requests, on the other hand, it fixed the vagueness of political landmarks, eclecticism in the selection of state symbols. In a somewhat simplified form, Yevgeny Yasin described this eclecticism as follows: „To me, our culture, our value system resembles such a three-layer pie, in accordance with our state symbols. There is a double-headed eagle - the traditions of pre-revolutionary Russia, including religious ones. Then Soviet values are Soviet culture, our Soviet anthem. And there is a new democratic Russia, to which the symbol is our tricolor flag” (Земляной, 2008).

Haste during the writing of the anthem text also had negative consequences. Many critics note that the new version of the text turned out to be less colorful than before. People who grew up under the Soviet rule unwittingly reproduce the old words when they hear such a familiar melody. In the new version of the text, the refrain begins with the same

line, but the words „the party of Lenin” and „communism” are removed. At the same time no definite landmarks appeared in that place. In addition, the line from the second couplet „native land stored by God” caused protests from both atheists and representatives of non-Christian faiths (in particular, Muslims).

According to the opinion poll conducted by the Foundation Public Opinion several years later (January 12, 2002, August 28, 2004), the most problems were revealed with training of the anthem. The overwhelming majority of the Russians knew what the Russian flag looks like, and could correctly describe it (86%). 79% of people confidently answered what the emblem of the Russian Federation represents. When it came to the anthem, it turned out that only 17% of people knew its melody and words, most of them only remembered the melody (65%). The share of those who did not know either music or words was quite high: 14%. The attitude to all symbols in 2004 was also different (tab. 1).

Later polls by Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) also confirmed that the knowledge of Russian symbols is different. So, according to the survey on June 6–7, 2009, the respondents were best informed of the state emblem of Russia. The overwhelming majority of the Russians correctly answered what is depicted in it (86%). A little worse did the Russians know the Russian flag: 60% correctly called the colors and their location on the national flag of the country. About a third of Russians (34%) correctly called only colors. Every twentieth respondent (5%) did everything wrong. The respondents were least aware of the anthem of the country: only 40% of the respondents correctly named the first words. Almost as many indicated them incorrectly: 36%. Moreover, younger respondents more often correctly reproduced the national anthem (Пресс-выпуск № 1295, 2009). After another 5 years, however, more positive dynamics can be traced in the level of knowledge (Пресс-выпуск № 2653, 2014).

In this regard, it must be recognized that the new symbols of the Russian state, on the one hand, often appeal to the archetypes of the public consciousness, and on the other, do not yet fully represent the views of various sections of society about themselves and the country. In relation to these symbols,

indifference, dislike, and misunderstanding often occur, although the process of „mastering” them is going on. If we understand under the archetypes the images with the traces of ancient experience and elements of the view of the world, the images of the state emblem deserve the most attention. The idea of a strong empire (or, more broadly, „power”), ruled by a just father-ruler, patronized by God himself, for centuries was close to a large part of the population in Russia. This idea, in fact, did not disappear and after the death of the Russian Empire, transformed and „repainted” it was embodied in new ideologies and political myths: „wise leaders”, „world revolution”, „the struggle for socialism in the whole world”, „socialist camp”, an „international duty”, and so on. That is why the modern „keepers” are in no hurry to part with the symbolic legacy of the Soviet Union. Such questions are important enough in the development of the style of public administration: will this management be built according to old „imperial” patterns, or will a different style be created which is more in line with the principles of democracy and federalism laid down in the Constitution?

The principles laid down in the Constitution somewhat „outstrip” the development of public consciousness towards the values of democracy, republicanism and federalism. Russian public consciousness has not yet developed a consensus on the question about what kind of state Russia should be. At the same time, the former paternalistic image of the „great power” under the „father of the people” continues to be attractive for many and turns into „neo-patrimonialism” (Robinson, 2017). „The imperial temptation” is in the formulas: we are a great Eurasian power, we are united by a common history and common values, we provided all the nations with the conditions for development; we must all feared of and respected. However, in response to this, accusations of colonialism, of striving to seize foreign territories, of violent Russification of other peoples, etc are often expressed. In this regard, A. Kappeler’s (2014) conclusion seems quite correct. In the history of Russian policy in relation to many peoples there were elements of colonialism, but the Russian people themselves were hardly dominant or privileged at the same time. Privileged was the administrative-command system, the „Center” which Russia along

Tab. 1. Answers to the question: „Do you like or dislike the current state Russian flag (anthem, coat of arms)?”

The current flag		The current anthem		The current coat of arms	
like	73	like	67	like	61
not like	12	not like	13	not like	18
difficult to answer	15	difficult to answer	20	difficult to answer	21

Source: Государственная символика..., 2004.

with other republics struggled for sovereignty during the times of perestroika. That is why the collapse of the Union was so rapid that almost nobody in fact defended it.

7. Conclusion

In the context of the identity crisis which has not yet been overcome there are three main options to answer the question: what is Russia. The first option: „Russia is the state of the Russians, Russian citizens.” This option is most consistent with the Constitution of the Russian Federation, and the state top officials publicly and unequivocally speak in favor of it (cf., for example, the periodically sounding thesis that „Russians are a single nation”). This is the most peaceful, democratic and least conflict variant of development. However, apparently, that is why it seems wide and not radical enough.

The second option: „Russia is the state of the Russians (option - Orthodox).” It lies on the ethno-religious principles. Many countries in the post-Soviet space are following this path: local elites create privileges for the „titular nation” and pursue a policy of assimilation or „squeezing out” of national minorities. However, for the Russian Federation, the implementation of such a variant would mean an upsurge in separatism, serious conflicts on national and religious grounds, isolation on the international scene, and so on.

The third option, „Russia is the state of the people of Eurasia” is based on the New Eurasian principle is based. It is becoming increasingly fashionable to talk about the civilizational unity of the Eurasian space, the natural axis of which is Russia. Such reasoning often reveals the abovementioned imperial temptation - the desire to depict Eurasia (without any clear boundaries) as a territory that God himself intended for Russian domination. However, even G.P. Fedotov wrote about the danger of attempts at an imperial revenge: „For Russia itself, forcible continuation of imperial life would mean a loss of hope for her own freedom. A state that exists by terror in one half of its territory, can not provide freedom for the other” (Федотов, 1992, p. 327). However, this does not confuse the ideologues of the empire: for imperial thinking, according to G. Simon, welfare is characterized by the criterion of the scale of the territory and the military power of the state, and not by the standard of living and freedom of citizens (Simon, 1994). A peculiar „fashion for the empire” is shown everywhere: in films (like the film by N. Mikhalkov „The Barber of Siberia”), and in the near-scientific literature (it is enough to look at the titles of the books

that flooded the bookshelves: „Forward, to the USSR - 2” by M. Kalashnikov, „To Become a World Power” Y. Krupnov, etc.), and in the pre-election statements of the party leaders.

Meanwhile, this rhetoric has the most serious influence not only on Russia’s image, the nature of its perception in the countries of near and far abroad, but also on the behavior of the administrative elite within the country. This eclecticism, which was the result of a tactical compromise, is still constantly „stumbled” by representatives of state structures. They do not know how to behave in relation to Stalinism. On the one hand, V. Putin condemned the criminal policy of repression against people, and on the other, a line from the old variant of the anthem praising Stalin appears on the Moscow metro station, and in some cities some Monuments to Stalin are restored. Officials do not know how to behave with respect to clericalism. On the one hand, the church is legally separated from the state, and on the other hand, the „Foundations of Orthodox Culture” penetrate into public schools, and in the army the representatives of the Church „consecrate” ships and rockets. They do not know whether to uphold the honesty of elections, if the leading party demands from them to achieve certain high results. The lack of clear value guidelines, mundane pragmatism and the „doublethink” of many representatives of the management elite in no small way contribute to the spread of corruption. All these protracted diseases are to be overcome by the Russian society.

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