Exploring near-border territories of Russia: peculiarities of ethnic identity of population and its determinants

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This article describes the results of exploring ethnic identity of population, residing in border regions of Russia, based on the data of the sociological survey, conducted in 2015 in the Republic of Karelia, the Republic of Altai, the Orenburg oblast, the Omsk oblast, the Altai territory, the Kemerovo oblast, the Amur oblast, the Jewish Autonomous oblast and the Trans-Baikal Territory (n=4437, aged from 15 to 75 years). The ethnic identity is measured through its affective, evaluative, cognitive and behavioral components, it is claimed that it has one-way causality, meaning that increase in one component leads in transformation of identity content as a whole. The specificity of the ethnic identity is determined by social-demographic characteristics, the actual

state of the inter-ethnic relations, the efficacy of the State national policy implementation in the region. Grouping regions by ratio of different ethnic communities allowed to make regional comparisons. The analysis of model application resulted in important conclusions about general mechanisms and inter-regional differences in ethnic identity formation caused by various ethnic conditions.

В статье рассматриваются результаты построения эмпирических моделей этнической идентичности населения, проживающего в современном российском приграничье, и ее ключевых детерминант на основе данных социологического исследования, проведенного в 2015 году в Республике Карелия, Республике Алтай, Амурской, Оренбургской, Омской, Кемеровский, Еврейской автономной областях, Алтайском и Забайкальском краях (n=4437, возраст респондентов от 15 до 75 лет). Этническая идентичность измерялась через выраженность ее основных компонентов: эмоционального, когнитивного и поведенческого, предполагалось, что модель имеет одностороннюю казуальность, проявляющуюся в трансформации идентичности при изменении выраженности и значимости одного из компонентов идентификации. Выявлено, что содержание этнической идентичности в значительной степени зависит от социально-демографических характеристик населения, а также от актуального состояния межэтнических отношений и эффективности реализации государственной национальной политики в регионе проживания. На основе группировки регионов в зависимости от соотношения численности представителей разных этнических общностей были проведены региональные сравнения. Результаты анализа трех ключевых моделей позволили сделать выводы о существовании общих механизмов и специфических межрегиональных различий в проявлении этнической идентичности, обусловленных разным этническим составом населения приграничных зон.

Introduction

The ethnic identity is supposed to be one of the most important characteristics of ethnic groups, constituting modern societies. The increasing interest towards ethnicity and ethnic identity issues in contemporary era is mainly associated with globalization processes, leading to different interstate alliances, diversification and complication of ethno-cultural landscapes in all affected countries. In such circumstances, almost all states need to elaborate integrating mechanisms for different cultures and ethnic groups that co-exist in the same territory. American experience of «melting pot», EU policy of multiculturalism, ideology of the «unique soviet people» in the USSR are mere examples of such integrative practices and mechanisms.

Intensification of migration, changes in territorial borders and in crossing regulations obviously affect interactions and self-perception of people. That is why one of the acute issues of modernity is described by the search and the crisis of identity. The academic literature contains multiple studies about relationship between different types of social identifications – national, ethnic, regional and others, which can be generally defined as territorial identities [Sociological monitoring of interethnic relations; Hansen, Hesli; Cebotari; Waechter]. Special interest was paid to the analysis of formation, reification and interpretation of hybrid or supranational identities, such as European [Neumann; Checkel, Katzenstein; Fligstein; La Barbera, Capone], Eurasian [Pereira; Barrett; Light; Stokhof, van der Velde, Hwee], Latino [Padilla; Gracia; Flores; Morales; Jaksic; Torres], pan-African [Esedebe; Lake; Zwangobani] or global as an all-encompassing identity [De Haan, Schulenberg; Karlberg; Shokef, Erez; Pichler].

In the meantime, the idea that the intercultural background has significant impact on identity formation, its fluid and overlapping character has been widely disseminated under conception of multiple or mixed identities, based on the synthesis of private and sometimes incongruent aspects of identification. For instance, according to the two-

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dimensional model of Berry, ethnic identity in the ethnically mixed environment can be built by the identification with one's ethnic group (segregation); identification with «alien» ethnic group (assimilation), identification with own and another ethnic group (integration). In the worst case, the refusal of the identification with both (all) groups can lead to the formation of the marginal identity [Berry, p.9]. Following Berry, several scientists explore different combinations of civic and national (ethnic) identities, distinguishing strong civic identity accompanied by weak civic identity, strong ethnic identity going with weak civic identity, hybrid (combining two types) and atomized (negative feelings towards ethnic or national belonging) identities [Hansen, Hesli; Cebotari]. In a recent study of famous Serbian scholars the national identity is seen as a set of cultural ascriptive and civic components [Lazić, Pešić].

However, regardless of the relationship among single types of territorial identification, the ethnic type remains very strong element of the social identity, especially for immigrants of the second and the third generations, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples. As a matter of fact, the immigrants' refusal of ethno-cultural affiliation doesn't contribute to their adaptation, while preserving positive ethnic identity is indicative for successful integration in hosting community [Paat, Pellebon; Ethnic identity, Immigration, and Well-Being].

The borders of the Russian State have been considerably changed over half a century, often as result of geopolitical concessions or compromises. In this context, changes in ethnic and identification processes in the frame of so-called «new borders» with European and Former Soviet Union (FSU) or actual members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries are of great interest among scholars [National identity and ethnicity in Russia and the new states of Eurasia; Kolossov, O'loughlin]. The research on theses territories is usually made from the point of view of the cross-border cooperation and the investigation of new boundaries which constituted previously a common political and economic space [Faranda, Nolle; Brednikova, Voronkov; Russia-European Union Borderlands).

Besides, there is a particular interest to explore processes of ethnic identity formation in border areas, where borders were constant for extended periods. Historically,

Russia was a greatest poly-ethnic country in the world, which different parts diverged in several respects, not only by legal or administrative-territorial status, but also by social-economic development, ethnic composition and so on. Contemporary regions constitute unique territorial, social-economic and socio-cultural systems, among which border regions may be singled out as specific objects of analysis. Examining the Census data, L. B. Kristalinskiy concludes that near-border territories differ significantly from internal ones by ethnic make-up of the population and indigenous territories, he notes continuous decline in the Russian population in these regions [Kristalinskiy, p. 19-22]. In addition to specific ethnic composition, the peculiarity of social-demographic situation in border regions is greatly determined by migration, which influence depends on the structure of the migration flows and its direction, so internal and external migrations have opposite impacts on border territories. The first type is associated with the decrease of population and labor force and poses a threat to the national security, while external migration is seen as an important source of population and labor potential [The migration component of the socio-demographic development of the border territories of Siberia and the Far East]. All these conditions suppose that there are some specific features in formation and expression of ethnic identity of population, living in the border area.

Materials and Methods

The ethnic identity may be evaluated with various methods and through a variety of indicators, depending on what theoretical model was chosen as a basis of the analysis. According to U. Schönpflug, ethnic identity, seen as a dynamic state in the context of acculturation, may be defined by three components: 1) the extent of inclusion in the group of cultural origin; 2) the predisposition for assimilation with ethnic group of origin; 3) the tendency of differentiation from own ethnic group [Schönpflug, p. 4].

One of the most prolific scientists exploring ethnic identity from the point of view of the developmental perspective, Jean S. Phinney, and her colleagues consider self-categorization, commitment, ethnic behavior, positive or negative evaluation of

one's group, ethnic values and beliefs, importance of membership as significant markers of ethnic identity [Phinney, Ong, p. 272]. Hungarian explorers of border identities in Cenral and Eastern Europe A. Örkény and M. Székelyi distinguish in the structure of ethnic identity its cognitive and affective components, described by the proximity to ethnic diasporas and the country of origin, feelings of pride and positive attitude towards ethnic group of the receiving society [Örkény, Székelyi].

Summing up the most valuable works on the structure of ethnic identity [described, among others, in Phinney, 1990; The structure of ethnic identity of young adolescents from diverse ethnocultural groups; Phinney, Ong] we have singled out three components in the structure of ethnic identity: emotional, cognitive and behavioral.

The emotional component is related to the evaluation of human qualities of one's group, attitude towards belonging to some ethnic group and personal significance of this membership. This component was measured by direct and inverse statements «I'm proud to belong to my ethnic group», «Belonging to my ethnic group is a nuisance», «I'm happy to be a part of the culture of my ethnic group», «I'm glad to be a member of my ethnic group».

The cognitive component contains representations about peculiarities of one's ethnic group and awareness of the group membership based on explicit indications. It was constituted by two statements «I consider myself to be a representative of my ethnic group», «I feel part of my ethnic group culture».

Behavioral component reflects the willingness of individual to act as a representative of his/her ethnic group. This component was measured by the statement «I share ideas and beliefs of my ethnic group».

Our principal hypothesis suggested that ethnic identity was determined by peculiarities of the ethnic composition of the territory (different ratio of single ethnic groups). Given that perception of ethnic tension and personally experienced discrimination may be important for the enhancement of ethnic identity [Waechter, p.240] we have also hypothesized that ethnic identity is conditioned by the character of interethnic relations in the region.

Ethnic processes and specificity of inter-ethnic communications in the area were evaluated by means of several statements, describing tolerant, respectful or conflict attitude towards representatives of different ethnos and characteristics of effective national policy in the sphere of inter-ethnic relations in the region of residence, measured by 10-point scales (from 1 point meaning «To the least possible extent» to 10 points indicating «To the greatest extent»).

The statements about tolerant attitude included: «Friendship between representatives of different nationalities», «Respect of customs, traditions and languages of different ethnic groups», «Mutual help in difficult situation regardless of ethnic belonging», «Respectful attitude towards representatives of other nationalities», «Condemnation of ethnic nationalism».

The spread of ethnic conflicts was assessed by the statements: «Prejudices, hindering the establishment of good relations between nationalities», «Unfriendly or hostile remarks about people from other nationalities», «Leadership contest among representatives of different nationalities», «Psychological abuse (racial or ethnic comments, verbal threats)»; «Ethnically motivated bullying, physical violence (beating, fights)»; «Condemnation of mixed marriages», «Unfriendly remarks about adherents of a different faith».

The efficacy of the governance in the sphere of national policy was evaluated by the following statements: «Monitoring of compliance with national policy legislation», «Support for the development of culture and traditions of different nationalities», «Support of national-cultural public organizations», «Support of confessions, religious organizations», «Fair distribution of different benefits and posts for all nationalities», «Debates between the State and ethnic minorities when making decisions are effective and public», «Regional authorities resolve conflicts in inter-ethnic sphere successfully», «There is an effective system for the realization of the State national policy in the region», «Authorities advance uncompromisingly the interests of all inhabitants regardless of their ethnicity or religion».

The ethnic identity and its determinants were statistically described by binary regression models built on the data gathered in the sociological survey of 4437 inhabitants of nine near-border regions, including 600 people in the Altai territory, 399 – in the Trans-Baikal territory, 400 – in the Kemerovo and Omsk oblasts, 397 – in the Orenburg oblast, 423 – in the Republic of Altai, 578 – in the Amur oblast, 585 – in the Jewish Autonomous oblast, 655 – in the Republic of Karelia. Similar mechanism of multistage stratified sampling ensured representativeness and adequacy of regional comparisons. In the overall sample, there were 45.9% of men and 54.1% of women, 69.3% of urban residents and 30.7% inhabitants of rural settlements.

In agreement with our hypothesis about the possible effect of ethnic composition on ethnic identity of population and in view of the fact that despite poly-cultural composition Russians constitute ethno-cultural node in all regions of the Russian Federation, regions covered by the research were divided into three groups, based on the proportion of Russian population and the number of ethnic groups (the data were taken from of the Census 2010). The first group consisted of regions with the predominance of Russian population and the presence of few ethnic groups with more than 1000 people in the ethnic composition: the Amur oblast (94.33%[1]), the Altai territory (93.92%), the Jewish Autonomous oblast (92.74%). The second group comprised regions with the lower number of Russians or greater number of influential ethnic groups: the Trans-Baikal territory (89.9% of Russians and five big ethnic groups), the Kemerovo oblast (93.7% of Russians and nine ethnic groups with population over 1000 people) and the Omsk oblast (85,83% of Russians and six ethnic groups with large populations). The third group was characterized by the lowest number of Russian population, the presence of indigenous peoples or the great number of ethnic groups. This group included the Republic of Altai (56.3% of Russians and 33.9% of Altaians), the Republic of Karelia (82.2% of Russians and 7.4% of Karels) and the Orenburg oblast (75.9% of Russians and more than ten different ethnic groups with population above 1000 people).

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[1] The data in brackets denote the proportion of Russian population.

Within each group of regions, a binary regression model was built to evaluate the probability of inclusion in the group with apparent ethnic identity, which had been measured by means of one statement from cognitive component – «I consider myself to be a representative of my ethnic group», recoded into dichotomous variable. The choice of dependent variable and independent predictors was justified by the need to explore interrelations between different components in the structure of ethnic identity and factors determining its expression. In the first group the model explained 89.7% of the total variance, in the second group – 83.7%, in the third – 80.7%.

Results and Discussion

Model of binary logistic regression in the first group of regions (with predominating Russian population)

Significant predictors in the model of ethnic identity in regions with predominance of Russian population included indicators from all three components (cognitive, emotional and behavioral). It was no accident that the most important factor was related to the inclusion of individual in the ethno-cultural space of his ethnos (B = 7.12 and p-value < 0.001), as appertaining to the same component as the dependent variable (table 1). Scales from emotional and behavioral components also had logical and significant correlations with predicted ethnic identity: the statement «Belonging to my ethnic group is a nuisance» had negative sign and appropriate significance level (p = 0,024) whereas the statements «I'm glad to be a member of my ethnic group» and «I share ideas and beliefs of my ethnic group» were positively associated with dependent dichotomy. Thus, the model has confirmed the close relationship between different parts and manifestations of the ethnic identity.

Besides correlations with emotional and behavioral components, the analysis has revealed associations of ethnic identity with other factors, *inter alia*, with the respondents' age, assessments of the state of inter-ethnic relations and the efficacy of the national policy.

Thus, it was found that the actualization of ethnic identity increases significantly with age (p = 0.006), so, the ethnic identity of older groups is stronger than the ethnic identity of middle and young generations. Here some clarifications should be given on

the relation of this finding with ethnic identity formation theory [presented par example in Phinney, 1990, 1993; Smith; Crocetti, Rubini, Meeus]. While the ethnic identity development is usually explored within distinct age group (children, adolescents or adults), in various ethnic or racial groups that impedes to draw general conclusions, it is not undisputed that ethnic identity formation is a long-term process passing through several stages until its achievement, and our data have confirmed this although in a rough manner. But we argue that in our case not only natural laws of identity formation came into play but also deep societal changes, which affected representations about ethnic self-determination in generations, socialized in completely different social and political conditions. The Russian youth, in particular, living in the period when the ethnicity is not only acquired during family education and self-development but also contested, redefined and reshaped, has many hesitations about its own ethnic identification, which is often mixed, confused with the State identity or marginal (Omelchenko et al., 2016), whereas older generations, in addition to psychological processes, contributed to their identity achievement, had less contested and more crystalized ethnic identities.

Furthermore, the model contained many significant predictors, describing the authorities' activity and the state of inter-ethnic relations, which indicated attention paid by people with evident ethnic identity (Russian identity in most cases) to the regulation of inter-ethnic relations and the support, provided by the State to various nationalities. Meanwhile, the evaluation of this activity was rather contradictory. On the one hand, the model provided evidence to conclude that people with evident ethnic identity have higher assessments of the authorities' efforts in advancing interests of all inhabitants regardless their nationality and religion (B = 1.41, p = 0.005), in developing culture and traditions of various nationalities (B = 1.19, p = 0.021), in condemning nationalist movements (B = 1.06, p = 0.006). They felt more confident in existence of national unity in Russia (B = –0.054, p = 0.008) and gave lower ratings for some markers of inter-ethnic tension, such as «Unfriendly statements about people of different

faiths» (B = –0.416, p = 0.011), «Some ethnic groups have much more power in Russia» (B = 0.04, p = 0.03). So, ethnic identification meant being sensitive to bare improvements made by the power to ensure inter-ethnic harmony and solidarity.

On the other hand, the expression of ethnic identity was also associated with low scores of support of national-cultural public organizations, (B = – 2.64, p = 0.002), weak monitoring of compliance with national policy legislation (B = –1.30, p = 0.008), insufficient respect of customs, traditions and languages of different ethnic groups (B = – 1.45, p = 0.005) as well as with high scores of condemnation of mixed marriages (B = 1.14, p = 0.005), prejudice hindering the establishment of good relations between nationalities» (B = 1.44, p = 0.011), higher probability of ethnic violence and clashes (B = –0.11, p = 0.011). People with apparent ethnic identity have noted more frequently that inter-ethnic relations in their place of residence were strained, conflict or even explosive (B = 0.079, p = 0.02). All the above-mentioned factors have shown that some courses of national policy were underestimated by people with salient ethnic identity, especially Russian identity that is given by regional group membership, and that their national consciousness was painful, sensitive to tiniest negative changes in inter-ethnic climate, more pessimistic.

Table 1

The model of binary logistic regression of ethnic identity in the Altai territory, the Amur oblast and the Jewish Autonomous oblast

Variable (response)	Logistic regression coefficients		
	B	Wald	p
«I feel part of my ethnic group culture»	7.176	13.466	0.000
«I share ideas and beliefs of my ethnic group»	2.037	6.856	0.009
«I'm glad to be a member of my ethnic group»	3.243	6.501	0.011
«Belonging to my ethnic group is a nuisance» (Absolutely	-1.416	5.071	0.024
Age: 50-75 years	3.632	7.662	0.006
«Support of national-cultural public organizations»	-2.640	9.22	0.002
«Respect of customs, traditions and languages of different ethnic groups»	-1.446	7.966	0.005

«Condemnation of mixed marriages» (To the greatest extent)	1.139	7.971	0.005
«Prejudices, hindering the establishment of good relations between nationalities»	1.437	6.533	0.011
«Unfriendly statements about people of different faiths»	-0.416	6.454	0.011
«Monitoring of compliance with national policy legislation»	-1.295	7.027	0.008
«Authorities advance uncompromisingly the interests of all inhabitants regardless of their ethnicity or religion»	1.410	7.886	0.005
«Condemnation of ethnic nationalism»	1.062	7.408	0.006
«Support for the development of culture and traditions of different nationalities»	1.194	5.308	0.021
«What is your opinion about existence of the national unity in Russia?» (four-point scale, higher values denote «yes»)	-0.054	7.003	0.008
«At the present time, how probable are ethnic violence and clashes in the place where you live?» (four-point scales, higher values denote negative answers)	-0.105	6.447	0.011
«How could you characterize relations between people of various nationalities in the locality where you live?» (four-point scale, higher values denote more strained, conflict relations)	0.079	5.447	0.02
«To what extent do you agree or disagree that some ethnic groups have too much influence in Russia» (four-point scale, higher values denote disagreement)	0.038	4.737	0.03
Note: B – regression coefficient, Wald – Wald's statistic, p – significance level			

Model of binary logistic regression in the second group of regions (with lower proportions of Russian population and several powerful ethnic groups)

The regression model for the second group had many features similar with the model described above. Predicted variable also had significant correlations with the statements from cognitive and emotional components, especially describing importance of inclusion in the culture of one's ethnic group (B = 4.3, p = 0.001), feeling comfortable and having positive emotions, associated with the salient ethnic identity

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(B = –2.24, p = 0.005 for the statement «Belonging to my ethnic group is a nuisance» and B = 1.99, p = 0.004 for the statement « I'm glad to be a member of my ethnic group».

In contrast to the previous model in the second one there was a significant relationship of the ethnic identity and the type of settlement (B = 6.90, p = 0.006). The probability of being included in the group with salient ethnic identity was higher among citizens, residing in large cities with more than 500 thousand inhabitants. It is therefore in highly urbanized areas, having multifarious ethnic habits, individual is more aware and sensitive to ethnic differences between people and to his/her own ethnic attachment.

Ethnic identity of population from this group relates to tolerant attitudes towards migrants and representatives of different nationalities. The respondents with this type of identity believe that it is not necessary to restrict migration inflows and it is better to use them for the benefit of Russia (B = 0.051, p = 0.005), they are opposed to the idea of limitation of residence in the territory of Russia for every nationality except the Russians (B = – 5.05, p = 0.011) (table 2).

Table 2

The model of binary logistic regression of ethnic identity in the Kemerovo oblast, the Trans-Baikal territory, in the Omsk oblast

Variable (response)	Logistic regression coefficients		
	B	Wald	p
«I feel a part of my ethnic group culture» (Absolutely agree)	4.299	10.595	0.001
«I'm glad to be a member of my ethnic group»	1.993	8.517	0.004
«Belonging to my ethnic group is a nuisance»	-2.238	7.79	0.005
Type of settlement (Large city)	6.896	7.43	0.006
«Do you agree that residing in the territory of Russia should be restricted for all nationalities except the Russians?» (the answer «No»)	-5.05	6.394	0.011
«What migration policy should the Russian government adopt?» (The answer «It	0.051	7.796	0.005

should not pose administrative barriers and try to use migration inflows for the benefit of Russia»			
Note: B – regression coefficient, Wald – Wald's statistic, p – significance level			

Model of binary logistic regression in the third group of regions (with indigenous ethnic groups and lower proportions of Russian population)

As regression analysis results show, actualized ethnic identity in regions with the lowest number of Russian population was closely related to the inclusion into the cultural environment of the ethnic group (B = 2.04, p = 0.001) and was associated with feelings of pride to one's people (B = 2.53, p = 0.003). At the same time, the considerable size of different nationalities in the structure of population facilitated actualization the of ethnic identity rather among Russian population than among other ethnic groups (this indicator had B = 3.04, and marginal significance p value = 0.06).

This model also contained indicators of the state of inter-ethnic relations and the authorities' activity regarding the implementation of the national policy in the regions. Similar to the first model, respondents with apparent ethnic identity expressed their appreciation of the efforts aimed at reducing the spread of ethnic nationalism (B = 0.51, p = 0.023) and proving interests of all inhabitants regardless of their nationality or religion (B = 0.6, p = 0.025). Meanwhile, unlike in other models, they had higher estimations of the prevalence of unfriendly remarks about people with other religious beliefs (B = 0.732, p = 0.031) and expressed dissatisfaction with the efficacy of ethnic conflict mediation (B = – 0.825, p = 0.03) (table 3).

Table 3

The model of binary logistic regression of ethnic identity in the third group (the Orenburg oblast, the Republic of Altai, the Republic of Karelia)

Variable (response)	Logistic regression coefficients		
	B	Wald	p
«I feel a part of my ethnic group culture»	2.036	11.387	0.001
«I'm proud to belong to my ethnic group»	2.533	8.849	0.003
«Condemnation of ethnic nationalism»	0.505	5.180	0.023

«Authorities advance uncompromisingly the interests of all inhabitants regardless of their ethnicity or religion»	0.6	5.041	0.025
«Regional authorities resolve conflicts in inter-ethnic sphere successfully»	-0.825	4.698	0.03
«Unfriendly remarks about adherents of a different faith»	0.732	4.659	0.031
«What nationality do you consider yourself to be?» (Russian)	3.036	3.610	0.057
Note: B – regression coefficient, Wald – Wald's statistic, p – significance level			

Conclusion

Building empirical models of ethnic identity made it possible to define general mechanisms of ethnic identification of population, living in border regions of Russia and to outline interregional peculiarities. Our data have shown that ethnic identity of population from all regions covered by the research, measured as a clear awareness of ethnic belonging and considering oneself as a representative of some ethnic group, is primarily related to other cognitive elements, namely to the inclusion to the cultural environment of this concrete ethnic group. Thus, the national culture appeared to be one the most important attributes for the ethnic identification with «own» and differentiation from «alien» ethnos. It was also found that the ethnic identity in investigated regions is mainly positive and conflict-free, the assessment of one's ethnic belonging is associated with positive feelings and psychological comfort.

The research has revealed that ethnic identity depends on several socio-demographical characteristics, among which the age and the type of settlement, denoting the extent of the urbanization in the boundary area. Ethnic identity of older generations and of inhabitants of large cities is in general more salient, although the significance of these factors differs depending on the group of regions.

Regression analysis has shown the connection between ethnic identity and the assessment of the actual state of inter-ethnic relations. The expressed ethnic identity is associated with higher subjective evaluations of ethnic discrimination, violence and prejudices, denoting painful reactions to the smallest deviations from normal inter-ethnic relations and overestimation of negative tendencies in the sphere of international

relations. Despite this, respondents with the strong ethnic identity are more tolerant towards other nationalities and support liberal and accommodating migration policy.

Interregional peculiarities of ethnic identity expression are explicated by different ratios of ethno-cultural groups in the general structure of population. Ethnic diversity and marked ethnic differences, probably, lead to more active formation of ethnic identity by comparing and contrasting the "own" and the "other" ethnic group. Ethnic identity in poly-ethnic regions is related to higher evaluations of ethnic pride and heightened interest to ethnic conflict mediation.

In regions where there are indigenous peoples and influential minority ethnic groups the ethnic identity among Russian population is more apparent, while in boundary areas where the Russians constitute the overwhelming majority, the ethnic identity structure is more complicated and contains significant emotional and behavioral elements, as well as contradictory assessments of the state of inter-ethnic sphere and the results of the national policy. It seems that being Russian means to praise the government for its attempts to establish inter-ethnic harmony and the national unity, but at the same time, the true Russian identity is sensitive to social inequality and injustice, its expression is impossible without criticism of the government policy implementation, hesitation about the capacity of officials to address specific tasks, concerning the «national question». Furthermore, it is worth emphasizing that, according to our data, there could not be unique resolution of this question relevant for all regions, for all geographic zones. The boundary area, very diverse and specific, needs special approach to the management in the inter-ethnic sphere and diversification of national strategies, taking into account all facets of ethno-cultural life in the region.

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