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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What are the concerns of the youth of Russia? What is the attitude of the country's latest generation, which has little or no memory of the Soviet Union? How does a young person, influenced mainly by the turbulent 1990s and the upswing in the 2000s, think about Russia and the world – especially in light of increasing de-democratisation and already more than 5 years of confrontation between Russia and “the West”? The Levada Centre, commissioned by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, has attempted to answer these questions through a representative survey, conducted in mid-2019, of 1500 young Russians between the ages of 14 and 29, supplemented with focus groups.

The young people were interviewed about various areas of their lives: education, employment, political participation and attitudes, leisure time and the use of new technologies, as well as their experiences of education and plans for their own families. The results show a highly differentiated, sometimes even contradictory portrait of Russian youth:

How do young people think about their own lives and the current state of affairs in politics?

- On an individual level, young people remain optimistic and satisfied with their immediate life realities and experiences: 87% are very satisfied with their lives and 81% look positively into their personal future; only 2% see things getting worse in the next 10 years.
- However, a different picture emerges when they are confronted with the realities of the country: although 43% still see the country's future in the next 10 years as better than today, 20% believe that the country will be worse off. This difference in the assessment of their own vs. the country's future is quite noticeable. Moreover, many are convinced that corruption in educational institutions is a problem and about half of the respondents feel that the voice of the young generation is not heard in politics.
- The concerns of young people range across a wide spectrum. When given a list of potential issues, the item that troubled them the least was refugees, which strongly concerned only 31% of respondents. More than half and up to 60% of youth were afraid of war, pollution and climate change, terrorist attacks, increased poverty in society and unemployment. The structure of fear is generally very similar to that of other age groups, except for “pollution and climate change”, which is a far bigger concern for younger respondents than for older ones. Gender differences are also very evident: while just a quarter of men fear being a victim of physical violence, half of the women do so.
- Trust towards the state and its institutions overall is low. The only state institutions that receive a comparatively high level of trust are the president and the armed forces. The reasons for this are not quite clear but can be related to the perceived role of the president and the army as guarantors of national security, seen apart from domestic policies. Political parties and the state Duma, on the other hand, enjoy only very low levels of trust. This low trust in state institutions is most likely causally related to low political participation among youth (the highest share of any form of political engagement is a little above 20% for signing online petitions or participating in volunteer or civil society activities) and their very low willingness to participate in politics (only 7% consider becoming involved themselves). On the other hand, volunteer movements are generally trusted.
- The challenge is to get young people interested in politics again. Just under a fifth show any interest in politics,

whereas more than half (57%) do not. And even fewer respondents consider their own knowledge of politics to be good or very good (11%).

- The digital shift is very evident among Russian youth. The demand for digital services to obtain political information is much higher than for analogue services. 84% get their information from the Internet, 50% from television. The latter is seen more as a supplement to information obtained from the Internet. In general, 95% have access to the Internet, but most use it to communicate with friends or family (78%) or for school or work (58%).
- Young Russians already live in a different, post-Soviet reality. Only the oldest age group has vivid memories of the USSR, and only in this group does a majority have a negative view of the collapse of the USSR. On average, 50% do not have a clear position on the collapse of the USSR.

What values and family plans do young people have? How tolerant are they?

- 69% agree with the statement “I am proud to be a citizen of Russia”. Their identity is focused on their immediate environment and the nation state. Hence, they mainly see themselves as citizens of their hometown (87%), as Russians (86%) or as a citizen of their region (86%). Nonetheless, ethnicity-based connotations of what makes a Russian citizen (“only those who have Russian blood in their veins”) are less pronounced among youth and are even less frequent, the younger the respondent: among the youngest age group (14–17 years old) 33% strongly disagree with this statement, while among the oldest (25–29) 24% do so.
- Travelling opens new horizons. Half of the respondents see themselves as world citizens, although only one fifth claim a European identity. The share of those who consider themselves as Europeans or world citizens is significantly higher among those who have already travelled abroad. However, only 20% agree with what is commonly perceived as “Western culture”, and only a third considers Russia to be a European country.
- Traditional ideas of the family are widespread: 84% want to have a marriage with children. Regarding the choice of a partner, romantic expectations prevail. Personal qualities and common interests are favoured as the main reasons for the choice, with economic aspects and status of the future partner less important.
- Except for family and close friends, young people show low levels of overall trust – no matter whether it is in their immediate environment or the institutional environment. People with other religions or political views and even neighbours are rarely trusted. Moreover, young people show very high levels of intolerance towards the following

segments of the population: homosexual couples (more than 60% do not want them as neighbours), Roma, former prisoners and drug users.

- Family and close friends are basically the only trusted group in the lives of the majority of young people – they trust them the most and almost all of the respondents get along well with their parents. Loyalty is shown mainly to family and friends. But still, 38% would raise their children differently or completely differently than they were raised themselves.
- The acceptance of bribery is quite low compared to other forms of misconduct and ranks even lower, the younger the respondents. The use of personal relationships for help with work or to solve everyday problems is regarded more tolerantly.
- Young people are less religious than the population as a whole. While 19% of the general population belong to no religious group, that level is 27% for young people. Moreover, 17% of young people consider God not important at all in their lives, compared to 7% in the general population. But at the same time, of those who consider God very important in their lives, there is a higher percentage of young people (24% of young people vs. 19% overall). The church and religious organisations prove to be a polarising issue: 26% do not trust them at all (which is the same level of trust toward the OSCE, IMF or the State Duma and political parties), while 17% trust them fully (the only institutions enjoying higher levels of full trust are the president (20%), the armed forces (21%) and volunteer organisations (19%).

What do young people want from the state and how does this translate into their political views?

- The state is viewed as a guarantor of social security and stability. This is clearly voiced by young people towards the state. They want to be better represented in politics.
- But no clear patterns emerge when it comes to the question of what form of state they prefer. Although almost half of the respondents consider democracy in principle to be the best form of statehood and there is a broad consensus that the state should not use violence and other authoritarian methods to solve problems of a social or ethnic nature, at the same time 58% of the respondents believe that a strong party or leader can be good for leading Russia in the interest of the common good. Compared to the general population, however, the results hint towards more democratic attitudes among young people.
- Social democratic views are the most popular among Russian youth, followed by Russian nationalist, liberal and communist views. Interestingly, in their political views, they do not differ greatly from the general population.

- The biggest difference is the slightly higher proportion of those who classify themselves as nationalists or liberals.
- Emigration is a challenge for Russia; the country risks losing a significant portion of its youth, among them a significant share of the most well educated. The main motivation for those with a strong wish to emigrate is the desire for an improvement in living standards (44%), but for more than a quarter, factors such as education and employment possibilities, culture and social and political stability also play an important role. The preferred destination countries are Germany, the USA and France. While our study, in comparison with other recent polls, shows a lower share of young people willing to emigrate, it is able to highlight – in addition to revealing differentiation among how strongly different subgroups wish to migrate – some additional characteristics of those seeking to move abroad. Apart from more urban youth, the strongest desire to emigrate is shown by those respondents who disproportionately distrust state institutions and the media.
 - In general, there is a clear disparity between answers given by young Muscovites compared to young people in the rest of the country. The capital clearly stands out. Young people there more frequently consider themselves as liberals, show a higher interest in politics, have the highest level of distrust towards state institutions, consider themselves more often as cosmopolitan and European and are more critical towards the quality of education in Russia.

What does this mean for Europe and the confrontation between Russia and Europe?

- Young Russians are, to a large degree, estranged from Europe. Many young Russians do not have a European identity and don't identify with what is commonly perceived as "Western" culture. This changes, however, when looking at those who have experience in travelling abroad, among whom a higher share of respondents consider themselves as European. This shows that participating in exchanges and other forms of people-to-people contact can contribute to a better image of Europe among Russian youth.
- A considerable number of young Russians express an interest in leaving the country and most of these wish to emigrate to European countries. Those who want to emigrate cannot be clearly associated with either the wealthiest or poorest segment of respondents but are rather characterised by high dissatisfaction with state institutions and a pessimistic outlook on the future of Russia.
- Russians are highly distrustful not only towards their own state institutions, but also towards international

and European institutions. The level of complete distrust of NATO (37%), the IMF (27%), the UN (27%) and the EU (25%) is comparable with that towards the State Duma (27%), Russian trade unions (22%) or Russian political parties (26%).

- Efforts to ease the confrontation between Russia and the West must be intensified. Only 52% of Russian young people believe that the relationship between Russia and the West can be truly friendly. The Ukraine conflict plays a key role in this respect, but also reveals that the youth have a similar attitude to that of their own government on key issues regarding the conflict. Almost two thirds of respondents would not support the return of Crimea if sanctions were lifted (although one fifth would agree); only an exchange of prisoners would receive considerable support among young Russians. Interestingly, the main party blamed for the conflict between Russia and Europe is the United States.

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INTRODUCTION

When we try to understand how a country may develop in the future, we look mostly at the ruling elites. What are their plans, what is their vision, what future do they see for the country and what might this mean to us? If we look at the people, it is mostly to ask how they view, again, the elites. This narrow perspective of analysis tends to ignore a perhaps even more influential factor: the thoughts and attitudes of those who will be steering the country in 20–30 years in all fields of public, economic and social life – today’s young people. Three decades from now the current elites will be gone, and it is today’s youth who will be in charge. It is thus worthwhile taking a closer look at what young people today think, hope for and expect.

If one mentions Russia’s youth, the label “Generation Putin” immediately comes to mind, showing again our focus on the ruling elites. But the generation between the ages of 14 and 29, surveyed in this study, has witnessed more than Putin’s rule and has endured other developments that have influenced their views on the world. They have been shaped by the turbulent 1990s and several episodes of economic downturns and crises, by a period of enthusiasm towards Europe and a period of confrontation over the last six years, by an economic upturn in the 2000s and a time of stagnation, by a political system that has seen both democratisation and more repression, and, last but not least, by digitisation and globalisation.

While there is extensive discussion in “Western countries” on the Generations Y and Z and on digital natives and their impact on the future of societies, economies and political systems, very few systematic analyses of these young people have been done in the Eastern European countries. The FES is trying to close this gap with a series of youth studies that have been published in recent years and we are now adding to this discussion with an extensive survey about the attitudes and values of young people in Russia.

This survey sheds light on the perceptions of Russian youth in very different realms of life: education, employment, politics and political participation, family relationships, attitudes towards Europe, leisure, tolerance and the use of new technologies. With these surveys, we hope to contribute to a more differentiated picture about “Generation Putin”.

The findings do present a very diverse and sometimes even contradictory picture. They show that the path of Russia remains open, and the results give hope for a slow democratisation in the minds of the country’s youth – but at the same time they also indicate that autocratic attitudes are accepted, and that young people are divided among several dimensions. Russia, despite its perceived stability, remains on a path of transition, resulting in a certain lack of orientation. This concerns all realms of life, from the political to the religious and personal.

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