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Young Russians Less Tolerant of Non-Russians Than Their Parents Are, Poll Finds

By Paul Goble

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Staunton, April 13 — A survey of 1500 Russians conducted by Tomsk officials found that younger people in that city are less tolerant of representatives of other nationalities than their parents and other older people are, according to a press release from the new organization Children of the Mountains, which unites people from the North Caucasus now living in Russia.

Madonna Dunyaeva, the head of the Children of the Mountains group, said that in March, the Tomsk department for youth policy conducted a poll to determine "the level of tensions in inter-ethnic relations among residents of the Tomsk region" and that the results have now been released.

According to her, the survey showed that "young people in Tomsk are less tolerant to representatives of other nationalities than adults are," with 15 percent of young people

agreeing with the statement that "multinationalism is harmful to Russia," 33 percent saying they feel "anger" toward non-Russians there, and 43 percent supporting a ban on immigration.

Moreover, Dunyaeva continued, the poll found that "every third young person declared that he or she had been a witness in recent times to ethnic conflicts" and one in every five of those young people said they "support those who took part in the [December 11] demonstration in [Moscow's] Manezh Square."

All these figures are higher than those found for older Russians, and the head of the Children of the Mountains organization said that "it is necessary to establish in schools an educational course, 'the peoples of Russia,' which would acquaint children with the cultures of various peoples. Only by doing so can we defeat the main cause of xenophobia — ignorance."

She added that it is also "necessary to establish close cooperation between the higher educational institutions and the diasporas [in order to provide] the diasporas with information on arriving students" because it is precisely these diasporas that can quickly and effectively help [these arrivals] adapt to local culture and to learn the [Russian] language."

Tomsk Governor Viktor Kress said that he supports this idea. "I absolutely agree with Madonna when she says that it is necessary to study the peoples of Russia. We ought to have such a course not only in the schools" but for the broader population as well.

The Children of the Mountains group was established in Tomsk at the end of January and now has branches in various Siberian cities. Its founding document declares that it seeks to promote "the unity of young people from the Caucasus in Russia and also love for the traditions of the culture of the Caucasus."

The group, which says it is the "first union of its type" in the Russian Federation, includes all ethnic groups from the region, including ethnic Russians, who "want to jointly resolve pressing issues of Caucasus youth and also to preserve the culture and mentality of the Caucasus and the Trans-Caucasus."

In a related report, Andrey Smirnov, the director of the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, said in Baku that one of the reasons that there are inter-ethnic problems in Moscow is that there are very few residents of the Russian capital who are genuine Muscovites.

According to Smirnov, "Less than ten percent of the total number of residents of Moscow today are indigenous Muscovites, those who have at least one parent who was born and grew up in Moscow." As a result, today's Moscow is "an unstable conglomerate with a large number of migrants."

"I think," Smirnov said, reflecting the view of many longstanding residents of the capital, "that native Muscovites would never permit themselves" to attack anyone on the basis of religious or ethnic differences." "Of course, for today's Russia," he added, "one of the dangers is the disloyalty of certain Russian Muslims."

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