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"These guests seem to exercise control over all current market trade":

THE CONCEPT OF "ETHNIC ECONOMY" IN THE LIGHT OF THE RUSSIAN PRESS

The paper presented is an analysis of the variety of journalists' interpretations of the situation that has developed around the Caucasian dealers in the Russian markets. Attention was concentrated on the fact that the recognition of the burst of "Caucasians" migration to "Russian" cities in the 1990-ies and the disproportionate number of "Caucasians" in the Russian markets has resulted in diametrically opposite estimations of these factors:

At present, our city has been overrun with Caucasians. These guests seem to exercise control over all current market trade; they behave discourteously, thriftily and moreover, commit various crimes. Is it possible to put an end to this?" ("Smena", 16.12.95, "Quota of "Caucasian" criminality is negligible").

Few understand, that "the Azerbaijani dealers' stranglehold" is beneficial for Russians ("Obshaya gazeta", 29.10-4.11.98, "The war between Lenkoran and Spanish tomatoes on the Moscow market").

As the study has shown, the authors of both points of view are united by the accentuation of the nationality of the market dealers and the notion about the existence of ethnic groups, the representatives of which have "natural propensity" to trade. Their contentions correspond to the principles of Soviet multiculturalism; the ontological status of ethnicity being out of dispute. Ethnic boundaries separating dealers in the market are beyond any doubt, the dealers from the Caucasian republics are associated, as a rule, with a "different" (ethnic) culture, (qua)esthetic groups ("Caucasians", "Azeris" etc.); a nonexisting cultural homogeneity is ascribed in this case. However, the descriptions of the position of "Caucasians" in host (our) society, of their economic actions and motivation differ strongly. In the first case, the conflict between the principles of functioning the "civilized" market and those of the organi-
criminality". The market places are at the same time an outlet for drugs and weapons. Criminal earnings are intended for the fighting (in Chechnya) brothers (Sankt-Petersburgske vedomosti, 27.10.1999).

- They belong to quite different, non-European cultures which are less civilized ("patriarchal") and cannot accommodate themselves to urban life. They live in clans, are traditionally dependent on their own community and are inclined to demonstrate consumption, to "show off". Our and their notions about "what is good" differ strongly.

Most immigrants from the Caucasus are patriarchal peasants at heart. It has always been very hard to survive in mountainous lands, especially living alone. In addition, the life of many peoples is restricted by very complex (from the European point of view) behavioral norms regulating almost every step and every word. As a result, from the early childhood, the children from the Caucasus rigidly regulate the norms of behaviour in friendly milieu. As to the surroundings which are treated by them as hostile (Moscow for example), they try to produce a favourable impression. For Europeans, the manner of "show off" seems to be shocking: all these restaurants, boxes with champagne, scattering of money (even the rest of it) by sower's gestures and so on (Izvestiya, 15.07.99).

- They are not accustomed and do not wish to accommodate themselves to our culture, they keep to the habitual behaviour of their "ethnic native land", ignoring its non-conformity with the new conditions. They tend to isolation, limiting their social contacts with co-ethnics ("clans"), do not show activity in search of social links, which would allow them to be integrated into our society.

Preferring to contact with marginal population or with the people of no standing, they form inadequate representation of us and our culture. As to their attitude towards Muscovites (including those, on whom "Caucasians" well-being depends, e.g.: buyers in the market), it has unfortunately been formed as a result of their communication with the leaders and prostitutes. This adds neither respect nor love to the Slavic culture and way of life (Izvestiya, 15.07.99).

- They despise us, they exploit our weak points and introduce their own rules in our territory. They have no respect for our women, they regard them as objects of their desires. They use them as both vendors in the markets and sexual objects.

- In their sexual behaviour, they are active and aggressive. Regarding our women, they do not observe any restrictions on sexual behaviour, whereas such restrictions do exist in their "ethnic motherland".

- They live and trade, mostly illegally, in our territory, they do not wish to obey general rules, as they consider the observation of our rules to be humiliating for them. The problems, arising as a result of their illegal status, are solved in the "traditional" way (popular in their motherland), i.e. by bribing police and officials.

The principles of "Caucasian" social organization allows them, in contrast to other participants of market interaction, to use non-market mechanisms of price control and force methods of influence upon competitors. In the market, "Caucasians" act as a particular corporative monopolistic group pursuing its own interests and neglecting the interests of other parties. The market comes to be a place, where "Caucasians" dominate over us. Because of their collective strategy, their power potential - as participants of exchange (collective strategy) - considerably exceeds our (individual) opportunities for resistance. The basic concept of the representation of "guests" is a concept of real or potential threat. The peculiarities of their culture provoke the non-observance of our norms and laws by them and threaten the preservation of the order established by us.

In this situation, we play a permanent role of victims of aggression from the outside ("occupation").

- By tradition, we are tolerant and behave correctly. We are credulous and indulgent. We apply force only in cases when we are compelled to react upon the aggression from their party and to protect our national dignity. Such an attitude is an attribute of a civilized European mentality.

By tradition, Russia (and St. Petersburg in particular!) has been a home for the people of different races and creeds. However, if a visitor comes to your place only with the purpose of enriching himself at your expense, and in no time declares that he is the host - to put such a guest in his place, is a matter of honour of everyone who respects himself. (Sankt-Petersburgske vedomosti. 27.10.1999).

- We are not racists, we acknowledge the distinctions among the "Caucasian" cultures. We live in a multinational society and respect the traditions of each of culture.

The words "persons of the Caucasian nationality" jar upon us, - the fighters with ethnic criminality say with indignation, - Such nationality does not exist at all! Like there are no European, Asian or American nationalities. There are Chechens, Dagostanians, Ingouges, Ossetians - the peoples with their own history, culture, national features and traditions. Until all of us do not understand this, do not take this into account in our work, we can do irreversible harm, instead of good (Sankt-Petersburgske vedomosti, 27.10.1999).

- We aim at an objective image of their presence in our territory. They impede us by forming closed communities according to an ethnic criterion, thus creating a parallel "Caucasian" world. We are compelled to use statistic data and information obtained from the "competent sources" - mainly, the representatives of law-enforcement agencies, who exercise control over them and have adequate information.

- Our negative attitude towards them is objectively substantiated, though we admit that one should constrain emotions. We condemn the people's especially aggressive demonstration of xenophobia (pogroms).

- Our resources are insufficient for solving the problems by "civilized" methods. We are compelled to infringe "human rights", entirely because of regular infringement of our rights by them.

As one can conclude from the above, it was they who became the originators of conflicts between us and them. They do not (can not and do not want to) adhere to our (civilized) norms of life, they threaten the existence of our society. The discrimination (both institutional and daily) from ours is a feedback effect upon the "impu dence" and "aggression" demonstrated by them. They become victims of their own (ethnic) norms of behaviour, which they can not and do not want to abandon.

Such a polarized image of the parties of interaction allows to use a metaphor of "war" for the description of mutual relations. This "war of liberation" in the interests of "hosts" is conducted by the representatives of law-enforcement agencies,
delegated with the power to protect our “home”. On the whole, such an image of the parties of interaction legitimizes force actions. In this context, the infringement of the Russian and International laws and agreements is justified; such infringements are considered rational behaviour in certain circumstances.

2. “...Stranglehold of the Azerbaijani dealers is beneficial for Russians.

A few texts deal with the above interpretation. Most of such texts are given in the form of interviews with the official representatives of so-called ethnic minorities. According to the First Vice-Prime Minister of the Government of Azerbaijan Abbas Abbasov, the current position of “Caucasians” in the Russian cities is in many respects determined by our common “Soviet” past. All of us have been integrated in the community of the “former Soviet people” and united by the “friendship of nations”. For the description of this community, a metaphor of “old friends” is used.

It is supposed that the planned economy has created prerequisites for the establishment of sustainable links between consumers in the Russian cities and agricultural producers in the republics of the former USSR (including Azerbaijan). At that time, a system of social protection of the dealers in the markets had developed. The processes which occurred in the early 90-ies resulted in the destruction of the former institution of the Soviet collective-farm market, a stable system of delivery obligations being broken. This negatively affected both producers in the republics (because of marketing difficulties) and consumers in the Russian cities (because of the deficiency of agricultural products). The high level of competition on the international agricultural market has forced producers (dealers) to return to the domestic (CIS) market, since their attempts to introduce themselves at international level were not a success. However, in new conditions, it is hardly possible to trade in one’s own products, because of the problems encountered on the NIS frontiers. “Azerbaijani” have established contacts with foreign suppliers and have organized a trade in import vegetables and fruit, which are more expensive. In prospects, they intend to change-over to their own production, which is cheaper and of higher quality. The terms of such reversion, however, depend to a considerable extent on solving a number of inter-state political and economic problems (e.g. Russia-Azerbaijan frontier regulations).

The economic success of “Azerbaijani” in the Russian markets in current situation is a result of competitive struggle. The victory was gained by those who came to be most business-like and thoroughly investigated the local structure, peculiarities and needs of the region.

“Caucasian” (“Azerbaijani”) market dealers not in the least endanger the host society. Moreover, they are of real benefit to it, as they supply the local inhabitants with vegetables and fruit, provide them with jobs, render financial support to our infrastructure etc.) Their potential can be used by the authorities for the further development of the economy of the Russian regions.

It is well-known, how many Russians are fed by Azerbaijani dealers. Besides, the latter pay for residence permits, registration, a place in the market, meals, transport and renting apartments. One can see what amount of currency it makes up.

However, up to now, there is no political leader in Russia, who could use the potential of our compatriots efficiently (Obschaya Gazeta, 29.10-4.11.1998).

They are hardly protected from racket and illegal actions (“bespredel” - lawlessness) of the representatives of law-enforcement agencies, who “at any moment can lay a person on the dirty ground, beat him for anything, or fabricate a criminal case” (Obschaya Gazeta, 29.10-4.11.1998).

The author of the aforesaid quotations agrees with some factors excusing “host” strategy, i.e. mass immigration to Russian megalopolises from the Caucasus and Transcaucasia; the assertion that “Azerbaijani” control all the greengrocery market and the “flower business” etc. However, the author suggests that the reasons and results of these processes should be interpreted differently and described in neutral terms, positively estimating the “Azerbaijani” presence in the cities and emphasizing rather similarity, than distinctions.

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So the first of the examples adduced deals with the discriminatory discourse prevailing in the official press. It suggests a “convincing” description of “facts” or opinions suggested by “competent agencies”. Such descriptions makes the reading public conclude that “guests from the South” are to blame for most difficulties. The assertion of group solidarity (“we are the owners”, “we are Europeans” etc.) in these cases represents itself as a slogan mobilizing for the struggle against “unbidden guests”. In this case, special attention is given to the difficulties caused by the presence of a great number of immigrants to Russian cities. At that, migrants’ positive influence on the life of the city is ignored, though it is supposed. The authors do not acknowledge any accusations in racism. They are well-protected from them, since in Russian discourse, a narrow definition of racism (as an ideology suggesting the biological superiority of one race over others) prevails.

As the research has shown, there are various mechanisms of discursive reproduction of ethnophobia and racism. They have nothing in common with the reactionary nationalist positions, as well as with the concept of biological predominance. The polarized “hosts’/“guests’” representation given above is one of such mechanisms used by the official (“democratic”, “independent”) Russian press. It promotes the reproduction of “cultural racism” (Dijk, 1999). Its adherents would never enter any extremist grouping, moreover, they openly declare their negative attitude towards the latter. At the same time, they white-wash ethnic (race) discrimination.

“Hosts’” discourse represents a modern version of racist ideology based on the notion about the collision between cultural-homogeneous “hosts’” and “guests’” communities in our territory. These communities have different rights in this territory.

One should remark, that the texts suggesting alternative (positive) estimations of “Caucasians” presence in the Russian markets, very seldom appear in press. In such articles, there are no oppositions “we” - “they”, the question is about mutually advantageous cooperation between two equal partners. Unlike “host’s” strategy, all that unites as is emphasized in this case. In the market, all of us enter into relations of more or less equivalent exchange. However, the alternative sense of this interpreta-

9 To illustrate such interpretation, the article “The war between Lenskoron and Spanish tomatoes on the Moscow market” was chosen. Some few understood, that the “dominance of the Caucasian dealers is beneficial for Russians”. An interview with the First Vice-Premier of the Government of Azerbaijan Abbas Abbasov (Obschaya Gazeta, 29.10-4.11.1998).

10 The traders had their own market places, they had the legal status which protected them from the arbitrariness of militiamen and officials etc.

11 The dissemination of such ideologies, in our opinion, is a quite marginal problem both for Western (Dijk, 1999) and for Russian society, and does not deserve so much attention.
tion is seeming in many respects. All attempts to prove that “Azeris” meet the interests of the “local population” could hardly shake the “hosts” version of the situation. The journalist, when putting questions, uses the “hosts” lexicon: “Is there any danger that a great number of aliens will become one more factor of destabilization in Russia?” A respondent does not reject the very formulation of the question and answers it easily, as he has not found any discriminative sense there.

On the whole, “the representative of the Administration of Azerbaijan” holds an opinion, that people working in the market, are “homo ethnicus”. In spite of the fact that the result of the meeting of the “Azerbaijani” dealers with “local (Russian) population” is estimated positively, such point of view, however, paves the way for xenophobia.

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