



# Russian Intelligentsia in the Socio-Political Transformations of the XX Century: Between Ideals, Virtuality and Creation Reality

Vasiliy Lvovich Chernoperov<sup>1\*</sup>, Sergey Mikhailovich Usmanov<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ivanovo State University, 39 Yermaka Street, 153025 Ivanovo Region, Ivanovo, Russian Federation, <sup>2</sup>Ivanovo State University, 39 Yermaka Street, 153025 Ivanovo Region, Ivanovo, Russian Federation. \*Email: vlchernoperov@rambler.ru

## ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the participation of the Russian intelligentsia in socio-political transformations in the contemporary world. It analyzes the problems and contradictions of the virtual and the real in the intellectuals' consciousness and activities. The authors present a new variation model of the Russian intelligentsia participation in public and political life, which includes three basic types of interaction between intellectuals and the authorities: "Entering the authority," "eternal confrontation" and "ivory tower." The authors conclude that for Russian intellectuals in their attitude both to the authorities and to the society, the main criterion for self-determination and motivation in their social action is the division into "ours" and "strangers."

**Keywords:** Russian Intellectuals, Modern World, Ideals Virtuality, Creation Reality

**JEL Classifications:** B31, I29, Z10

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Russian intellectuals in the 20<sup>th</sup> century passed a long and hard way. Its quest, achievements, problems remain the subject of much thought and researches, causing a lot of conflicting and ambiguous judgments, many disputes and academic discussions (Gella, 1976, Philippot, 1974, Dmitrievsky, 1999, Strada, 1999, Lotman, 1999, Lotman, 2005, Kustarev, 2006).

In this regard, as indicated by the famous Italian specialist in the Russian language, Vittorio Strada, many questions without easy answers raise: It's a problem of the intellectuals' responsibility for the tragedies of our age, responsibility for cooperation with criminal regimes and ideologies, pursuing and suffocating freedom; the problem of ideas and values that should be followed during a transitional period. This is the problem of an era evaluation - The era of modernity, which began with grandiose projects and eventually found itself at the point of self-critical uncertainty. This is a problem of relationship, as they say, between power and culture (and not only for Russia). Yet, actually, this is already a problem of relations between strong, decisive power of

economy, science and politics and weak, but ineradicable power of culture (Strada 1999. p. 32).

To get answers to these and other questions is the task of many studies. We would also like to participate in the scientific debate on the subject, suggesting some ideas for further discussion. First of all, within the framework of the latter problem mentioned by Vittorio Strada - On the relationship of authority with the world of culture and its meaningful representative - intelligentsia.

## 2. METHODS

Methodological aspects of the study of intellectuals cause considerable difficulties. The integrated use of various conceptual approaches and methods for the analysis of socio-political transformations and specific phenomena of the modern world seems essential to us. In our view, the new scientific knowledge can be obtained by considering multivariate, mixed, volatile and contradictory phenomena of intellectuals' consciousness and creativity in conflict areas of social life on critical stages of socio-political transition in the world today.

We find it interesting to study a few basic conceptual approaches to the issue of intellectuals: Structural-functional analysis, “sociology of intelligentsia,” historical anthropology. In particular, we paid attention to the conceptual approaches of the American researcher, Professor Alexander Gella, which he formulated in the foreword to the collection of materials of the eighth world sociological congress in Toronto (1974). As Alexander Gella noted, intellectuals are necessary for any society, while intelligentsia appears only in the period of industrialization of feudal societies (Gella 1976. p. 22). Still even more important is how the researcher is delineating both social phenomena: As Alexander Gella believed, intellectual’s self-determination did not imply the change of social status or class consciousness. On the contrary, intelligentsia appeared as social strata from the start (Gella, 1976. p. 22). In other words, according to Alexander Gella’s idea, intellectuals are people from different social classes who speculate at different time periods and, while intelligentsia is a special social layer of modernization era from traditional to modern history periods.

As we see it, there is every reason to believe that in this sense the Russian intelligentsia comes close-in its many features-to the “ideal type” (we use here the well-known concept from Max Weber’s sociological concept in a different context) of intelligentsia in the era of New and the Newest time, in the midst of modernization processes. So that’s why the typological features of Russian intelligentsia are of course essential basics of intelligentsia as such. This basis could be worded more accurately as follows: Intelligentsia is a new social layer autonomous intellectuals who have a particular moral complex of serving the ideal (Usmanov, 2011. p. 16).

Of course, there is also a completely different view at Russian intelligentsia, which treats all the bends of its activity and consciousness as some anomalies, deviations from the mainstream of world development. The French scientist Robert Philippot, who thought that intelligentsia’s specific status in Russia is just the consequences of the fact that society modernization in Russia remained unfinished, quite consistently expressed this view (Philippot 1974. p. 74).

However, in this context, it would be worthwhile to take into account the considerations of the famous Russian scientist Gregory Pomerantz: “If you look back at the world experience, then at first an illusion comes that an intelligentsia representative is an underdeveloped highbrow, whose fate is to reach-sooner or later-The Western example.” However, after the first and particularly the Second World War, the intellectual’s traits, who could not find a place in the absurd life story, became explicit in the exemplary Western world too. (...) It can be said a welfare intellectual is the culture representative in its relatively tranquil state; a metaphysical homeless intellectual is the crisis culture representative. In this view of things, an intellectual ceases to be a one country (or group of countries) phenomenon, but becomes something universal, at least, for the New time (Pomerantz, 1997).

Of course, there are other scientific classifications of authorities and society’s relations with intellectuals. So, in the Russian science the typology proposed by Vitaly Dmitrievsky is noteworthy.

Within its framework, depending on the nature of the attitude to the authorities five groups of intellectuals are allocated: “Ideologues-fundamentalists,” “social climbers-functionaries,” “neutrals-evaders,” “independent experts” and “dissidents” (Dmitrievsky, 1999).

In our view, such classifications reflect rather a social psychology or social pathology of intellectuals’ position in the modern world. At the same time, the study of self-actualization of intellectuals as networked communities (Manuel Castells and Pekka Himanen, Randall Collins, in the Russian science - Nikolay Rozov, Lyubov’ Fadeeva, etc.) (Castells and Himanen, 2002; Collins, 1998; Rozov, 2009; Fadeeva, 2012) allows identifying conditionality of the internal behavior of this or that intellectual group rather than the variants of their interaction with government and society.

However, we find it simplistic and schematic-functional to interpret this interesting problem like the authors of the study titled “Thinking Russia” do: They offer to distinguish Russian intelligentsia’s activities only according to two basic scenarios: The model of autonomous behavior and various kinds of activists’ behavior (Kurennoy, 2008).

In this context, the complete interpretation of intelligentsia’s self-awareness is, in our opinion, provided by a valuable scientific concept of intentionality in the framework of phenomenology by the outstanding German philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Edmund Husserl. Husserl demonstrated in a number of his fundamental works, that consciousness is inherently endowed with the ability of “essential vision.” Edmund Husserl’s heritage researcher, a well-known professor Peter Prekhtl’ noted: “Husserl took into account the objection of a so-called real politician or a so-called realist who stated that we are talking about an unreachable ideal, unrealized either for an individual or for the society. Husserl’s reaction to this justified pessimism allows his position to become more distinct: Even if we are talking about unattainable moral ideal, we do not mean an idealistic view of the perfect situation but the moral law as a constant effort. This law, respectively, a claim, however specifically it would be considered, is an absolute moral requirement” (Precht, 1999. p. 53).

### 3. RESULTS

Intentionality is particularly evident in intelligentsia’s consciousness. It is for it - more than for any other social group - genesis and the creative force (reality) are linked so closely and inextricably to its ideals (virtuality). Moreover, intelligentsia’s ideals are the most precious value, which represents in itself an unquestionable and necessary reality. That is why, it is the ideals that specify vectors of intellectuals’ creativity that contribute to the real meaning to such activities, introduce enduring inspiration into their works. Otherwise (at the loss of the ideal as a source of inspiration) such thinking people cease to be intelligentsia representatives, pouring into other social groups, e.g., bureaucracy, technocracy, various strata of “middle class” or “lumpish-proletariat.”

We are interested in intelligentsia’s participation in social transformations. Here, we see different paths (or models) of such

participation. Considering the main models of intelligentsia's participation in political and public life in Russia of the XX century (and also at the beginning of this century), there are three main variants of such participation: "Entering the authority," "eternal confrontation," "ivory tower."

We consider "entering authority" to be not only a direct involvement of intellectuals into the power structures, and therefore, their faithful participation in the "team game" on the side of the current government: This is described in the famous book of Anatoly Sobchak, which name we're using to name this type of participation (Sobchak, 1991). We consider this term to be quite applicable to interpret another way of incorporating intellectuals into the political fight for the existing authority's interests-when an intellectual is not directly included in the power structures but openly and clearly expresses his commitment, unabashedly championing the power interests (often getting all kinds of incentives and rewards from it).

We refer to "eternal opposition" as to a constant battle of the intelligentsia part, in one form or another, against the political power and its interests. This is the natural form of the existence of several generations of intellectuals: Both of Russian pre-revolutionary intellectuals, the Soviet intelligentsia, and post-Soviet Russian intelligentsia. The term itself is not new: For example, Georgy Fedotov talked about a "century-long" confrontation between intellectuals and authorities. I would like to draw attention to Gregory Pomerantz' article "Eternal confrontation of intelligentsia," published in 1997, in the official newspaper- "Rossiyskaya Gazeta" (Pomerantz, 1997).

It is the "eternal opposition" style, which was typical of the bulk of Russian intelligentsia's life in the times of the Russian Empire existence. After the Soviet power establishment, most part of intellectuals continued confrontation, and some of its prominent members intensified their activity dramatically.

"Ivory tower" is a concept from the jargon of Russian intelligentsia of the silver age period, representing the all-sufficiency of a creative personality and his benign neglect of the vanity (this way the biblical image was rethought by European intellectuals of new times). We use this term in a slightly different context: Talking about intellectuals' consistent distancing both from the government and from the people, when some closed (often, elitist) groups of intellectuals fenced a particular cultural space from which they influenced the society, including, of course, to a greater or lesser extent, politics as well. A literary circle, a newspaper, a magazine, an intellectual club, a network community or some other association of intellectuals may represent this «tower», having its effect on culture, society and the political process.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The most spectacular case of "entering the authority" in the history of Russian intelligentsia is, of course, Maxim Gorky's participation in the top echelons of the Soviet authorities in the 20-ies of the last century. Curiously, "Revolution's Burevestnik (Stormy petrel)" initially criticized the Soviet regime harshly.

Yet later Gorky still dared to lead all "masters of culture" in the country. This "entering the authority" turned out a real ordeal for Maxim Gorky and ended tragically in all respects (though not all circumstances of his service to the Soviet government even became famous).

However, the relatively recently published correspondence of Gorky and Stalin opens new and very unattractive details of "great proletarian writer's" serving the Soviet power. The researcher and publisher of the writer's correspondence with the Chief, Tamara Dubinskaya-Jalilova notes thereupon: "Gorky and Stalin's relationships were not equal. The writer was in a subordinate position, allowing the head of the State to use him to his advantage shamelessly. Stalin led a hypocritical, but a successful game. Gorky, too, was cunning with Stalin, knowing when and how he could do it. However, no matter what, Gorky was Stalin's understanding comrade, his reliable assistant in the Soviet culture organization until his last days" (Dubinskaya-Jalilova, 2000).

At the decline of the Soviet State existence, the most striking phenomenon of this kind was the activity of the unofficially honored "first intellectual of the country," academician Dmitry Likhachev. Here one cannot but recall his speech before deputies of the third Congress of the USSR people's deputies in March 1990, with the justification for an immediate election of Mikhail Gorbachev the President of the Soviet Union. Dmitry Likhachev's considerations were simple: If we do not immediately elect Gorbachev as the President, a civil war will start in the country! Anatoly Sobchak in the book "Entering the authority" witnessed the process and gave the following assessment of Dmitry Likhachev's statements: "If Likhachev's words persuaded at least every tenth deputy - There were many more hesitating people in the audience, in my opinion - even then Gorbachev owes his presidency to Dmitry Sergeevich" (Sobchak, 1991).

Sobchak's observation does not appear biased toward the eminent academician. It should be reminded that at that time, much more strident assessments of Likhachev's cooperation with Soviet leaders appeared. Thus, the writer Yuriy Belyaev claimed: "Likhachev, despite his heroic destiny, agreed to become Raisa Maximovna's 'pocket' academician (Mrs. Gorbacheva-V.L. and S.U.) in the Soviet culture fund created under her patronage" (Belyaev, 1992).

Actually still Dmitry Likhachev was a really impressive personality, and authorities' representatives treated him very respectfully, always listening to his opinion. The dramatic nature of such assessments of his relationship with the authorities was due to the negative attitude to Gorbachev's personality rather than was a consequence of the perception of some specific activities of the Soviet culture fund. It can be also proved by the significant fact that Dmitry Likhachev didn't lose his position under President Boris Yeltsin either.

In post-Soviet Russia there were notable cases of "entering the authority" among intellectuals of the "sixties," who occasionally expressed their opposition to the Soviet power. Particularly famous are the names of intellectuals who held the post of Minister of culture - Mikhail Shvydkoy and Alexander Sokolov.

However, we have to admit that for the representatives of the Russian intelligentsia “entering the authority” are not an easy process, which never promises popularity and is even fraught with considerable danger. In this regard, Anatoly Sobchak’s story - He created the recognizable term “entering the authority” - Is very illustrative. It is clear that his political career developed poorly. In a sense, he became an unacceptable figure for many former adherents of his, and for those who did not initially perceive the “perestroika” period transformations positively. Anatoly Sobchak wasn’t accepted among the new Russian political elite either. No wonder, he, in the end, was forced to flee abroad and to live in Paris for some time - In a beloved city of Russian immigrants of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

However, there is reason to believe that Anatoliy Sobchak by the end of his days was still able to feel a familiar atmosphere of intelligentsia again. This feeling of returning to St. Petersburg after “entering the authority” and forced emigration was vividly reflected in the final lines of his memories dated 1999 “A dozen of knives into the back:” “I walk along the streets of my native city again, enjoying listening to Russian speech, meeting with friends and acquaintances. (...) Feverish, broken, daily-changing course of Russian life captures me completely. And I am infinitely happy that once again I live this life in which there are so many dangers, so many lies, distortions and downright slander around my name” (Sobchak, 1999).

Of course, these are emotions of an intelligentsia representative rather than an assessment of a cold-blooded and calculating politician.

The interaction of intellectuals and the authorities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Russia in conditions of “eternal confrontation” was absolutely different. It is necessary to mention Ivan Bunin’s programmatic speech at the reception of the Russian emigration on February 16, 1924. The well-known writer’s speech was one of the most impressive phenomena of this kind. Preaching intransigence to the Soviet government, he nevertheless urged to respect cultural traditions, to claim the intellectual and spiritual superiority of Russian emigration. The case studies show that such appeals influenced even those figures in émigré political circles that were far from the writer himself (Bakuntsev, 2014. p. 336-337).

However, being much more moderate in his emotions and correct in behavior, the “liberal conservative” Pyotr Struve distinguished himself in the struggle against Soviet power even further. As you know, Struve was one of the main ideologues of the White movement and perhaps the most famous of the political advocates of the volunteer army on the Don; then he headed the newspaper “Velikaya Rossiya” (Great Russia). It was in that newspaper where Pyotr Struve in November 1919 clearly suggested that Russia’s national revival (Struve himself used the term “nationalism” which wasn’t so notorious then) as a result of the struggle against the Bolsheviks should become the main task of the Russian intellectuals: “. nationalism, conquering intellectuals, should leak out down to the folk masses and conquer them with its great idea. And it will happen, as in Russia, that what intellectuals chose eventually always came to the people” (Struve, 1992).

The subsequent history of the Russian intelligentsia consistently continued the lines of “eternal confrontation.” This applied to the Russian foreign diaspora (both “first” and “second” waves) and to intelligentsia of “post-soviet Russia.” In the latter case, it is not just about the dissidents’ movement of 1960-70-ies, but also about a broader rejection of the Soviet government policies by various sectors of the Russian intelligentsia. Yet such rejection could not always find a clear and unequivocal expression in socio-political activities of those persons.

However, there is a different version of the confrontation between intellectuals and power in Russia, according to which Russian intellectuals are “nervous people.” The exponent of this point of view, Alexander Kustarev, thinks that in the basis of such nervousness there is a conflict between the unsettled and alienated intellectuals, “whose mental product and cultural practices are not rewarded with enough recognition - Income, reputation, influence” - On the one hand, and welfare intellectuals on the other. Moreover, Alexander Kustarev considers this phenomenon, typical for the post-perestroika Russia, to be a special case of inevitable for postindustrial society “class struggle” between “cultural bourgeoisie” (a welfare version of Russian intellectuals) and “cultural proletariat” (in Russia-unsuccessful intellectuals) (Kustarev, 2006).

However, in our view, this whole line of argument by Alexander Kustarev is too schematic, within the vulgar sociology, long known in Soviet science. It also seems unconvincing because in the post-perestroika Russia the main part of those ‘nervous intellectuals’ who were opposing the authorities belonged to the “well groomed” liberal capital intelligentsia.

The model of interaction between society and the authorities, which can be called the “ivory tower,” also has its own specifics. The most typical examples of such “towers” in the Soviet era were: The Institute of Russian literature (Pushkin House) in Leningrad; some units of the Novosibirsk “academgorodok” (a town of scientists); the so-called “Tartu school” of Yuri Lotman; the circle of Moscow intellectuals, led by Archpriest Alexander Men; and in the Russian foreign diaspora - A magazine “Noviy Grad” in pre-war Paris.

None of these groups of intellectuals claimed to participate in political life directly. In fact, some of the representatives of these groups of intellectuals openly decried the outcome “into the outside world” from behind of their ‘towers’, a too fervent desire to affect the society. Academician Alexander Panchenko, one of the most famous scientists of Pushkin House, expressed such a mood very brightly on the eve of the Soviet Union collapse: “The current feverish activity of the intelligentsia-noisy rallies, endless parliamentary vanity, publishing mass blank and strident newspapers-this is just doing something unneeded” (Chekalova, 1991).

In reality, however, these “ivory towers” still had an impact on society - Their own, independent, unconnected to the interests of those in power. This is the character academician Dmitry Likhachev’ articles and speeches had, as well as those written by his colleagues on the Pushkin House (before the academician

decided to “enter the authorities”), Yuri Lotman’s public speeches and interviews, Archpriest Alexander Men’s sermons and articles, “Noviy Grad” representatives, Feodor Stepun and Georgiy Fedotov’s printed publications. Maybe “Noviy Grad” representatives, distancing themselves from other currents in exile, most consistently expressed this trend of intellectuals’ self-determination and self-organization. This position was already declared in the very first editorial in the first issue of the magazine: “We want to capture the image of authentic - It does not mean pure and sinless - Russia, and to define the basis on which its historical life should be built. If at least some of our pages reach it and help someone out there in painful national and social self-determination, we will be truly rewarded for our work” (Noviy Grad, 1931). So it seems that a virtual “New Grad” becomes a source of inspiration for Stepun, Fedotov and their adherents’ creative searches.

As noted by literary critic and researcher of Russian émigré Vladimir Warshawsky, with the separated position of “Noviy Grad” representatives in the environment of the Russian emigration, “common misunderstanding” was inevitable. In particular, one of the Russian political exile masters Paul Milyukov, found the ideas voiced in the magazine “Noviy Grad” “the last wave of intelligentsia psychosis” (Warshawsky, 1992. p. 277, 283). However, the efforts and works of such founders of “New Castle” as Georgy Fedotov and especially Ilya Bunakov (Fondaminskij), brought something substantial into the exile life. Fondaminskij did especially much: He created a whole new set of clubs, associations, journals, literary scholars and publishers and even a drama theatre. Moreover, in all these efforts the desire to re-establish the old “intelligentsia order” was clearly felt (Warsaw, 1992. p. 288, 290-291).

In this context, it is significant to see how at the decline of the Soviet Union, Yuri Lotman’s “Tartu School” developed and to study the understanding of this activity by Lotman himself. Note that the world-famous scientist from the quiet provincial Estonian town had to create his school in more difficult circumstances than those in which the abroad intelligentsia representatives found themselves. The fact is that - According to Lotman’s view - As a result of the devastating cultural policy of Soviet power, the cultural background was seriously damaged: “One cannot say that the province has no capable, energetic, unselfish cultural activists.” There are some, but there is no atmosphere around them, they have no necessary authority (Lotman, 2005. p. 257-258). Yuri Lotman declared this all as long ago as in the late 80-ies of the last century not in order to beg the authorities for certain benefits or for justifying the existing problems and deficiencies. His basic idea was completely different - Namely, that one should not interfere with the intelligentsia’s activity and let all the participants of the cultural creativity process do what they have to: “Culture is an organism that must evolve continuously, and you cannot copy anyone, one needs to organically evolve one’s own. The greatest pedagogical wisdom now would be to choose good teachers and let them work” (Lotman, 2005. p. 262).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The main criterion for distinguishing three main types of the Russian intelligentsia participation in political life is the

relationships within the idea “ally” - “stranger.” Actually, as Yuri Lotman noted, this confrontation was historically embedded in the grounds of Russian intelligentsia self-determination, which turned out to be simultaneously broken “ally” and “improper stranger” (Lotman, 1999. p. 128). However, in the twentieth century, the internal contradictions of this kind were rather obvious, because in the identity of this or that intellectuals’ group, this criterion accurately pointed out intellectual’ place in political and public life. These strict rules of separation into “allies” and “strangers” in the minds of patriotic intellectuals during the first years of Soviet power were, inter alia, identified and classified in several studies of Vasily Chernoperov about eminent intelligentsia representatives-Bolsheviks, Georgiy Chicherin, Maksim Litvinov, Leonid Krasine and Victor Koppe, as well as about the known scientist- historian Yuri Gauthier (Chernoperov, 2005).

Note that the division between “allies” and “strangers” in the environment of patriotic intellectuals in fact turns out to be even more significant than the attitude to the existing authority. This is particularly emphasized by the famous genre of intellectuals’ collective letters both in the late Soviet era and in the present.

However, a division into “allies” and “strangers” did not help the Russian intelligentsia of the twentieth century to fulfill their purpose at all. Just the other way round. And maybe the most reasonably Gregory Pomerantz expressed it at the end of the century, in one of his very emotional essay. “As intellectuals we cannot comprehend complex, eluding, colliding phenomenon,” a recently deceased scientist admitted. But even this is not the most important thing for an intellectual, Pomerantz added: “The main task for intellectuals is to fill in the spiritual gap in people’s soul. And first of all, in one’s own soul” (Pomerantz, 1994). By the way, both of the mentioned judgments of the known scientist are about the two most important qualities of intelligentsia’s self-consciousness. The first one is about intelligence; the second is about serving the ideal.

So, for the Russian intelligentsia in their attitude to both to the authorities and to the society, the main criterion for self-determination and motivation in their social action is the division into “allies” and “strangers.” The conclusion of our survey turns out anyway, somehow unexpected. Because in Russia, not only those intellectuals who are divided by their attitude to the authorities (“entering the authority,” “forever opposing” it or separated from it in their “ivory towers”) tend to resist and fight among themselves, but also those who are inside each of the three large communities. In fact, Dmitry Likhachev and Anatoly Sobchak, both “entering the authority,” “the opposition” from the revolution camp Vladimir Lenin and Peter Struve, the authors of the journal “Noviy Grad” who created their “ivory tower,” and other “towers” in the emigration strata (for example, masters of the old emigration, Pavel Milyukov and his allies) do not coincide with each other and go their separate ways. They all, in one way or another, diverge in their understanding of “serving the ideal.”

However, in the context of scientific analysis, the emblem-type figures which we chose from the Russian intelligentsia are not only a peculiar embodiment of the main trends in the participation

of these social communities in social transformations, but also an impressive model their self-reflection, including intellectually-rich self-evaluation concerning the results of such participation. In this regard, among Russian intellectuals we can distinguish Yuri Lotman and Gregoriy Pomerantz, “Noviy Grad” representatives, Feodor Stepun and Georgiy Fedotov.

So, our variational model of intellectuals’ participation in public life is designed to identify viable alternatives of these social groups being included into social and political transformations of the modern world and to assess their practical results. So for the existing power this model clearly demonstrates its capabilities of interaction with such ambiguous social partners as intellectuals. As for those who really possess intellect and intelligence, the proposed model suggests them a sober thinking over one’s place in the world and the potential for the future.

Research on the political participation of intelligentsia and intellectuals in various countries and regions of the world in those or other historical epochs have put a lot of interesting problems, far from being solved. Their further study appears to be needed and very promising in the scientific search and relevant in terms of more specific interpretation of socio-political transformations in the contemporary world.

## 6. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The study was performed in the framework of the project part of the state task in the field of scientific activity of the Ministry of education and science of the Russian Federation. No. 33.526.2014/K “Russian intelligentsia and European intellectuals in the changing socio-political reality of the 20<sup>th</sup>-early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries: Virtuality and reality.”

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