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РОССИЯ ГЛАЗАМИ ИНОСТРАНЦЕВ

Умом Россию не понять,
Аршином общим не измерить:
У ней особенная стать -
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Ф.Тютчев

Образ любой страны состоит из огромного числа различных элементов и национальных черт, которые делают ее абсолютно уникальной. Иностранцу сложно понять менталитет другой страны, особенно если это такая неординарная и уникальная в своем развитии страна как Россия. И на Западе с пристрастием следят за экономическим, политическим и культурным развитием России.

The image of any country is built up by a great number of elements and features. It is worth regarding from the point of view of both its citizens and foreigners. The survey conducted among top experts - opinion leaders allowed to sketch Russia's image. In fact, it revealed our general opinion about ourselves. A country's image-building characteristics may include the nation's cultural achievements and values along with its industrial and scientific achievements. Thus, Germany is associated with beer and cars, France - with wine-making and perfume industry, Japan - with high-tech, Saudi Arabia - with oil and Switzerland - with watches and cheese; but what associations does Russia evoke?

More than 20 years ago there existed an opinion that the USSR was the main threat for America, that we were ready even to start a nuclear war for our communistic ideology. After the termination of the Cold war and falling of the "Iron Curtain" separating the Soviet Union from the West, people in both camps realized, that they knew very little about each other and that knowledge was full of myths and stereotypes.

1. First of all Russia is known by her culture. Pushkin, Dostoevskiy Tolstoy and other classical poets and writers are famous all over the world. But unfortunately modern writers are not popular at all.

Foreigners' cursory of the traditions of Russian literature would be incomplete without brief attempt to indicate how some characteristics have lived on to become determinants

2. Europeans still regard Russia as a country that could at any moment have a new financial meltdown. There is also a media stereotype to the effect that a sick Russia is the main source of corruption and crime flowing into virtuous Europe. Russia should be given a wide berth, they say; it cannot be allowed to become strong. Let it remain weak, and then we could be friends with it - with sympathy. There is far less interest in Russia than there used to be a decade ago. Europe today is preoccupied with itself. If we look at the coalition agreement between the Green Party and the Social Democrats who are now in power in Germany, we will see that foreign policy matters come seventh - very near the end of a 10-point program. There is no room for Russia there at all, and this is typical of all European states.

3. The arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the head of Russia's largest oil company YUKOS, produced real hysteria among investors. So, the MICEX index dropped by 15 percent. Foreign media and Western officials immediately said that putting into the top manager of Russia's largest oil company custody would lead to capital flight, and it would hit Russia's investment attractiveness. Alexander Vershbow, US Ambassador to Russia, believes that Mr. Khodorkovsky's arrest could have a negative impact on Russia's investment climate, and it might call into question the prospects of investing in the Russian economy. The Financial Times quoted a Western investment banker who expected an outflow of money from Russia over the next few days. However, independent experts say Western investors are in a state of shock now, and, as soon as they calm down, their money will return to Russia. There are no fundamental reasons for capital flight.

Unfortunately, in the near future it is difficult to expect the change of the attitude of foreigners for Russia. In fact the financial crisis in which we now are, has caused the deepest credibility gap to our country. The international investors, certainly, had to collide with devaluations of currencies of less developed countries or re-structuring of their duties, but there were no country which simultaneously did not declare the devaluation of national currency, a default on an internal duty and introduction of the moratorium on payments on external obligations.

The experts who believe that the attitude towards Russia in the world improved, say that the Western assessments of Russia have become less biased than they used to be. They also remark that the foreigners, who take an impartial stance on Russia and have deep knowledge of it, mark positive changes currently going on in the nation.